

Forgetting the Past

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Introduction: Do You Live in the Past?

- A. Many people live in the past, often feeling the need to talk about the past or dwell upon past events in their heart (e.g., “glory days,” hardships, mistakes).
- B. Should a Christian live in the past?
 - 1. Contemplation of the past can be valuable if we seek to learn from it and gain wisdom (e.g., **Eph. 2:11-12**).
 - 2. It can be a blessing for a Christian to look at the past mercies that God has shown, increasing one’s gratitude and joy in the Lord (**1 Tim 1:12-14**).
 - 3. Yet, there is a **big** difference between learning from our past and *living* in the past and for many, letting go of the past is exceedingly difficult.
- C. Christians are commanded to *forget* what lies behind in order to move forward to what lies ahead (**Phil. 3:12-14**).
 - 1. Forgetting the past in order to reach forward to what lies ahead, is essential to answering God’s call in Christ to heaven itself!

I. What’s wrong with Living in the Past?

- A. Living in the past hinders our ability to run the race of faith (**Phil. 3:12-14**).
 - 1. It is not easy to forget the past; even Paul struggled to do this perfectly.
 - 2. Holding on to the past will weigh us down; we must do our best to unload this weight so we may live a full life a Christian (**Heb. 12:1**).
- B. There is nothing you can do today that can change the unchangeable past.
 - 1. When dwelling on the past, a person begins to believe that his life would be so much better today “if only” this or that had occurred that he becomes bitter, resentful, or exceedingly sorrowful (e.g., **Num. 20:3-4**).
 - 2. Often, it is too late for us to prevent the consequences of a bad decision, no matter how much we try to undo what we have done (**Mat. 27:3-5**).
 - 3. Don’t let remorse of the past lead to your destruction; there is a way to move forward with the Lord’s help.
- C. Living in the past is too often used as an excuse for all that is bad today.
 - 1. Many blame their lack of initiative and good works today on one disappointing event of the past (e.g., betrayal, church division).
 - 2. Many blame others (e.g., parents) for all that is weak, sinful, or negative in their character or conduct today.
 - 3. We all need time to heal from bad experiences, yet such experiences should not be used as a “lifetime pass” that excuses bad behavior! (**Ezek. 18:20; Phil 4:11-13; e.g., 2 Cor. 4:7-10; 6:1-10**).
- D. Living in the past can cause us to “rest on our laurels.”
 - 1. For Paul, he needed to “forget” his past achievements and count them as “rubbish” for the sake of Christ (**Phil. 3:4-8**).
 - 2. Contemplation of the past can cause us to become self-satisfied causing us to be puffed up with pride (e.g., **Rev. 3:1-2**).
 - 3. By putting our trust in the past, we will foolishly believe that the prize of eternal life is secure and become complacent toward the Lord’s work.

4. Instead, we must continue to bear spiritual fruit (**John 15:8**) and “*excel still more*” in what God expects us to do and be (**1 Thes. 4:1**).

E. Living in the past prevents you living for the Lord today.

1. Like Lot’s wife, living in the past will destroy you (**Gen.19:17, 26**).

“When your memories are bigger than your dreams, you’re headed for the grave”

2. All of the living we do takes place in the present, not in the past.

3. To live in the past, is to rob or take away from the present and the blessings you can have today in the Lord (**Num. 11:4-6**).

4. To live in the past, is to become lazy toward the work of the Lord, much like the gossip who is idle as a result of talebearing (**1 Tim. 5:13**)

II. How to “Reach Forward to What Lies Ahead.”

A. Face up to the consequences of your decisions, learn from them, and resolve to do better (**Prov. 26:11; Ps. 85:8**).

1. Learn all you can from your mistakes and with humility use the lessons you have learned to teach others (**1 Tim. 1:12-16; cf. Gal. 1:13-16**).

2. Rather than have a “pity-party” for what you have done or say you’re sorry a million times, demonstrate true repentance (**Luke 3:8-14**).

“Right actions in the future are the best apologies for bad actions in the past.”

B. Put your faith in the Lord and trust in His grace.

1. The Lord is abundant in grace toward His children, providing “new starts” or forgiveness of sins (**1 John 1:9**).

2. Trust not in your works for salvation, **as if** past accomplishments are enough to earn salvation (**Phil. 3:9; Tit. 3:5**).

3. To those who put their trust in God, He provides new strength to move forward, even after much hardship and distress (**Isa. 40:29-31**).

C. Look to the future of what is yet to be accomplished (e.g., **Neh. 2:17-18**).

“We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future.”

1. Looking back can delay our following Jesus as we should (**Lk 9:61-62**).

2. To “*abound in the work of the Lord*” we must look forward, not backward if we are to fulfill God’s purpose for us (**1 Cor. 15:58**).

D. Learn to forgive as the Lord forgives or hand it over to God.

1. Those that harbor ill will have a miserable life (**Eph. 4:31**); we must learn to forgive as God does (**Eph. 4:32; Heb. 8:12**).

2. Rather than hold grudges and “keep score”, we must develop a forgiving heart (**Mat 18:21-22; Luke 17:3-4**).

3. Whether the offender has repented or not, we must learn to hand it over to God, whatever the offense is, and let God be the judge (**Rom 12:19**).

E. “Press on” (**Phil. 3:12-14**).

1. Rather than look backward in life, let your motto be: “*I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*”

2. The only way to move forward is to remember the goal of Heaven (**2 Cor. 4:18**). We must never forget where we are going!

Conclusion: Forgetting the Past is not easy, but it is absolutely essential to Living the Life of a Christian Today.