

Don't Let Past Failures Discourage You (Video)

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of growing to maturity in our Christian walk, akin to how parents desire their children to mature. It highlights the need to move past regrets and failures, understanding that God allows them to humble us and propel us towards spiritual progress. The focus is on pressing forward towards the goal of becoming more like Christ, leaving behind past mistakes and earthly losses without dwelling in regret.

Scripture: Philippians 3:15, Philippians 3:13, Hebrews 8:12, Hebrews 3:12, Matthew 5:21, Joshua 13:1

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Moving Past Regrets"

Description

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Transcript

I'd like to turn to Philippians in chapter 3. Many of us have been Christians for a number of years and just like we want our children to grow up to maturity. Our Heavenly Father wants us to grow up to maturity. We are very disappointed when our children seem to always remain immature and childish.

And you can be sure that the Heavenly Father is also sad when his children are immature in their Christian life. We're not angry with our children who are immature. We love them.

We want to help them. Even if they behave like children when they are 20 years old, we're not angry. We want to help them.

That's the thing we must remember that God is never angry with us, but sometimes He's disappointed. A loving father will be disappointed if his child does not develop as he should. And that's not wrong.

I mean, it's a very irresponsible father who's not disappointed. So God loves us much and He wants us to be mature and not be childish. And it says here in Philippians 3 verse 15, the word perfect here is translated in my margin of my Bible as mature.

Let us therefore, as many as are mature, Philippians 3 verse 15, have this attitude which he has mentioned in the previous verses. And if you have a different attitude, God will reveal it to you if you're

really serious about being mature. However, if you don't get discouraged, verse 16, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

Thank God for what He's already done in your life. So there's no place for discouragement in the Christian life. Even if you find you're not as mature as you should be, God wants us to press on to perfection all the time.

If you look at yourself the way a loving father would look at his children and see that God sees you in that same way, you will never be discouraged. Never, never, never. Because no matter how many your weaknesses and how many your falls, God still wants you to grow and become mature just like you want for your children.

And a good father will be very patient in trying to teach his children the right way in any area. And I want to tell you from my own experience that the Holy Spirit is very patient in the way He seeks to lead us on. The Holy Spirit does not put us all in one class and like a teacher stand up in front and teach us.

He gives us personal tuition. You know, it's only the children of kings and queens who have personal tuition with the teacher. That's how the Holy Spirit treats us.

We are the children of a king. And He deals with us individually. He's not going to say the same thing to the person next to you as He says to you, even in a meeting.

You must see that the Holy Spirit deals with you personally because you're a precious child of God. And He will show you exactly what you need to do. And you don't need to worry about the others around you.

So what is this attitude that He says in verse 15? Let us who are mature have this attitude. And that is, let me read from verse 12. That's the attitude He wants us all to have.

Paul says about himself, I have not become perfect. That all of us will acknowledge. But there are two ways in which we can acknowledge it.

I mean, it's not difficult for us to say we are not perfect. Just go and ask your wife or your husband. They'll tell you pretty quickly that you're not perfect.

Even if other people think you are. Ones who live closest to us know that we're not perfect. We might as well acknowledge it.

We're not perfect. But it's not enough to acknowledge that. I've not yet become perfect.

I've not yet become fully like Christ. But I don't sit back and say forever and ever I'm not perfect. I'm pressing on.

It's like I sometimes take the example of a child who's just joined the kindergarten at the age of four. And you ask him, what is it? And you ask him, what's your ambition? He says, I want to get a PhD in some very complicated subject like nuclear physics or something like that. This four-year-old, imagine the ambition that four-year-old has.

When are you going to get that, son? Oh, it'll take a while, but I'm going to get there. And he's never going to tire of pressing on to that. When he gets to first grade, second grade, third grade, he's got to get a PhD in nuclear physics.

Think if we had an ambition like that, Lord, I'm going to be like you. That's my ambition. I'm not going to sit in the kindergarten forever.

I'm going to press on. I'm going to go to the first grade and second grade. I know I'm not going to jump up there all of a sudden.

It may take me 20 years to get there, but I'm going to get there. Let those who are mature, those who want to behave like mature children of God, not like babies. Let me paraphrase it lightly.

Those who don't want to be babies, let us have this attitude. That's basically what it says in verse 15. And that is, acknowledge first of all that I've not become perfect.

When I want to become perfect, I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold of me. When you think of parents who send their children to the most expensive schools and colleges and spend hundreds of thousands of dollars, which other parents cannot afford, to give their children the best education, what would you think of a son or daughter who was like a wastrel in that college? I believe that a lot of God's children are like that. When you think of the tremendous price that Christ has paid, which is far more than hundreds of thousands of dollars a parent may spend in a college, in order that we might get a spiritual education, and that is to become more and more like Christ every year.

So we must not sit back and say, I'm not perfect. That's only one part of it. We must say, I'm not perfect, but that's how verse 15, 12 is.

I'm not perfect. I've not become like Christ, but I'm pressing on. If you can say that, but I'm pressing on, you're okay.

But if you just sit back and say, well, I'm not perfect. When somebody corrects you about something, I've heard believers talk like this. Somebody says, hey, that's not the way you should behave.

You say, well, I'm not perfect. They shrug their shoulders and it appears to me they have absolutely no intention to be perfect. They'll be in the same condition 10 years from now.

That is no, but I want to press on. Thank you, brother, for showing that to me. I'm very happy that you pointed out something in me that's not Christ-like.

I want to be perfect. I hope you have that type of passion and you will never be offended with anybody who corrects you. You'll be very thankful.

If you were doing a mathematics sum wrong, say in the second or third grade, and you had a teacher who lovingly came and told you, listen, son, my girl, that's not the right way to do it. Would you be upset with that teacher? That teacher is not trying to pull you down, trying to make you better. Please have that attitude to any godly brother or sister who comes and corrects you in some area.

I've had a number of people who have corrected me in my younger days. And even as I've grown older, and I tell you before the Lord, I'm thankful for every one of them. I see them as teachers who showed me there was something defective in the way I worked out that problem.

It's not the way to do it. Thank you for showing me there's a better way. And so we are here to help one another and pressing on to perfection.

So Paul says here, brethren, again, he repeats the same thing. I have not laid hold of it yet, but see, there's always that, but whenever he says, I've not become perfect twice in those two verses, and whenever we say we are not, we say, I've not become like Christ, he must say, but that's what we learned from these two verses. I've not become like Christ, but that was not the way for me to behave there.

But when you speak to your wife or your husband, and it is not the right way to behave or speak, you say, I'm sorry, that's not the way I should have spoken. But it's going to, it's going to be different in the days to come, because I'm seeking to press on to perfection, I pray there'll be a but in your life, always, whenever you recognize or when somebody shows you in your life, that something is wrong, don't get offended. Think of a teacher who's trying to help you to get that problem correctly.

So that you can advance to the next class, always. And if people are afraid to correct you, you're in a very sorry state. You should be very open to correction.

I remember once a brother, way back in India, many years ago, came to me and said, Brother Zack, you're my elder brother. I want you to speak straight to me and correct me, wherever you see I'm wrong. And I did.

And he got offended and left the church. He wasn't serious. He was hoping that I would say, Oh, there's nothing wrong with you, brother.

And you know, like all these foolish preachers who just butter people and make them happy because they want their money. I said, I'm not going to be that. I'm concerned about your eternal destiny.

And so I'll tell you the truth. So be thankful for anyone who comes and corrects you. And don't ever get offended.

Being getting offended is the mark of a child who is not only in the kindergarten, but repeatedly failing in the kindergarten, repeatedly failing in the kindergarten. That's a person who gets offended with something somebody said, or something somebody did not say or do. He didn't greet me that Sunday.

Are you offended that somebody doesn't greet you? Forget it, man. Grow up. Don't behave like a kid.

Somebody didn't greet me. Can you imagine somebody getting offended or something as silly as that? That's okay for a three year old. Not for anybody about that.

So in pressing on to perfection, there's something we have to do. And this is what I want to emphasize. First of all, I got to forget verse 13, what lies behind.

And secondly, I have to reach forward to what lies ahead. Pressing towards the goal. I must see my goal.

Your goal is not to become a better human being. Your goal must not be that you must have a better reputation in the church. I'm sorry to say there are people who want that.

And if you search your heart, you may discover that lurking desire in your own heart for the elder brothers to think a little more highly of you. It's garbage. Let your desire be not to impress the elders, but to become more like Christ.

Whether the elders see it or not, whether they see your growth in secret or not, that you have a passion. I want the goal, the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. And the call of God in Christ Jesus is not that you

might go around preaching or have more gifts, but that you may become like Christ in your behavior, in the way you think, in your attitudes to people, in the motives with which you do certain things.

In all those areas that your speech will be more Christ-like year by year. At home, first, in your place of work, with your fellow workers, with people on the street, with that other driver of that other car on the road who's irritating you by the way he drives. Those are the places where we need to be Christ-like, not just in the church.

It's easy to be Christ-like here. We get honor for it. To be Christ-like where we don't get any honor, but because we want to please the Lord, that's our goal.

The upward call of God in Christ Jesus. But coming to that, first of all, forgetting what lies behind. It's a very important phrase.

Every one of us, if you look back on our life, especially our unconverted days before we came to know Christ, I'm sure we have a lot of regret about the foolish, stupid things we did and said. We definitely should have regret. And if you have confessed them to the Lord, you can be sure he's blotted them out with his precious blood.

The blood of Christ does a tremendous job with our past. There's so many references to the blood of Christ in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, if you went into the tabernacle or the temple through the door, the first thing you saw in front of you was an altar.

That's the very first thing. All the other parts of the, I mean, furniture in the tabernacle were further up. But the first thing you saw was the altar.

And if you looked at it, it was red. The top of that altar was always red with fresh blood every single day. What was the Lord trying to teach the Israelites? The seriousness of sin, how there's a sacrifice required for their sin.

You know, it was costly if you sinned in the Old Testament. Because you had to bring a goat. Imagine if you had to bring a goat today for every time you committed sin.

You'd stop sinning pretty quickly, cuz goats are expensive. We don't think about that when we read in the Old Testament. He shall bring a goat, or even if he brings a bird.

Imagine buying a dove or something every time you sin. It's gonna cost you something. The sad thing is today, because it is just, Lord, I'm sorry, please forgive me, and we move on.

It doesn't cost us a penny. That's one reason we don't take sin so seriously. Those Israelites took sin seriously because it touched their pockets.

So it should hurt us more because the price for our sin is not the blood of some goat, it's the blood of Jesus Christ. Don't you think that should touch our pockets and our hearts much more than some guy who only had to bring a bullock perhaps? A bullock, the cost of a bullock compared to the blood of Jesus Christ, where is the comparison? That indicates how likely believers take the cleansing by the blood of Christ. It's a fact.

If you meditate on it and think about it, it'll hit you. I have meditated much on these things, and it has radicalized, radically revolutionized my attitude to sin in my own life. Because I saw what a price had to be

paid, much more than that Israeli who only had to go and buy a bullock or a goat.

Much more than that. You ask yourself honestly, when you get forgiveness of your sins through the blood of Christ, does it make you value that and say, boy, that was serious. More than that Israeli who spent a few hundred dollars having to buy a bullock to get rid of his sin.

It's a good question to ask ourselves. Or do I treat the blood of Christ as of less value than the blood of bulls and goats? I'm sorry to say some Christians do. And perhaps you also do, if you think about it.

Just ask yourself one day, sit down when you're alone sometime and say, if I had to go and buy a goat, because I had to confess my sin, would I take that sin more seriously next time? And when I go to ask Jesus to cleanse me with his blood, what is the comparison? Do I take it just as seriously? I should take it more seriously. Do I do that? Or is it a very light, Lord, I'm sorry, Jesus, forgive me. Thank you for your blood.

Bye. That is, I'm sorry to say, the way many people treat their sin. And I'll tell you the result is that's why they never grow in their Christian life.

And that's why they never get more light on the seriousness of what they've done. Or more light on other sins in their life. And God says, I'm not gonna reveal any of the other terrible things in their life because he doesn't take sin seriously, something I show him.

He doesn't seem to have much sorrow over it. Why should I show him any more? I'll tell you my testimony, my honest testimony. I have a tremendous passion.

God is my witness when I say this. I have a tremendous passion to discover all the unseen, unseen, un-Christ-like areas of my life. Do you know there are unknown, un-Christ-like areas in your life? If you don't think so, you're saying that you've become like Christ already.

That would be the height of arrogance. When you say I've not yet become like Christ, you're acknowledging there are areas in your life which are not Christ-like. Why aren't you doing something about it? See, I haven't seen them yet.

How can I do something about it before I know what is un-Christ-like? If you have a passion, and I'll tell you, that's how God has shown me so many things through the years. And I picture this like the land of Canaan where the giants are a picture of all the un-Christ-like things in our life. And the Lord said to the Israelite from Dan, which is the northernmost to Beersheba, the southernmost place, all of this land must be yours, go and possess it.

It's like the Lord saying to us from head, Dan to Beersheba, from head to foot, I want every part of your life to be Christ-like, every part of your inner life. And those children of Israel, at least in the time of Joshua, took it very seriously. When they killed a bunch of giants and occupied that territory, this is the thing.

If you killed a bunch of giants, that territory became yours. It's like you overcome sin in some area, that area becomes Christ-like. It may be less than 0.1%, but in some areas become Christ-like.

And you cannot, and what happens is when you've killed the giants in one area, the Lord shows you another area for you to possess. And that is how little by little they were to go and possess the whole land. And one of the things the Lord told Joshua, I want you to see this verse and see it in the context of what

I'm just telling you.

In the book of Joshua, he said these words to Joshua at one point. When Joshua was getting old, he told him in Joshua chapter 13, I think it is. I can't find it.

But he told Joshua, there remains a lot of land yet to be possessed. And they'd already possessed so much. But the Lord said, there's still a lot of land to be possessed.

And he told the Israelites that. There's a lot of land to be possessed. 13? 13.1. Okay, I knew it was in 13 somewhere.

Yeah, 13 verse one. You are old, the Lord said to him, and there's yet much land that remains to be possessed. I wish you would all hear that word today.

Joshua was such a wholehearted servant of God. The best in the nation of Israel that day. And you may be the best believer sitting here this morning.

Do you know the word of the Lord to you? My son, my daughter, there remains much land to be possessed in your life. That at the moment is being ruled by some giants of the flesh. But I don't want those giants to possess that land.

I want from Dan to Beersheba, from head to foot, every part of your life to be under the control of my Holy Spirit. And to become Christ-like. Now I know, I realize the Lord says to Joshua, you can't occupy the whole land in one day.

It takes time. And unfortunately, they had not possessed everything by the time Joshua died. And if you turn to the book of Judges, we read like this.

Verse seven. Judges chapter two, verse seven. The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua.

And the days of the elders who survived Joshua. Because those people like Joshua had seen the great work the Lord did for Israel. But after that, when that generation, verse 10, had been gathered to their fathers, verse 10, there arose another generation who did not know the Lord and were not grateful for all that the Lord had done for them.

Then the sons of Israel, verse 12, forsook the Lord and they became slaves. That's a story of many, many born-again Christians. They overcome something in their life.

They are challenged. Maybe the walls, you know, by the time in the early part, they had occupied the land of Jericho and certain other areas. They finished and they stopped.

I hope it will not be like that in your life, my brother, sister. I hope you'll have a passion when the Lord says to you, there remains much land to be possessed. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, which is to become totally like Him.

Every bit of the land from Dan to Beersheba to be occupied for the Lord. Not one part must belong to the devil. Not one part of my life must belong to the flesh.

It must be wholly the Lord's. And coming back to Philippians 3, if we want to attain that, the first step is to forget Philippians 3.13, what lies behind. First of all, to forget all that you have achieved.

To forget however much progress you've already made. Forget the giants you have conquered. If you keep sitting back and congratulating yourself and patting yourself on the back for the giants you've already conquered in your life.

Oh, I have this bad habit, it's gone from my life. Good, if that's gone. But that satisfaction with that can prevent you from moving forward.

Forget what lies behind. Forget. Stop congratulating yourself for all the giants you've killed.

Stop congratulating yourself for the areas in your life, the sins that you've conquered. That's the meaning of forget. If you keep on congratulating yourself and patting yourself on the back, I overcame this, I gave up my smoking and I gave up my drinking and I gave up this bad habit, bad habit.

I'll tell you this, you'll never progress. You got to forget it. Forget and press on to what lies ahead.

But in this one area of forgetting, there's a reason why we need to forget. Not only because we become proud of the areas we have conquered. But also we can have a lot of regret over the failures we have made in our life.

And that regret over past failure can hinder you as much as pride over past successes. Remember that. We should not live in regret over, oh, it's so terrible what I did then and I wish I hadn't done it.

I mean, if any one of you are honest, you have a lot of things that you look back and say, I wish I hadn't done it. There's not a human being on earth who can say, I'm very happy the way I lived. We all have regret, especially the days before we knew the Lord.

Think of the things you did before you knew the Lord. And think of the foolish things you did after you came to know the Lord. I've done a lot of foolish things after I came to know the Lord.

And that is more serious than what we did before we came to know the Lord. I look at it like this. If I told a lie before I came to Christ, before I was born again.

If I tell a lie after I'm born again, it's like telling a thousand lies. Not one lie. Because sin becomes, like the Bible says, exceedingly sinful.

There's a phrase like that in Romans 3, that sin becomes exceedingly sinful. When does that happen? When Christ comes into our life, He gives us a microscope. And that teeny weeny ant looks like an elephant.

Right. If that hasn't happened to you, I would ask you whether you're really born again. If the ants of sin in the past don't look like elephants to you today, ask God for a microscope to show you what sin really is in His eyes.

Before we came to Christ, we were seeing what sin is in man's eyes. I mean, even ordinary human beings are not converted. Think telling a lie or behaving rudely is bad.

You don't have to be a Christian to feel that way. Yeah, that's like an ant. We don't want ants in our food.

Definitely not. We don't want ants crawling around our house either. But when you see those ants like elephants crawling around your house, there's a lot of difference.

Sin becomes exceedingly sinful. And so we have regret not only over the things we did in our unconverted days, but a lot of regret over what we did after we are converted. And all I want to ask you is, to the best of your knowledge, have you taken the blame? To confess our sin means I take the blame.

What is the difference? You know, the Bible speaks about in Adam and in Christ. Okay, let's compare Adam and Christ. When Adam sinned by eating that tree, you know what was his next sin after that? He refused to take the blame.

The Lord asked him, did you eat it? And he wouldn't acknowledge it. He points to his wife and says, she's the one who gave it to me. And trying to blame God, remember God, you're the one who gave her to me.

So think about that. You gave me such a wife and that's why I ended up like this. There are people who say that.

I've heard people say to me, brother, it's my wife, she makes life so difficult for me. Lord, you gave me such a wife and that's why I'm like this. And you keep saying that.

I tell you, I wonder whether you'll even enter the kingdom of God. If you blame somebody else for your sin, you're not following Jesus Christ. You're following Adam.

Anyone, I don't care who he is, if he blames somebody else for his sin, his wife or some neighbor or somebody in the office, that fellow provoked me and that's why I did this. Yeah, there are 101 ways we can blame somebody else. You are doing exactly what Adam did in the garden of Eden.

When God says, did you do it? You say, no, this chap, this woman made me do it. Or that man provoked me to do it. Or my children irritated me.

Blame them, blame somebody else. I'm the holy man, you see. Other people make me sin.

It's garbage. Learn to confess sin properly by not blaming anybody else. I want to tell you this.

If you blame a single person for your sin, it's not a confession that God accepts. You're like Adam and we're not to be like Adam. So I hope something will change in our life from today that we'll stop blaming other people around us, especially in our home or in our office or anywhere else.

Lord, it's me, it's me. Contrast that with Christ. When he was hanging on the cross, you know what he was saying? It's me, Father.

He hadn't sinned at all. What was he saying? It's me, my sin, your sin, which we should have taken the blame for. He says, Lord, it's me, punish me, punish me.

It's me, punish me. And God did it. He forsook him.

Think if you did some terrible thing in the office or somewhere else which hurt others badly and somebody else goes and takes the blame for you. And some small little thing, somebody in your office takes the blame and pays up a hundred thousand dollars, which you should have paid. What would be your attitude towards him? You know, that's what Jesus did on the cross.

Because we kept pointing to others like Adam. That is my husband, my wife, and this, the children. And that's why I behaved like this.

Jesus is okay, I've got nobody to blame. There's a hymn, there's a poem that I read long ago, how man always has got fingers pointing to somebody else for what they did wrong. But on the cross, Jesus could not point at anybody.

His hands were nailed. He couldn't point at anyone like Adam. He nailed those pointing fingers on the cross.

And I want to urge you to do that. This is what it means to be crucified with Christ. I cannot point my finger at anybody because my palms are crucified.

Is that true in your life? I want to challenge you. I'm only telling you what the Lord has spoken to me. I'm no different from you.

I know every sin you've committed because my flesh is the same as yours. I know what you're tempted with. I know where you fail because my flesh is the same as yours.

I don't have to be a prophet to know that. And I know you point fingers at others because I've done it myself. But I've sought with all my heart to have my fingers crucified.

That's what Jesus was saying at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. He said so many amazing things in the Sermon on the Mount. It's a much higher standard than the Old Testament law.

And the end of it, he said, now that you've heard this high standard, don't use it to judge others. Have you noticed that in the Sermon on the Mount? Anger is equal to murder. Matthew 5, 21, 22.

Lusting with the eyes is equal to adultery. Verse 28 onwards. And seeking honor in prayer is idolatry.

Seeking honor when you give money to God is getting money, everybody to know about it is idolatry. And being worried all the time if you can have more and more money to protect you because of inflation and because of cost of living and you don't believe in a loving father who provides for you. You trust more in your savings account more than in your loving father.

Do you know how many believers trust in their savings account more than their heavenly father? They talk about a heavenly father, but their trust is in their savings account. I've got enough laid up for a number of years. You remember the story Jesus said about a rich man who said, I've got enough laid up for a number of years.

Was Jesus commending that person? No, there's nothing wrong. I'm not saying you should take all your money and throw it away. It's not a question of money.

It's a question of where your confidence is. Is your confidence in that or in a loving father who will never leave you nor forsake you? These are, you know, failure in faith is much more serious than failure in other areas. We don't seem to see failure in faith as a serious sin.

If I told a lie or slap somebody, I'd take that seriously. But what if you don't trust your heavenly father and you're trusting in money and something you'll store it up more than your heavenly father. Do you ever see that as a sin? It's a far more serious sin than slapping somebody on the face.

It's a sin of unbelief. The Bible speaks in Hebrews chapter 3, and verse 12. I think it is an evil heart of unbelief.

Turn with me to that verse that you'll never forget it. Hebrews in chapter 3 and verse 12. Take care, brethren.

Not that you don't slap others on the face. Take care that you don't have an evil heart of unbelief. Where your confidence is in your money more than in a loving father.

That is an evil heart of unbelief. We need to confess it more than if you slap somebody. Lord, I have an evil heart of unbelief.

Just like that out person out in the world. My confidence is in something other than you. Forgive me.

It's not a question of what you have or what you don't have. It's a question of where your confidence is. The evil heart of unbelief.

That will make you fall away from the living God. When we think of falling away from the living God, we think, oh, we stop going to church. And we say, Jesus Christ is not God.

No, no, no, no. When you are not making spiritual progress year by year. Let me say that again.

When you're not making spiritual progress year by year, you have fallen away from the living God, whether you know it or not. The person who is not falling away from the living God is the one who's making progress year by year by year. What would you think about your child who's sitting in the third grade year by year by year by year? Five years in the third grade.

Five years defeated by the same sins again and again and again and again. Yeah, we are in danger of falling away from the living God. So therefore, we have to be careful that we don't get hardened, it says in verse 13.

So I want to say a little more about this regret for the past. God allows failure for some very good reasons. Let me tell you that.

You know, Paul had a thorn in the flesh, which he prayed, Lord, remove it. And the Lord said, I won't remove it. It'll keep you humble.

It was some type of physical infirmity. I personally believe it was some type of infection in his eyes, which never got cured. And it was repulsive because that pus was coming out of his eyes all the time.

And he said, Lord, take it away. And it pleased the Lord not to take it away. He said, Paul, you're such a mighty servant of God.

You're in danger of pride. So I have to give you something to humble you. This will humble you when you get up to preach.

People see all this dripping and they won't think so much of your good. You will become like Christ inwardly. What does it matter if there's some defect in your body? What does it matter if people despise your physical appearance? If you're becoming like Christ-like, isn't that enough, Paul? And he says, yes, Lord.

And so he said, I will glory in my infirmities, he says in 2nd Corinthians 12. You did not take away that thorn in the flesh. Thank you.

There's another thorn in the flesh that God doesn't take away from us, from any of us. You know what it is? The memory of past failure. Haven't you sought sometimes, I wish God would remove from my memory all those incidents of failure in my life.

Completely blotted out. There's no memory of the areas I failed. Wouldn't that be wonderful? I have sometimes sought God like that.

Lord, the things I've done, I've done from the time I was a little kid. I wish it were blotted out and the only things left in my memory were all the Christ-like good things I did. But God doesn't do that.

He allows the memory of things that we did when we were 10 years old, five years old. The selfish, foolish things. I'm nearly 82, but my memory still can remember things, stupid things I did when I was a little kid.

And I'm sure it's true in your case too. I know what all human beings are like because I know what I'm like. And we wish it would be blotted out, Lord.

And think of the much more serious sins that we committed. And especially the thousand times more serious sins which you committed after you were born again. And you wish, oh, I wish I hadn't done that.

You repented. Your repentance has been genuine. The blood of Christ is blotted out completely and God has said about those sins in your case, I will not remember it anymore.

I know that my past sins, God has said to me, I will not remember it anymore. Hebrews 8, 12. So I have no sense of guilt, not even an atom of guilt in my heart because the blood of Jesus has taken care of it all.

But I've also wished that the memory of it would go. But it has pleased the Lord not to remove the memory of it. It's like a thorn in the flesh.

Always, you know, thorns always poking you. It's a thorn in the flesh, the memory of those stupid, idiotic things that I did before I was born again and after I was born again. And no matter how much I pray, like Paul prayed, take it away, take it away.

And the Lord says no. And then Paul says why? Because it will keep you humble. And that's exactly why my brother and sister, please listen, in love for you, God keeps that in your memory.

So we cannot remove it. So how shall I forget what lies behind? This is the way I shall forget what I've done in the past by saying, Lord, I'm not going to live in regret over that. I remember it, but I'm not going to torture myself with regret, regret, regret, which will hinder my spiritual progress.

So that's the way we have to forget the things that are behind. God has blotted it out in the blood of Jesus. What are the things that you look back in your past life that really disturbed you? That really bother you? The things you did after you were converted which you wish you'd never done.

You wish that some part of your life could be just blotted out. He's forgiven you, but the memory of that is there. It will remain there till Jesus comes.

It'll remain there. I think in heaven, it'll be blotted out. I believe it will be.

You won't remember it in heaven. That part of our memory is going to be removed in heaven. It's going to be wiped out.

But as long as you live on this earth, the memory of your failure will remain to, first of all, to prevent you from doing it again. And secondly, to keep you humble. To make you more careful in similar situations that you don't do that again.

But we must forget it in the sense that I must not whip myself and afflict myself, trying to punish myself. No, Christ has taken the punishment of it all. You don't have to afflict yourself for anything you did in the past.

That is a heathen idea that I beat myself. You know, the non-Christians, there are people who do that for their sin. They beat themselves and roll on the ground and do all types of things.

There are Christians who mentally do that over their past failure. You can't take the punishment for your sin. There's no use whipping yourself.

Christ took a whipping for you. He took it completely. He died for you.

He was whipped and beaten. And you don't need to get a whipping now. Forget it.

But it keeps you humble. And if you take it that way, I believe God can make you progress in your life. Finish with regret over the past and say, let that regret spur you on.

I sometimes tell young people, some of the truths I share with you of an overcoming life. I discovered when I was nearly 36 years old, 16 years after I became a Christian. I wish I had known it as soon as I became a Christian when I was 20.

But there was nobody around me in any church that told me the type of things I'm telling you these days. Nobody. In no church I attended.

And I struggled along, failing, getting up, discouraged, everything else. And I sought God to be filled with the Holy Spirit, study His word. I studied His word in depth.

And after 16 years, I finally got open my eyes to see the truth. So I tell young people, I see you guys have 17, 18 years old, and you've already understood what I discovered when I was double your age. So strictly speaking, you should be able to make much greater progress in your life by the time you come to my age than I am today.

Much greater progress in Christ-likeness and in usefulness to God and effectiveness in His service much more than I have done because you started earlier. You start when you're 15 or 16. When I started when I'm 36, I got a handicap in running this race.

And you're way ahead of me. You can be way ahead of me. But I said, I doubt whether you will beat me in this race.

And I'll tell you why. Because I'm so sorry for the foolish things I did that I'm running very fast today to make up for lost time. And I see some of you people, I say to younger people, you're not running so fast.

You're taking it easy. Because you know these truths so easily. You never did all the foolish stupid things that I did.

You never, thankfully because you were in a good church, you never did the foolish things that I did from 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. You never did the foolish things we all did. So you don't have any regret.

I feel sorry. I'm not saying you should do those things. But why can't you run and say, Lord Jesus, I want to know more about how much you suffered to take away my sin.

That's what you need to. I'm not saying you have to do the same things, foolish things we did. No parent will want, all of you parents, do you want your children to do the stupid foolish things you did when you were young? No.

We, none of us want our children to do the foolish things we did when we were young. But we do want them to be passionate in following the Lord. And I pray that'll be true.

Don't let regret over the past hold you back. You know, there must be like a curtain that drops right behind me as I move forward. And I look back and I see a curtain.

I can't think of anything that happened at the back. I can't see what I accomplished. I can't see what foolish things I did.

It's all, I can't see it. Forgetting the things that are behind. Forgetting what I've done for the Lord.

Completely forgetting. Completely forgetting all the foolish things I've done. I say, Lord, I'm only going to look in front.

No man wins a hundred meter race looking back. To see how far he's covered. Or how much better he is than others.

Such people will always lose. The person who's going to win a race is always going to look in front for the finishing line. And I want to encourage you.

Basically, that's what I want to say. Dear brothers and sisters, please look at the finishing line alone. Don't look back to see how much ground you've covered.

It's not important. Don't look back and see the places where you tripped up. Forget it.

And certainly don't look around to see how many people you're overtaking. That'll also make you lose the race. Say, Lord, I've got one goal.

That's the finishing line is to become like Christ completely. So I want to put a curtain right behind me. I'm going to have zero looking back and regret.

My past failures serves to humble me. Why did God allow Peter to deny him three times? I don't have time to show you this. But you read the gospel sometimes.

John, you know, Jesus was in the high court being tried in the priest before the high priest, which was the high court of those days. John, the apostle, was a relative of the high priest. So he could go in through the gate related to the high priest.

Peter came there. And the gate fellow said, Who are you? And John came and spoke to the gatekeeper and got Peter inside. One single event, which made Peter deny the Lord.

John did a good turn for him. He wanted to come inside to see the trial. And that's where three people came and asked him, Yeah, you're with Jesus.

And he denied him three times. I thought sometimes Peter must have thought, Oh, I wish John hadn't come and spoken to the gatekeeper and got me inside. I wouldn't have denied the Lord.

I would have felt like that. Why did God allow it? Why did God allow John to know at that time that Peter is trying to come in? Do you have regrets like that? There's something somebody did or the moment that if that hadn't happened, I would not have fallen like this. Yeah, we all have incidents like that.

God permitted it. He permitted it with Peter. He permitted it with you.

Because he wanted you to be humbled for the rest of your life. So that he can make you make you a useful servant in his kingdom. And so about, what is it? 40, 43 days after that.

On the day of Pentecost. Oh, it was 53 days, right? After that, on the day of Pentecost and the spirit of God comes upon Peter and fills him and becomes a mighty anointed person. And he preaches that powerful message.

And 3000 Jews are converted. I mean, if you were to convert one Jew in your life, you'll never forget it in your life. Say, boy, I brought one Jew to the Lord.

It's not easy to convert a Jew. It's like trying to convert a Muslim. 3000 of them converted in a 15 minute sermon.

Can you imagine the danger Peter had of getting puffed up? And people come and slap him on the back and say, hey, Peter, that was great, man. He could not be puffed up. He'll say, you know what I did seven weeks ago? It humbled him permanently.

All his life, he remembered himself as a man who denied the Lord in the moment of testing. Could he forget it? In one sense, he could never forget it. But it did not bring such regret in his life that he stopped serving the Lord.

No. Okay, I did it. 25 years later, he'd say, yeah, I'm the man.

I'm the man who denied the Lord three times. I'll never forget it all my life. It has humbled me permanently.

So my brothers and sisters, when you forget the things that are behind, let those failures humble you permanently. But don't live in regret over it. That it hinders you from further progress.

Forgetting the things that are behind, I press toward the mark. Don't live in regret over anything in the past. Is there something that you did that made, okay, let's forget these spiritual things.

Sometimes you can have regret over decisions that you made, which made you lose a lot of money. Money is a very important thing in this world. And perhaps you took some decision which made you lose a lot of money, some job opportunity, which you gave up, which would have made you a millionaire today.

But you're struggling. You have regret over it. Say, Lord, you allowed it.

Maybe if I had got it, maybe I would have drifted away from you. Maybe those million dollars would have taken me away from you. Thank God you did not allow me to get it.

Don't sit in regret over money that is lost by your foolishness. Or by wrong choices. There are many things like this.

We look back and say, boy, if I hadn't done that at that point, I came to the fork in the road and I took the wrong turning. That's why I'm here today. I could have been there.

Some of my friends are out there and I was with them and I'm over here struggling. But those guys are not following the Lord. You are, thank God.

So remember that God allows failure. To humble you. But you must not live in regret over it.

Forgetting the things that are behind. One day, when we stand before the Lord, you will see that God permitted you to take the wrong decision. Yeah, I think of incidents in my life where God permitted me to take a wrong decision or something that made me suffer some type of loss, earthly loss, not spiritual loss.

And I say, thank you, Lord. I will never shed tears over earthly loss. Never.

I'm not going to sit and weep or feel sorrow about any earth, sorrowful about any earthly loss. Lord, I want to have sorrow only over spiritual loss that I've suffered in my life. Make that decision today.

God bless you. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, please help us each one.

We are so quick to forget important things. I pray that no one here will forget what they heard today. And it'll change their life permanently, not just for a few days, but they'll remember it 20 years from now if you haven't come.

Help us all, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.

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