



MOMENTS TO PONDER
UNVEILING JOY:
EXPLORING THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Episode 92: Forgetting the Past (Phil. 3:12-16)

Hi Friends! Welcome to Moments to Ponder. This is a podcast designed to help you spend a few moments in God's Word wherever you are and take away something to ponder.

We live in a loud, busy world that can make it hard to find the time to get into God's word and I'm grateful for these moments we have to ponder the book of Philippians in the series that I've titled, Unveiling Joy. I'm Betsy Marvin and this is episode 92.

(music fades)

This is my third writing of this episode...thus it's a week behind and I appreciate you hanging in there for me. It's not that I don't know what to say, but that there is so much that can be said. The passage for today has been working on me in different ways...

In Phil. 3:12-16 which says:

*¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: **Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,** ¹⁴ **I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.** ¹⁵ All of us, then, **who are mature** should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Phil. 3:12-16 (NIV)*

Paul is using the metaphor of a race to help the church understand what he is trying to get across. Sports were a big deal in ancient Rome and his audience would have understood the references. So, after speaking of placing his entire life in the hands of Jesus and his desire to experience his power and resurrection he admits that he's not there yet, the Passion Translation of these verses says it this way:

I admit that I haven't yet acquired the absolute fullness that I'm pursuing, but I run with passion into his abundance so that I may reach the purpose for which Christ Jesus laid hold of me to make me his own. I don't depend on my own strength to accomplish this; however I do have one compelling focus: I forget all of the past as I fasten my heart to the future instead. Phil. 3:12-13 (TPT)

He pressing on toward absolute fullness in Christ, running with passion INTO his abundance so that I may reach the purpose Christ has for him. Then he says, I forget all the past and fasten my heart to the future... I press on..

Those who trained for the Olympics in those ancient days used to tie weights on their bodies as they trained but when it came to the race, they stripped down completely so that they had nothing to impede their running. I can just imagine the lightness as they ran free of all the weight.

Forgetting what is behind – I've had to sit on this for a bit.

I think Paul's words here reflect what he has learned from his personal journey. As he stated earlier in chapter 3, he had a lot to be proud of. He could have rested on those accolades, living with his eyes on past achievements. He had quite a bit to be ashamed of – the stoning of Stephen, the persecution of Christians. He could have let the shame of his past define him. And, he had many who persecuted him that he could seek revenge on, or at least hold a grudge against – but he says – forget what's behind.

Paul isn't saying you can't be proud of what you've accomplished, but it can be hindering to live in the pride of past accomplishment so much that we don't look forward. He also isn't saying we shouldn't be repentant of things we do wrong, but when we allow shame from our past to block the grace of Christ, we don't allow our hearts to be free.

We all have events in our stories that we carry with us. Some are really painful, others are defining moments. Some are celebrations, others are life-alteringly hard. Do we just forget them?

What I have learned is that although the past is a part of us, an event from our past does not need to remain an open wound. Open wounds fester, bringing infection which can take us out of the race altogether causing us to live limited by the pain, the lies, that will define us if we let them.

We also don't need to keep our past alive in our present. When these experiences from the past have not gotten the loving attention they need, it is just like a child living inside you. You feel the emotions of that earlier time, and they drive you to limit yourself in so many ways. Dr. Gail Brenner

Think of all of the weights and garbage that we carry around in our spiritual lives that hinder us from winning the race. We get so weighted down by it, making our steps heavy as sin entangles us or we allow the chains of the past to hang on us.

When we do the work of healing, which often requires facing our past, it allows us to begin to move forward - not to dismiss anything or anyone - but to allow it to be in our past – not the focus of our lives – we are forgetting what is behind.

Paul is saying – take hold of what Jesus took hold of you, the forgiveness, freedom, wholeness. Allow the past to fall away with all its weight, and straining toward what is ahead. –

Whether you've played them or not, you've probably watched at least one match, game, or contest in your life. There's something about sports that draws us into the competition, it's entertainment, but it's also the human fortitude, it's the pressing on. The push through at the 1 yard line, the stretch for the tape in a race, the digging deep to go one more set on the court.

Paul is using the metaphor to remind the church and us that the spiritual journey takes work, digging in, and pressing on to go after the call of Jesus.

I've had a verse on my wall for many years now. I read it almost every day in my home office as a reminder of the spiritual race I'm on. It's from Hebrews 12:1-2 taken from the Amplified Bible.

Therefore then, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [who have borne testimony to the Truth], let us strip off and throw aside every encumbrance (unnecessary weight) and that sin which so readily (deftly and cleverly) clings to and entangles us, and let us run with patient endurance and steady and active persistence the appointed course of the race that is set before us.

Again, a sport analogy.

The fans watching and cheering the runner on.

Strip off the things that hinder.

Patient endurance.

Steady and active persistence.

The appointed course of our race.

The self-discipline of a high level athlete is pretty amazing. The diets, the workouts, the mental work, the sacrifices – all in order to win. They will spend years looking forward, preparing for those 4 minutes on the ice, the seconds of a race, or a few hours on the court. They press on through the aching muscles and early rising times – all to go after the prize.

But, if they allowed a past loss or past accomplishment to define them, they would not get too far, right? I already won last year so why practice now? Or, I lost to them in the last game, so I probably will again, why play? NO, they press on, they get back up, learn, process, and then, move forward.

When you hear me say, forgetting what is behind – what comes to mind?

What is keeping the past alive for you that needs to be released or resolved?

What's in need of healing so that you can move forward?

We can get back up, learn, process, heal, and then move forward toward the prize.

And the prize?

A life lived for Jesus, with Jesus – forever.

A resurrection life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.

A life of joy in knowing the freedom Jesus brings.

Paul goes on to say,

¹⁵ All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Phil. 3:12-16 (NIV)

As we grow in our understanding and stamina for our spiritual race, may we mature in the understanding that it's all about Jesus.

In the second letter to Timothy, sent by Paul from another prison near the end of his life, he wrote: *As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to*

God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. 2 Timothy 4:6-7 (NLT)

Dear one,

May you run with passion into his abundance with eyes to see beyond the past within your story and the stories of others. May it bring healing and resilience as you press on toward the life God has anointed you to live.

Amen.