

One Thing I Do
Moving Forward
February 17, 2019

Ed, I need you to stand right here and not budge an inch. No matter how hard I tug on your hand, don't move. Now, I'm trying to reach my goal over there and I'm straining and straining, but I can't reach it. I'm not going anywhere. What do I have to do to reach my goal? I have to . . . LET GO . . . if I want to MOVE FORWARD!

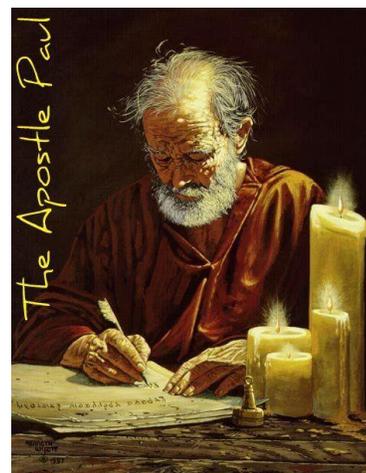
That's today's message.

Today we arrive at our final ONE THING passage, which we credit to the Apostle Paul

Phil 3:10-14 (toward the end of his life)

I want to know Christ

to know the power of his resurrection
and participation in his sufferings,
becoming like him in his death,
and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.



Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

And here it comes:

But ONE THING I do: ONE THING! What is it?
Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,
I press on toward the goal to win the prize
for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Forgetting the past and straining toward what is ahead.
Now, unless you fall down, hit your head and get amnesia,
you won't actually "forget"
And our picture of straining for something doesn't necessarily mean
as I illustrated with Ed, mean I'm actually going anywhere.

So what words would best capture Paul's meaning.
Forget in the sense of LET GO
Straining toward the goal in the sense of MOVE FORWARD.

I have to let go if I want to move forward.

Paul wanted to keep moving forward.

OK, that sounds exciting. I want to do *that*.

BUT, to continually move forward, what must you *also* be doing?

You must continually be letting go.

Now I don't want to do *that*.

Then I got to thinking.

What might Paul have had to let go of in order to move forward?

Maybe this question will help you identify what might *you and I* have to let go of to move forward?

So what do we know about Paul?

For one, he had a former alias.

He used to be known as Saul, and Saul was one angry guy,

He was on a rampage against Christians, all in the name of God.

Ever heard of violence in the name of God – that's so NOT God.

Saul's the one who authorized the stoning of Steven, the first Christian martyr.

He was off to persecute more Christians when he was arrested by Jesus himself on the road to Damascus,

and Jesus says, "**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me.**"

How long until the horror of what he'd done bowled him over?

I'm sure he agonized over this as he went away to the desert for 3 years.

How would you like that on your conscience: "Persecutor of Jesus."

How would look into the eyes of Stephen's wife and children, seeing their immense grief in?

How would you begin to say, "I'm SO sorry?"

How would you forgive yourself for the pride and arrogance

that drove you to actions that caused such pain and agony?

What *good* could you expect to come your way after *that*?

How deeply Paul must have regretted the pain he caused.

How do you let go of *that*?

Do you have regrets?

Have your actions deeply wounded another person?

Do you feel like your sitting in a barren desert chastising yourself for your failures?

Like you and me, Paul had to let that go.

But that's not all that Paul had to let go of in order to move forward.

This is a man who had suffered severe abuse after becoming Paul,
the servant of Jesus Christ.

He was beaten 5 times,
a Roman beating of 40 lashes.

Add to that he was beaten 3 times with rods.

That's excessive cruelty.

That was systemic cruelty and injustice.

Since it doesn't make sense to hate the soldier who was just doing his job.

So, I guess you'd have to hate Rome.

. . . hate the empire.

. . . hate the whole unjust, cruel, sick system that's allowing this to happen.

It's really hard and confusing to hate a system, an institution,

because you don't really know *where* to lay the blame or *who* to fight.

It's just this big, awful force of evil, and it hurts you and it hurts people you love.

Have you ever hated an institution?

Have you ever hated systemic injustice?

Have you ever hated the church?

Has it ever consumed you?

Has this negativity ever drained all your positivity?

Has this anger at the nebulous enemy ever drained all your joy?

Paul was human, just like you and me.

At some point, Paul would have struggled with all these same feelings.

At some point, Paul had to make a choice.

He had to choose to let this anger go and move forward.

But that's not all.

What else might he have had to let go?

How about abject indifference?

Did you know that Paul was stoned (and not recreationally)
and *left* for dead.

People stoned him and then just walked away,

not caring enough to check if they had even finished the job.

They just walked away as if they had thrown out the garbage

and now had to get on about the important things in life.

Have you ever had someone hurt you deeply, and not even really seem to care?
You weren't even significant enough to arouse their compassion?
It's as if you don't matter, as if you're unworthy of their time and attention?

At some point, Paul had to decide if "*they*" got to define his worth,
or if he was going to let that go so he could move forward.

Oh, but we're not done yet

Paul was shipwrecked 3 times.

OK, God has told you he wants you to go from point A to point B.

In obedience to *God*, you set out,

only your mode of transportation is shipwrecked in a storm,
and you're tossed into the terror of the violent sea.

What would you be saying to God about this time?

Don't you care that I'm perishing?

Are you wondering if God can be trusted?

Are you wondering if *you* can be trusted to hear God's instructions correctly?

Did I get something wrong?

This wasn't supposed to happen!

It's either: How did I get in this mess?!

Why did God let me get in this mess?!

You're probably thinking of packing it in cause this life is too fraught
with the unpredictable danger and pain?

I expected protection and success at every turn!

After all, I'm doing *your* work, Lord!

You're supposed to do your part and protect me from all harm!

Are you disillusioned? Or more than disillusioned . . .

Are you downright mad at God?

At some point, Paul had to decide if he was still in, or if he was out.

At some point Paul had to let go of everything he couldn't understand.

He had to let go of his idealized version of life,

where God always protects us from pain

and creates for us the happy endings we have ordered.

What disillusionments, disappointments, moments of shaken faith, anger at God
do you have to let go of in order to move forward?

But it's one thing to find enemies out *there*, in the unjust system and the impersonal sea,
it's quite another when the enemy has a name.

In **2 Timothy 4:14-15** Paul tells Timothy
Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm.
The Lord will repay him for what he has done.

We're not sure exactly what Alexander did, but it's likely that early on
he appeared to have identified himself with the newly formed church,
but over time turned against the fledgling church for personal gain.

Apparently, the damage done wasn't just a minor setback.
Paul said it caused him a *great deal* of harm.

And this time the enemy has a *name*.
This time there's a specific target on whom to vent your anger.

Any Alexanders in your life?
Anyone whose actions have caused you and the ones you love a great deal of harm?

If so, then you and Paul are in the same boat.
I'm sure every one of us has been in this boat.
You both have a choice to hold on to that grudge,
or to let it go so that you can move forward.

But there's more.
It's one thing when the harm comes from someone
on the periphery of your life,
but what if the harm comes from one's friends.

Paul has arrived in Rome where he's imprisoned.
His hopes of continuing his missionary journeys come to a sudden halt.
Oh, he still had plans for the future.
We know from his letters that he hoped to go to Spain to spread the gospel.
I'm not done, Lord!

So why all these obstacles? Why can't I catch a break? (*Crutches, Lord? Really?*)

"But here I sit, relegated to writing letters."
Remember, Paul has no idea that on February 27, 2019,
a group of Jesus followers at New Beginnings, Edison, New Jersey,
will be reading what he wrote.

But back then?
It's had to be a low point.
It's times like this when you find out who your friends are.
Yet, Paul writes . . .

2 Timothy 4:16-17

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me.

Are you rehearsing everything you did for *them* when *they* were in need,
and now they can't show up for *you*?

What are you saying in your head to all those "*friends*"?
Forget you?
Something worse?
See if I show up for you when next time you need something!

But it gets even *worse* than neglect.
In Philippians 1 he tells us that some of the *Christians* were . . .

Preaching Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely,
supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.
There were other believers who wanted to make life *worse* for him!

But of course, they were sophisticated in our grudge holding, just as we learn to be.
We nobly claim to be forgiving people,
but our resentments sneak out in ever so subtly ways as we tell our stories.

Paul knew there were trying to stick it to him.

This business of life is really tough!
Have people let you down?
Has the government let you down?
Has the school system let you down?
Has the church let you down?
All that systemic injustice has let you down?

Have people with names and faces let you down?
Has your mother, father, brother, sister, husband wife, children let you down
done you great harm?

I'll venture a guess that your first instinct wasn't to say what Paul said.

In the very next sentence he penned . . .

May it not be held against them.

Or as in the case of those with selfish ambition,
But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from
false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

How could he be so . . . magnanimous in the face of betrayal?

How do you let it go?

Here's what Paul said,

The Lord stood at my side and gave me strength,
so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed
and all the Gentiles might hear it.

In all that bad, he chose to look for the good!

He chose to say NO to negativity, and YES to God who always gets the last word,
Who always works all things together for good.

Like Paul, you may not be able to change your circumstances,
but we can change your attitude.

You may have the same old job, but you can have a new mind.

You may have the same old disability, but I can have a new spirit.

Here's three words to watch out for. . .

I'll let go and move forward "as soon as" . . .

- As soon as I have become a better person that others are proud of.
- As soon as justice is served.
- As soon as I know that God's going to do a better job of protecting me.
- As soon as my family realizes how much they have hurt me.
- As soon as he or she apologizes to me . . .
(in sackcloth and ashes would be fine)

As soon as you hear the words, "as soon as",
hold up a big red flag that says, "I'M STUCK!"

And then consider:

Jesus forgave Saul *before* he had proved himself as Paul.

Paul kept moving forward without any guarantees
that he'd get no more beating and no more shipwrecks.

Paul kept moving forward although there wasn't an inkling of evidence
that the systematic injustice of the Roman empire was coming down.

Paul kept moving forward while Alexander was still determined
to undermine his work.

Paul kept moving forward even before his friends realized
what awful fair-weather friends they were
and came forward with a heart-felt apology.

Paul didn't wait for everything to right itself.
He just let it go, and moved forward,
entrusting the whole convoluted mess to the Lord.

So, ready or not, it's time to:

TO LET GO TO MOVE FORWARD