

# (The Supreme Priorities) 5. One Thing I Do

by Zac Poonen

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*The main priority for a Christian is to understand God's purpose and press on to attain it, as stated in Philippians 3:7-14.*

**Scripture:** Philippians 3:7

**Topics:** "Pursuing God's Purpose", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of pursuing God's purpose in life, as exemplified by the Apostle Paul, who, despite his extensive ministry and experiences, acknowledged that he had not yet attained his full potential in Christ. Poonen challenges believers to move beyond a superficial understanding of salvation and to actively seek God's will, pressing on towards the high calling of God. He warns against the distractions and temptations that can hinder spiritual growth, urging a commitment to a life of continual surrender to the Holy Spirit. The sermon encourages believers to adopt a forward-looking mindset, forgetting past failures and successes, and to strive for a life that glorifies God. Ultimately, Poonen calls for a wholehearted dedication to fulfilling God's purpose, which is essential for a meaningful Christian life.

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## Transcript

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:7-14.

Let us first of all remind ourselves that these words of the apostle were not written by a young enthusiast starting out on the Christian road. They are the testimony of a mature Christian towards the close of a rich and full life. Thirty years had passed since Paul's conversion. During those years God had used him to establish many churches, mightily attesting his ministry with signs and miracles. From the first Paul had

spent himself unstintingly in the work of the gospel, travelling constantly and undergoing great hardships. He had come to know the reality of victory over sin as he grew in likeness to his Lord. And among his many joys he had had one unique experience of being, as he put it, lifted up into the third heaven to receive remarkable revelations of spiritual truth.

Yet at the end of all this, he states that he still has not attained to all that God had purposed for his life. Here is one of the greatest Christians of all time saying towards the end of his life that he still needs to press on to the goal. To most believers, alas, salvation begins and ends with the new birth and its assured escape from Divine judgement. Not so for the apostle, nor indeed for anyone else who seeks like him to be a true disciple of Christ. Here in this passage he declares his firm belief that Christ had laid hold of him with a purpose. He, in return, was determined to lay hold of that purpose at any cost. This is a tremendous and solemn truth, that when the Lord lays hold of us at conversion, it is with a purpose extending far, far beyond just the saving of our souls out of hell fire and into heaven. If so mature a man as the apostle Paul had to say at the end of thirty years of untiring Christian service that he had not yet attained, but had still to strive to fulfil all of God's purpose for his life, what a vast thing that purpose must be.

Paul goes even further in this passage. To him everything that the world considers as precious is worthless rubbish, when compared to this supreme objective of grasping the purpose of God and fulfilling it. He considers this a prize worth the giving up of everything in the world (verse 14). When we look around us and see believers coveting worldly possessions and clinging to material things, giving these a greater place in their lives than the things of God, we are forced to conclude that their Christianity is very far removed from Paul's.

It is a mark of spiritual infancy to think of salvation only in terms of an insurance policy to escape the flames of Hell. When we mature spiritually, we realize that God has saved us in order that we might walk each day in the pathway that He has already planned for each one of us from eternity (Ephesians 2:10). That pathway was what Paul called God's purpose for his life. If we are satisfied with having received His grace, but are uncommitted to fulfilling His will for our lives, then no matter how thoroughly evangelical we may be, we shall go through life without accomplishing anything of lasting value to God. Of course the Devil's first aim is by one means or another to blind people to the grace of God in Christ Jesus, thus preventing them from being saved (2 Corinthians 4:4). But if he does not succeed there, then his next aim is to blind that new believer to the fact that God has a very definite plan for him. To a large extent he has succeeded here. There are thousands of true believers who never seek the will of God with any degree of earnestness, even in major decisions that they make in their lives.

The Christian life is depicted in this passage in Philippians as one in which we have to be continually pressing on. No degree of spiritual maturity attainable on earth will ever absolve us from this need of constant urgency. It is because many believers have neglected this lesson that they have no living testimony. Their only testimony relates to an experience in the distant past when on a blessed day they perhaps raised their hand or signed a decision-card in some evangelistic meeting. That was wonderful, but nothing has happened since! Proverbs 24:30-34 with its picture of a garden gone to waste, describes the condition of the man who relaxes after his salvation. A garden requires constant weeding and caring, if it is to be guarded against weeds and nettles - and so does the human soul.

I think it was John Wesley who made it a rule in the early Methodist testimony meetings that no one was to give a testimony that was more than one week old. Anyone who had no story to tell of the Lord's dealings with him during the previous seven days, was to consider himself a backslider. How many of us can stand

that test? Would we have to sit glumly silent in a meeting of that nature?

Notice Paul's words in verses 13, 14: "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Here we have one more of the priorities for the Christian. Understanding God's purpose and pressing on to attain it is not an optional extra for the spiritual elite. It should characterize the life of every true child of God.

Once more we shall consider our subject from three standpoints. First, we shall consider the things that can hinder us from pressing on to God's full purpose; secondly the power that can strengthen us to press on; and finally the attitude of mind that can keep us doing so to the end of our lives.

### The Things that Can Hinder Us

When God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt. He had marked out a route for them to travel in the wilderness on their way to Canaan. They however could know it only as they followed the pillar of cloud and fire, day by day. For each of His redeemed children today, God has a pathway marked out too. But they can know it only as they walk with Him each day. If we are to fully lay hold of the purpose for which God has laid hold of us, we must learn to walk with God. And here is where we shall find resistance from Satan at every step. Even as thieves invade the homes of the rich more than of the poor, Satan aims his darts more at the believer who is spiritually minded than at the one who is carnally minded. We shall therefore find the battle getting thicker with every step of progress in spiritual maturity.

There are many forces that seek to hinder the believer who would press on to do all of God's will: the world with its varied attractions, the flesh with its unclean lusts, and the Devil with his subtle devices. If these are hindrances to the believer's spiritual growth, we may wonder why God does not eliminate them, or at least protect the believer from them. This has been a problem that has plagued many minds down the centuries. Sufficient here for us to know that it is our heavenly Father, who is wiser than all of us, who has permitted these forces to exist. One good reason at least may be in order that our spiritual strength may be built up. Even in the physical realm, our muscles can be built up only as we subject them to resistance through exercise. Otherwise our muscles will be flabby and powerless. A wrestler who is training for a bout will need constant exercise, wrestling with others in order to fit himself for the event. In the same way our spiritual strength can never be developed if we are protected from the trials and temptations of the world, the flesh and the Devil.

It should bring us strong consolation to know however that the Lord Jesus was Himself tempted with every single temptation that comes to us (Hebrews 4:15). Luke tells us that Jesus went into the wilderness, "full of the Holy Spirit," and that at the end of the temptation, He returned "in the power of the Spirit" (4:1, 14). Overcoming the temptations common to man had strengthened even Him, as a man. Can it not do the same for us? Let us never imagine that we can become spiritually strong just by reading Christian books and attending religious meetings. Such activities are the equivalent of taking food, but along with our food we need exercise too if we are to be strong. That is why those who cut themselves off from contact with the people of the world and live protected Christian lives never become spiritually robust.

Holiness is like health. To be fully healthy, we need to take regular exercise. Then only can we resist disease. Thus to be made perfect, we have to go through temptation and overcome it. If we evade testing, we can never be made perfect. This suggests another reason why God placed the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. It gave Adam the opportunity to overcome temptation and to become positively holy.

There is no need for us to fear temptation. The Lord has assured us in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that He will never allow us to be tempted above our ability to bear it.

Psalms 66:10-12 is one of those wonderful Old Testament passages that suggest what tremendous benefits can come to us through trial and testing. The fire and the water make us not only spiritually wealthy but spiritually healthy too. The men of God in the Bible were all subject to the same temptations that plague us. James 5:17 tells us that even Elijah had the same lusts and passions to overcome as we have. It was because these men of God overcame in their trials and testings, that they became strong, and thus usable in God's hands. God permits temptation to come to us in order to test us. Everyone who would be used by God must be tested. The temptations that come to us when we are alone are meant to prove our fitness for more public service. Overcoming temptation is like learning to swim. You cannot learn to swim in one day. But if you are determined, you will sooner or later acquire the skill. Then you are no longer afraid of the water. In just the same way, if we are determined, we shall learn the secret in Christ of victory over temptation, and then of that too we shall no longer be afraid.

Let us consider briefly the three temptations that came to the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 4. We shall find if we study them that it is along the same lines that the Devil comes to us too. The three temptations described here seem to have been the Devil's final attempt, at the end of forty days of temptation, to knock down the Lord. They were the three last weapons in his hand, but the Lord overcame them all.

The first temptation came along the line of the natural appetites of the body, in this case the desire for food (verses 3, 4). It is significant that both Eve and Esau were also tempted along this line (Genesis 3:6; 25:34), but where they failed Jesus conquered. To all men and women the Devil comes today with this same temptation to satisfy the natural appetites of the body outside the means appointed by God for their satisfaction. The desire for food, rest, sexual fulfilment and the like, are normal appetites that God Himself has endowed us with, and God has also prescribed the ways and means by which these appetites are legitimately to be satisfied. But when we seek to gratify these appetites outside God's appointed means for their satisfaction, or when we over-indulge these natural cravings of the body, then we sin. The Devil tempts us very subtly here. There will be no open appeal to sin - only a call to satisfy a legitimate craving of the body, but in an illegitimate way. Give way to over-indulgence in the matter of eating food, and we end up as gluttons, unable to go without food for even a single day. Thus our usefulness to God becomes seriously hampered. The same holds good if, like sluggards, we have not learnt the discipline of getting out of bed early in the morning to have a quiet time with God.

In the West today, the Devil has found a large following in those who subscribe to the so-called "new morality." Unfortunately this philosophy is now creeping into the East also. It teaches that in the realm of sexual desire there is no need to exercise any self-control whatsoever. Vast multitudes are swallowing this philosophy of license wholesale. Their refusal to love the truth has ended in their believing a lie (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Samson and David were lured by Satan through lust. David could conquer Goliath, but not his own lust. Many are the mighty men who have fallen here. The one who is careless or undisciplined in this area of life will be an easy target for Satan. Take for example modern fashions in women's clothes. They seem designed to uncover ever larger areas of the body which God intended to be covered, as makes clear. Fashion design, together with the exposure of naked flesh that is shown in the cinema and brazenly advertised on roadside posters and in newspapers and magazines, are together part of a carefully planned strategy of Satan to enslave men totally in their own lusts. If in these wicked days we are to

subdue our lustful desires we shall have to discipline our eyes as Job did (Job 31:1). We must refuse to look at or to read anything that would enflame those desires. David sinned because he did not control his eyes (2 Samuel 11:2). Having learnt a bitter lesson thereby, he later prayed that God would help him to discipline his eyes (Psalm 119:37). We too would do well to make that our earnest prayer.

The Apostle Paul was very conscious of the fact that over-indulgence of the natural appetites of the body would disqualify him for the Lord's service. He therefore severely disciplined his body and kept it in constant subjection to God (1 Corinthians 9:27). Thousands have disqualified themselves for the Lord's service through indiscipline in this realm.

The second temptation that came to Jesus was the temptation to presumption. He was asked by the Devil to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and to arrive spectacularly, unhurt, in the midst of the crowd in the temple court below. For protection He was to claim the promise in Psalm 91:11, 12. Here the enticement was to do something spectacular in order to display His trust in God: to jump when God had not asked Him to.

Today there is a great craze for the spectacular and some sections of the Christian church have succumbed to it. The Devil is constantly urging believers to do something adventurous and out-of-the-ordinary, that will display their faith in God. Many have gone completely astray from the pathway God planned for them by following these urgings of Satan.

There are many others who have rushed forward into some course of action without patiently waiting for God's time and God's leading, and have thereby made shipwreck of their lives. As one has said, "We must be in His path and move in it at His time and at His pace if we would have His protection and claim His promises." In the life of the Lord Jesus we have the perfect example of One who always moved forward under His Father's direction, governed only by His Father's will and time and never by the urgings of Satan or of men. He would say to those who urged Him, "My time has not yet come" (John 7:6); that is to say, "I can only move when my Father tells me to." King Saul lost his kingdom because he rushed ahead without waiting for God's time (1 Samuel 13:8-14). Many believers have missed God's best in just the same way. Many, for example, have rushed into marriage without awaiting God's will in the matter. Having acted in haste they are now repenting at leisure! Brothers and sisters, learn to wait patiently for the Lord's time and then you will never need to regret. He will never disappoint those who wait for Him (Isaiah 49:23).

In the third temptation the Devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. All would be given to Jesus, he said, if only He would fall down and worship him. Here again is a temptation that comes to all of us. It is the temptation to compromise our Christian principles for the sake of some personal gain.

There are many things that we can obtain in the world if only we are prepared to compromise our principles and bow our knee to the Devil. One of them is money. It is one of the biggest attractions. Frequently believers are tempted to lower their standards for the sake of making a little more money. When we seek employment, are we not governed more by the salary that can be expected than by the will of God? Consequently it becomes very easy for the Devil to lead us out of the mainstream of God's purpose for our lives. This was the error of Balaam, and many are taking this road today (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11; cf. Numbers 22). Do we realize that this is really bowing the knee to the Devil? Then there are Christians who adopt unscrupulous worldly methods to "collect money for the Lord's work," as they would say. No matter how good the end in view, God can never sanction unrighteous means to reach it. God

does not want us to win the world by bowing our knees to His usurper. If we would follow the Lord wholly, let us beware of the attractions of money. Jesus warned us to despise it if we would hold on to God (Luke 16:13).

Then there is the lure of status, the temptation to become famous or prominent. Many are the compromises that the soul seeking earthly fame must make. Even in Christian circles and in the work of the Lord, there is this very same temptation. There is something within all of us, that craves the limelight. We all like to be admired and respected by others. It gives us an inner satisfaction to be "the life and soul of the party," the focus of all eyes, the one who stands out head and shoulders above all those around us. Even in the church, what a temptation it often is to display ourselves as better or more gifted than others in singing or in preaching, or even in praying! We are tempted to elevate ourselves in the esteem of men at the expense of our fellow believers. All this is totally contrary to the spirit of Christ.

Or take again the appeal to the Christian preacher. How often is he tempted to be more "broad-minded," to avoid emphasizing Bible doctrines that are distasteful to his hearers, to refrain from denouncing sin or covetousness in his preaching! Let him avoid giving offense to the wealthy and influential and gain a wider hearing. But at what price? Essentially at the price of bowing his knee to the Devil, from whom all these suggestions originate. Every preacher is tempted along these lines at one time or the other. Many, alas, have yielded, unaware of the ultimate complicity with Satan that underlies all such compromise.

An avenue along which temptation frequently comes to younger men and women is in the matter of marriage. We have spoken already of the danger of haste in this matter, where nothing can be lost through waiting for God's time. But there are other, more serious temptations. Many believers have flagrantly disobeyed what they knew to be the clear teaching of God's Word, and have married unbelievers. Tragically it is just at this critical point that so many who stood courageously for Christ in student days have fallen down later. Often a life which had begun to be of great use to God has had its entire usefulness nullified by compromise on this issue. This is the price of bowing the knee to Satan.

In India the pressures brought to bear upon young people at the time when they have to choose their life partners are very great. There are pressures from parents and relatives who may be neither converted nor sympathetic. There are financial pressures caused by sheer poverty, or by the iniquitous system of dowry. And the saddest of all, there are social pressures arising from the retention, even after conversion to Christianity, of this country's heathenish caste system. Not surprisingly, many a young Christian has finally succumbed to these pressures brought upon him by the Devil, and consented to an unspiritual match.

Satan has countless plausible arguments to deceive us. "Do not," he urges, "be too narrow-minded about 2 Corinthians 6:14 and its talk of the unequal yoke. After marriage you have only to persuade your partner to believe the Gospel and all will be well. If you throw away this golden opportunity, you may never again get so commendable a match." How many have been taken in by his suggestions! O, I know God has worked miracles, and has saved some unconverted husbands or wives in answer to much prayer. But this is no ground for our disobeying Him. This is no excuse for bowing to Satan.

Has such a time arrived in your life? I appeal to you: have the courage to stand by your convictions! Reject every diabolical proposal, no matter how great the pressures. Seek God's help in prayer and wait on Him for His will. He will not fail you. Honour Him, and He will give you the partner of His choice; and if the choice is His, it can only be the best.

Many and subtle are the temptations to fall down and worship the enemy of souls. Brothers and sisters, if you do not want to miss God's purpose for your life, then reject them all. Stick to the pathway of moral and spiritual integrity, even if it means worldly loss. Do not be led astray by other believers who may have lesser scruples, and who perhaps have sought to get the best of both worlds. What does it matter if they seem even to have a better time than you? Appearances may deceive. Much so-called "success" in this world may be adjudged as failure in the clearer light of eternity. Determine to have none of that. Refuse to accept any of the Devil's short cuts to advantage or prosperity. Walk with God and seek His praise alone. Cling to Him, and you will have no regrets at the last.

So far, we have been considering only sinful things that can hinder us from pressing on to God's full purpose. There are, however, legitimate things also that can prove to be a hindrance to us. That is why we are exhorted in Hebrews 12:1 to lay aside not only our sins but also every weight that will hinder us in running the race.

Take one example. Talking is not at all sinful in itself. But talking can easily degenerate into harmful gossip. Idle conversation can be indulged in, too, at the cost of Bible study and intercession. Ecclesiastes 5:3 tells us that a man who speaks too much is a fool, and Proverbs 10:19 warns us that no one can converse for long without falling into sin. Many a believer has forfeited the privilege of being God's mouthpiece because of a lack of self-control in the matter of speech (Jeremiah 15:19). Excessive or careless talk invariably leads to leakage of spiritual power.

Or again, no one would question the value of music in Christian worship. But when countless hours are spent in training our voices, or developing our talents with musical instruments, and when such practice becomes more important to us than Bible study or prayer, then what is quite legitimate in itself can also become a hindrance to our spiritual progress. How many believers there are, who are more regular at the choir practice than in their daily quiet time!

The apostle Paul, being conscious of the many devices of Satan was not only careful to avoid sinful things; he was no less careful over even legitimate things that would prove to be a hindrance in fulfilling God's purpose (1 Corinthians 10:23). He had his priorities right and decided that he must give up even some good things in order to attain the Lord's goal. He saw that even in the Christian life, the good can be the enemy of the best. When the Devil finds he cannot hinder us through sinful things, he will seek to reduce our effectiveness through legitimate things. This should drive us much to our knees, to ask God's help to distinguish what is edifying and profitable from what is not.

### The Power that Can Strengthen Us

All that we have said so far may seem calculated only to dishearten us. The wiles of Satan may have appeared so subtle and so varied as to leave us without hope of any successful defence. It may be that we have tried sincerely for years to overcome some assault of his and have been foiled. But God has a message of hope for us. He has given us His Holy Spirit. His is the power that will strengthen us to fulfil all God's purpose. Without this gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell us, God would never have made such demands. He would never have expected us to carry out His will unaided. The distinctive mark of the age in which we live is this, that since the resurrection and ascension of Jesus to heaven, the Holy Spirit Himself indwells and fills any human life yielded to Him. God not only calls us to His high purpose; He also enables us to reach it.

Even the Lord Jesus, God's own Son, needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit before He could set out on His earthly ministry. This event took place at the time of His baptism, and it was through the power of the Spirit that Jesus passed triumphantly through the wilderness temptations that followed it. It was the same Holy Spirit's power that enabled Him to fulfil His long earthly ministry and to tread the pathway to the cross.

The same held true in the lives of Paul and the other apostles. Paul testifies that his service for God was fulfilled only through the power of the Spirit of God (Romans 15:18, 19). Many today have neglected the command, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Many others are afraid to seek that fullness, lest in finding it they become fanatics. The Devil has used this fear of emotionalism to turn away a large portion of the church from seeking God earnestly for this. Others he has kept satisfied with some ecstatic experience in the past, which though it may have been from God, is valueless without the present enjoyment of a continuous filling with the Holy Spirit.

Many are confused regarding the fullness of the Spirit. They have the idea that God is very reluctant to give His Spirit to us. But the words of Jesus in Luke 11:11-13 should for ever dispel such doubts from our minds. "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!" So if God had delayed in thus blessing us, we can be sure that the cause lies in us and not in Him. We have only to approach God and ask Him in simple faith for this filling. All He demands of us is an unreserved surrender of our lives to Him. Fulfil these conditions, maintain them day by day, and we shall remain continually filled with the Spirit.

The testimony of Dr. Walter L. Wilson has been a blessing to many in this respect. He states that the experience of surrender to the Holy Spirit brought about a greater transformation in his life than even the experience of salvation had brought about seventeen years earlier. For some years after his salvation. Dr. Wilson remained dissatisfied with the fruitfulness of his own life and labours. He came at last to recognize that this was because he had not given enough place to the Holy Spirit in his life. At the same time he was full of fear lest seeking for the Spirit's fullness should make him fanatical. One day he heard a message from Romans 12:1, where the speaker emphasized that the presenting of our bodies, spoken of in that verse, must be to the Holy Spirit, for the Lord Jesus had a body of His own, and the Father remained upon His throne in heaven, whereas it was the Holy Spirit who at Pentecost had come to earth without a body. Dr. Wilson went back to his room after hearing the message, and falling prostrate upon the carpet before God, he addressed these words to the Holy Spirit: "My Lord, I have mistreated You all my Christian life, I have treated You like a servant. When I wanted You I called for You; when I was about to engage in some work I beckoned to You to come and help me perform my task. I have kept You in the place of a servant. I have sought to use You only as a willing servant to help me in my self-appointed and self-chosen work. I shall do so no more. Just now I give you this body of mine; from my head to my feet I give it to you. I give You my hands, my limbs, my eyes and lips, my brain; all that I am, without and within. I hand over to You, for You to live in it the life that You please. You may send this body to Africa, or lay it on a bed with cancer. You may blind the eyes, or send me with Your message to Tibet. You may take this body to the Eskimos, or send it to a hospital with pneumonia. It is Your body from this moment on. Help Yourself to it. Thank you my Lord, I believe You have accepted it, for in Romans twelve and one. You said 'acceptable unto God.' Thank You again, my Lord, for taking me. We now belong to each other." Dr. Wilson testified to the remarkable fruitfulness that attended his labours, even from the very next morning after this act of surrender was made. (This incident is quoted in, "They Found the Secret" by V. Raymond Edman; Chapter 18).

I am not asking you to go and copy that. God does not ask us to imitate others. But there is a principle here that we do well to heed. It is this, that the Holy Spirit will possess us fully only when our surrender to Him is unconditional. Very often our surrender is with inward reservations. We are unwilling to go to a certain place, or to take up a certain type of employment. We have inward choices as to where and how we want to serve the Lord, and we want the power of the Holy Spirit for the sake of success in the task that we have in mind. That is the point. Our yieldedness to Him is conditional. We have made our own terms, and that is the reason why we so rarely experience the Holy Spirit's working. Maybe we feel that we can carry on well enough without His anointing for most of the time, but we do not know what we are missing. How foolish we are! Is not the Holy Spirit the One who can make the most use of our lives?

Brothers and sisters, unless our surrender to the Spirit of God is truly unconditional, how can He possess us completely? We must sincerely be willing to do all His will, even to the extent of taking up the lowliest duties. In marriage we must be willing to accept His choice of a partner, dark or fair, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, who is one with us in the Lord." In employment we must be prepared, at whatever cost to ourselves or our families, to be either constantly on the move or stuck in one place all our lives, if only we are with Him. Have we ever yielded ourselves to the Holy Spirit like that, without personal preference or reservations in any sphere? That is the only type of surrender that will bring into our lives the full measure of His power. And it is with that power alone that we shall fulfil God's purpose.

#### The Attitude of Mind that Can Keep Us

In the passage we have been considering in Philippians, Paul described to us by example the attitude of mind that must be ours if we are to attain to God's full purpose. Forgetting the things that are behind, he tells us, he keeps looking ahead to the things that lie before. In spite of every temptation to do so, he refuses to look back. Earlier, in Acts 20:23, 24, he had said that he was unmoved by the knowledge that persecutions awaited him. No fear of them could shake his determination to press forward to God's goal. Again, in Acts 26:19 he testified before King Agrippa that he had not disobeyed the heavenly vision received from the Lord nearly thirty years before. And in his very last letter he could claim to have fought the good fight and finished his course (2 Timothy 4:7). Here is a man who had doggedly pursued the pathway of God's purpose right up to his very last day. Despite countless inducements to give up and turn aside, despite fierce persecutions, despite slander and calumny, and all the rest, he held faithfully to his course, his eyes fixed on the goal. Blessed shall we be if at the end of our lives we can have such a testimony.

How often we are tempted to look back! The failures of the past have a way of discouraging us, and when that happens, sure enough the Devil arrives to whisper in our ears the lie that God has no more use for us. It has always been a great encouragement to me that it was said even of an ass that the Lord had need of it (Matthew 21:2, 3). If the Lord Jesus needed an ass to fulfil His Messianic programme, and if God could even on one occasion speak through an ass (Numbers 22:28), then there is hope for everyone of us. For whatever was written in the former days, and even therefore the story of Balaam's ass, was written for our encouragement (Romans 15:4). You may feel yourself to be as stupid as an ass, and you may make ten thousand mistakes; yet your Lord has need of you, and when He so chooses He can even speak through you.

The same Bible that tells us not to worry about tomorrow tells us with equal urgency not to look back over the past. We need to finish with all our yesterdays and to face today and the future trusting in the Lord. If tomorrow you fail, do not let that cast you into despair. Go and confess your failure to the Lord and have

your sin cleansed in His blood. Then press on again. And if you fail once more, go and do the same thing yet again. Never abandon yourself to despair. Resolutely refuse the futile backward look of regret over the past, for there is only loss in crying over spilt milk.

But refuse also to look back in pride that destroys the soul. So if God uses you in some wonderful way tomorrow, seek grace to forget that as well. Do not indulge in self-congratulation. Press on. Discouragement on the one hand and pride on the other are equally means that Satan uses to stay us on our course and rob us of our effectiveness.

We are told in Ephesians 5:15, 16 that, if we would walk wisely in these evil days, we must constantly redeem the time. That means that we are to buy up every opportunity that comes our way and turn it to the glory of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). Each of us has only one brief life, and every day of that life should be made to count for God. But that will only happen as we persistently look ahead to Him. No matter how heavy the odds that we are called upon to face, let us maintain this attitude of mind. But let us also refuse to look aside at other believers and compare our lot or measure our successes against theirs, for that too can lead to discouragement or to pride (cf. John 21:20-22; 2 Corinthians 10:12). We are to look straight ahead and in no other direction (Proverbs 4:25).

Even before his conversion the apostle Paul was wholehearted about his religion (Acts 22:3, 4). His was no feeble, faint-hearted faith such as we see too often today. When he was converted, he was equally wholehearted in his devotion to Christ. The only difference was that now he had set his mind on things above and not on things on the earth. Our risen Lord Jesus tells us clearly that He has absolutely no appreciation for lukewarmness (Revelation 3:16). God seeks utterness in His people, for only people utterly committed to Him can fulfil His purpose on earth. If many of us were as half-hearted in our studies as we are in our Christianity, we would never even have passed the elementary school grade. Or again, if a man were as half-hearted in his job as many believers are in the service of God, he would have been sacked long ago. Wholeheartedness is plentiful in the mundane activities of many Christians, but alas, how seldom is it found in their religious activities! We are told that when king Hezekiah worked with all his heart, he prospered (2 Chronicles 31:21). But the day came when, forgetting "the things that are before," he relaxed. That day he tragically failed the Lord.

By word and example Jesus urged those who would follow Him to keep their eyes on the goal. He warned one would-be follower that any man who had put his hand to the plough and then looked back was unfit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). A little earlier we read that Jesus Himself had "steadfastly set His face" to go in the direction indicated by His Father (verse 51). "I must be about my Father's business" was His unceasing attitude, and he desired no followers who were unwilling to look in the same direction and walk the same road.

The disciple of Jesus Christ must have only one aim in life, namely, to do God's will and thus to glorify Him. Everything in life - money, position, marriage, employment and all the rest - must be made to serve this one end. All must be relaxed to the purpose of God. It is only when we adopt such an attitude of mind that we can claim the promise in Romans 8:28 for ourselves. For it is only to those who love God and who are aligned to His purpose that all things work together for good.

We do well also to remember that in eternity it is those who have done the will of God on earth whose works abide for ever (1 John 2:17). All else will be destroyed. So let doing God's will be our one aim. As it was for Jesus, let it be our very meat and drink (John 4:34). The man after God's own heart is the one who

desires to fulfil all His will. Only such a one can effectively serve his generation in God's eyes (Acts 13:22, 36). God is seeking for such men and women in the world today.

As in the last three chapters, let us notice here also the relevance of this theme to the days in which we live. In speaking of the last days Jesus warned his disciples once more in Luke 17 of the danger of looking back. To point out the lesson He quoted the grim example of Lot's wife. What was her weakness? Unlike the others in Sodom, she had believed the message of God. Not only that, she had obeyed it and set out from the city. But then she had second thoughts - and looked back. The moment she did so judgment overtook her: she became a pillar of salt. Her backward look resulted in her becoming fixed - a stationary pillar. From that moment she could not move forward one single inch.

Today, unfortunately, many believers are as stationary as Lot's wife became. She has her twentieth century counterparts in those who many who, though saved years ago, have made no progress at all in the things of God since then. Here and now in their lives there is no more holiness or peace or patience than when they began; there is no advance in repentance for sins, or joy in the Lord, or victory over the world, or understanding of God's purposes, than there was on the day when they were saved. The sins which plagued them then still plague them. The same desires for wealth and position and comfort that existed at the time of their conversion characterize their lives even today. The reason has invariably been that they have looked back instead of forward. Jesus makes it plain that this will be a special danger of the last days.

Do you want to live a life over which you will have no regrets when you arrive in His presence? Then set yourself to do all the will of God. Seek day by day to discover and understand His purpose for your life. What that purpose is, the Holy Spirit can show you. You can never learn it theoretically from books, but only in experience as you walk with God. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" was Paul's question from the very moment of his conversion. What better attitude than that could you and I choose as our own?

Let your aim not be to live a long life, but one satisfying to God. Heaven and eternity will be sweeter to you if you arrive there having fulfilled God's will on earth.

Will you come in sincerity to the Lord as you read these words, and say to Him in faith,

"Lord I do want to fulfil all Thy purpose for my life. I do not have the wisdom to discover that will, nor the strength to act on it. Nevertheless Lord, I do desire with all my heart to press on through sweat and blood and tears to the prize of Thy high calling. Grant that when I enter Thy presence it may be without any regret at all, but only with the joy of having finished my course and glorified Thee on earth. To this end fill me, Lord, with Thy Holy Spirit."

Do this, and you will find life full of meaning and hope in the coming days. The eyes of the Lord seek through the whole earth for such men and women. God grant that you and I in our generation be ready to pay the price necessary to fulfil all the will of God.

"Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Revelation 3:11)

"I'm pressing on the upward way

New heights I'm gaining every day.

Still praying as I onward bound

Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

Lord, lift me up and let me stand

By faith on heaven's tableland

A higher plane than I have found,

Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

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