

Goals for the New Year

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again. We can be turning to Philippians chapter 3. We're going to be spending most of our time there this morning. Between verses 13 and verse 14, we will be looking at other scriptures as well today.

The last year has passed. We are in the last day of 2017, and tomorrow will be the beginning of a brand new year. It's time to take inventory as we normally do at the end of each year, taking inventory, preparing for the future.

Time to be setting goals. Some people call them New Year's resolutions. I prefer the term goals because I believe we all need to be goal-oriented.

I heard something on the radio this past week that said a significant number of people had kept at least one of their New Year's goals or New Year's resolutions from last year.

Well, that's good to know. I hope it was a good goal that they had. So as we begin thinking this morning about 2018, we will be looking at three goals that I believe would be good goals that you may add to whatever it is that you are setting for yourself in this coming year.

[1 : 21] And we're going to be looking at what the Apostle Paul would teach us from his own letter to the Philippians as he is helping them to have a future orientation about how they will be living the Christian life.

Paul, in his letter to the Philippian believers, talks about how they are to live, talks about how they are to use Paul and Timothy as their example for the Christian life.

And then Paul talks about his own past, how he views himself and what he is looking forward to. We will have seen these lessons from a great Christian and learn from a man who has influenced millions, millions and millions of people wrote the most of the New Testament.

So let's begin this morning in verse 13. Philippians chapter number 3, where the Apostle Paul continues what he has begun in chapter 3.

Chapter 3 begins with the word finally. He has been setting the stage for what he has been teaching them. These Judaizers have come in and tried to add works to the Christian life.

[2 : 41] And he says finally in chapter number 3, rejoice in the Lord. He said it's not difficult or it's for me to write the same things to you is not tedious.

But he says for you it's safe, it is necessary. And Paul up to verse 13 talks about if anybody can have confidence in the flesh, it is me.

He talks about his, he was circumcised the eighth day. He was a Jew of the Jews. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He had a great pedigree. And he goes on and on and on.

Verse 8, he comes to the conclusion that he says, all these things that were gained to me, he says I count as loss. As a matter of fact, the last time we were there a few weeks ago in Philippians chapter 3, Paul says, I consider all these awesome things that people look at me and say, oh Paul, you're awesome.

He says I count them as dung. I count them as worthless for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. So he comes to verse 13 and says, brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended.

[3 : 55] But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, he says I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Now the apostle Paul was a spiritual giant in the eyes of these Philippian believers. But Paul wanted them to understand something. He wanted these people who were holding him in such a high estimation, he wanted them to understand that he himself hadn't even reached the goals that he had stated in verse number 10.

He says I haven't apprehended. I haven't reached the pinnacle. I haven't gone to the point. I haven't been to the point where I'm perfect.

I still have room to grow. Now Paul's salvation experience had taken place about 30 years before he writes this letter. So Paul had lived a long Christian life.

Paul had been through many trials. Paul had been through many hardships. He had been through many spiritual battles. And Paul had held many, many victories along his Christian life in the past 30 years before he writes this letter.

[5 : 14] But he wanted his readers to understand that the Christian life is a continual process. Learning, continual process of growing and progressive sanctification.

The Christian life is not a static reality. We learn and we grow. It is a daily endeavor. Daily becoming more and more like Christ. Daily learning to trust him and to walk after him.

And to allow the Holy Spirit to be controlling us. Paul had many more spiritual heights to climb. Paul realized that he still had many things to learn.

So as we look at verses 13 and 14, we'll look at Paul's focus. Look at what Paul's focus was concerning his regrets, concerning the race, and concerning the reward in the Christian life.

Now Paul obviously was satisfied with Jesus Christ. We know that. Through all of his writings, Jesus Christ was sufficient. Jesus Christ is enough. We don't need works.

[6 : 24] We don't need anything else to add to the Christian life. So Jesus Christ is sufficient. Paul was satisfied with Jesus Christ. But what we see throughout Paul's writings was he wasn't satisfied with his Christian life.

He had room to grow. He had a holy dissatisfaction with the way things were in his life. He said, I might be okay today, but I still have room to grow.

I am still far from being like Jesus Christ. So as we think about it, a sanctified dissatisfaction is the first essential in the progress of running the Christian race.

We can't be resting on our laurels. I remember back a few years ago, late 80s, early 90s, when I was a sales manager in Birmingham. I had a number of salespeople that performed very, very well. But I had one particular salesperson that was a great salesperson and always led everybody else in sales. The problem was, and I hounded this salesperson every single month.

[7 : 40] And she must have thought that I had it in for her. Her problem was, she was so much better of a salesperson than she ever performed.

Because what she did was, as long as she looked and saw that her sales were ahead of everybody else's, she kind of coasted the rest of the month. And she did only what she had to do.

And she would come in late. She would take days off. And she would, she performed. But what she was doing was, she was comparing herself with everyone else. She was not comparing herself with herself and her potential.

And so I think what the Apostle Paul is doing in Philippians is, Paul says, I'm not comparing myself with anybody else. I'm comparing myself with myself, meaning I know I can do better.

And he was comparing himself with Jesus Christ. That's the one that we need to be concerned about. What does Jesus want in my life? So as we look and see these, and ask ourselves these three questions, what are we thinking about?

[8 : 45] What are we doing with our regrets? What are we doing with the Christian race? And what are we doing concerning the rewards that will be ours one day? So let's see what Paul thinks about these three things as we consider this brand new year and see what it's going to bring as it begins tomorrow.

So the first thing is, the first question is, what should we do about regrets? We see that in verse number 13. Let's listen to Paul's own words.

What about our regrets? Paul says, I do not count myself to have apprehended brethren. He says, but one thing I do. What does he say? Forget.

Forget. Forget what's behind. Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. So he starts off by saying, how do we deal with the regrets of the past?

How do we deal with our past failures? How do we deal with our past regrets? And the thing is, we all have regrets. We've all made mistakes. We've all sinned.

[9 : 53] We've all maybe said things that we regretted saying. We've all done things that we regretted doing. Decisions we made that we wish we could go back and redo.

And have a do-over, as some say. We all have those. We would love to have a replay. You know, just like they do on the NFL.

Instant replay. Well, we would love to be able to have an instant replay and be able to go back and redo it over. But there's no replays. The past is the past.

So, how do we deal with last year's blunders? How do we deal with last year's mistakes? Last year's sin? Where we might have found ourselves maybe becoming a slave to?

Well, the first thing I believe, and even the Apostle Paul says this later, is, or John says it rather, confess our sins.

[10:52] If we look back and say, I have sinned. I messed up. I made a mistake. I made a very, very poor decision.

The first thing we do is own up to it. Confess it. And say, you know what? I did wrong. If we confess our sins.

He is faithful. God is faithful. And He's justified in forgiving our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Leave our past failures with the Lord.

Leave our past regrets with Him. What's past is past. We can't go back and undo it. We might rue the past. We might say, you know what? I really hate doing that I did what I did.

But like Paul, forget. Forget those things which are behind. As for 2018, let's make 2018 a year of relationships.

[11:52] You know, we're beginning our Family Fusion initiative where we're trying to bring everyone together beyond Sunday mornings and help us to know one another.

Help us to understand how each other, how we tick, how we can pray for one another, how we can better know each other and for deepened relationships within our faith family.

I believe one of our shortcomings is we really don't know one another. There are some that, and I hear this from time to time, we talk about someone and someone will say, who's that?

Well, they've only been attending here for the past eight months, and we don't even know their name. Well, we need to change that. We need to figure out how we can get to know one another. So let's change that this year. The sign-up sheet is in the back. We have a number of signatures already, a number of names, and that's awesome. If you haven't done it yet, please do so.

[12:55] You don't necessarily have to host a get-together, but maybe you're willing to go and to get to know another family, maybe in their home. That's fine, and there's a spot for that on the sign-up sheet as well.

So let's do that today and start the journey. What about if you're saying, you know what, I have some relationships that are strained. It might be family relationships.

It might be friend relationships. It might be neighbor relationships. And I have, if that's the case, I have a maxim for you.

And here it is. You may want to write this down. It's very, very, very, very important. And it is this. If you did something to someone, apologize.

If they did something to you, forgive. That's pretty simple, right? Now, it may be difficult to do. But in reality, it is very, very simple.

[14:00] I think if we held to that maxim and lived that out every day of next year, I believe it would help our relationships. If you did something to someone, confess it.

But apologize to them. If they did something to you, forgive. So what does that leave room for? Nothing.

So it would really repair any relationship. Now, it's going to depend on the other person if they're willing to forgive you. But as the Apostle Paul says, we just simply do our best to live at peace with all men and women and boys and girls.

So all we do is we apologize. We confess. I apologize for doing this to you. I apologize for making you feel this way.

I apologize for saying this. I apologize for. Don't make excuses. I apologize. And then if someone did something to you or said something and hurt you and they won't apologize, the answer is forgive.

[15:18] And then go to them and try to mend the relationship. So here, it's very, very, very simple for 2018. If you did something to someone else, go apologize.

If they did something to you, forgive. And as we've said in the past, I know this sounds kind of trite, but build a bridge and get over it.

Just build a bridge and get over it because life is too short. Relationships are too important. To allow something to stand between us. So let's take that to heart.

Also, as what Paul is saying, he says that we forget those things which are behind and we reach forward to those things which are before. I believe the believer, the follower of Jesus Christ, should be future oriented.

We should be future oriented. You know, it's difficult for some people to think about there being the possibility of a better future.

[16 : 21] Just last night, I dealt with someone. They were suicidal. They ended up taking their own life by the time we got there.

And I was dealing with the family for a period of time thereafter. Had medical issues. Had relationship issues. But had gotten to the point where they lost any, what we call future orientation. They could not think of a better future. They got to the point where they felt that this was their best and it was painful. And they couldn't see it getting better.

So they had lost a future orientation. But for a follower of Christ, I believe it's important that we think about no matter how bad, no matter how ugly it is, no matter how difficult today is, no matter how painful today is, tomorrow can be better.

Will tomorrow be better? I don't know. But with God, it can be. And so as we trust him, it's something that we have to keep in mind that miracles still happen.

[17 : 26] God still can perform miracles. Now when Paul says, now here's something else that's important. Because people ask, well how can I do that? Forgetting those things which are behind.

Keep in mind, in Bible terminology, when the Bible says to forget something, when God says he forgets something, it's not a mental gymnastics that we're expected to do.

And it doesn't mean fail to remember. Apart from senility, hypnosis, or brain damage, that's pretty well physically impossible for us to just not remember something.

But what the Bible means when it says to forget something, it means to no longer be influenced or affected by. When we forget something and put it in the past, as the Bible teaches us, it doesn't mean we can never remember it.

Because that's a human impossibility. It means that we don't allow it to influence us any longer. We no longer are affected by that negatively.

[18 : 33] Because when it comes up, we say it's under the blood, God's taking care of it, and I don't have to allow it to influence me. Same way with relationships. We hurt each other.

But often what happens when someone, when we see someone, or they do something and reminds us of a past hurt, what happens to us?

We think back, we see on it, and we then begin to hold that against them, either again or continue to. The problem is, when Paul says forgetting what's in the past, it's difficult for us to do.

But if we just say, God, you've taken care of it, and I don't have to worry about it, it doesn't have to influence my future relationship with this individual. It doesn't have to influence my life.

Because what happens very often, what people will do, and it's the same with a diet when we're trying to lose weight. It's the same way with trying to gain mastery over a certain skill.

[19 : 34] If we fail just a little bit, we tell ourselves, well, what's the use? I'm a failure, so I might as well quit, or I might as well go back to what I was doing before.

Instead of saying, you know what, this is a failure, this is a minor setback, but I'm going to look at the future, and I'm not going to let the past affect me.

So Paul says forgetting the past. So, our first goal. What's our first goal for 2018? This is on your connection card. Your first goal, our first goal, I believe, for 2018, according to what the Apostle Paul is teaching the Philippians, and I believe teaching us this morning, is this.

Forget the past. Don't let the past influence your future. Don't be affected by your past, because God can change your future.

So the first thing is, forget the past. The second thing, second question that we are presented with, with the Apostle Paul is, so now how do we run life's race?

[20 : 38] Because Paul is talking about that. Paul uses certain analogies. Paul uses certain metaphors in his writings. Three in particular that he uses over and over again.

The first is the military. He says, we are in a battle. Now, we are fighting in this Christian life, fighting against Satan.

And he also uses agricultural terms. What do we sow? We'll reap. He uses agricultural quite a bit. And then he uses the metaphor of athletics.

He uses boxing. He uses running. He uses a number of these analogies. And in today's analogy, he uses that of an athlete.

So what Paul is talking about when he is dealing with these Philippian believers, he says, now guys, remember, I'm not perfect. I haven't fully apprehended that for which Christ has apprehended me.

[21 : 41] I've got a ways to go. I still have room to grow. So I assess my Christian life. I'm not perfect. I'm not there yet. I still need to grow.

So I can't have an attitude that says, you know what? I'm better than you are because, you know, we may be better morally than someone else, but there's going to be someone else who's better morally than we are. And it's a continuum.

So Paul says, forget what's in the past. How do we run life's race? That's verses 13 and 14. Let's look back at verse number 13.

He says, brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended. Back in verse number 10, he says, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable to his death.

Paul says, I haven't gotten there completely. But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, he says, and here is his sports analogy, his sports metaphor.

[22 : 51] He says, I press toward the goal. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, reaching forth to those things which are before.

Paul approached his future with anticipation and with faith. Paul's tomorrows were something that he reached for.

Paul's future was something that he says, I can be, I want to be more like Jesus and I'm reaching forward to that day and I am pressing toward the day when I go home to be with Jesus Christ.

That's what he was running for. That's what he was working for. He was eager to see what he could achieve for Christ. Because in Paul's estimation, he hadn't achieved enough yet.

He hadn't accomplished enough for Jesus yet. It's like, you know what? I still have a long to-do list. There are still things that I need to do. There are still people that need to be reached with the gospel.

[23 : 55] There are still people groups that I haven't gotten to yet. And so the Apostle Paul was looking forward with anticipation. Here, as we think about this, as we enter 2018, here's the reality.

We're all either problem conscious or possibility conscious. Think about it. We're in two camps.

We're two groups. We're either problem conscious.

What's going to happen next? What's wrong with today? And how could it be better? Or we could be possibility conscious. We could either be glass half full or glass half empty kind of people.

I believe the Apostle Paul tended to be a glass half empty guy, but through the Holy Spirit's work in his life, he was possibility conscious.

Because his life as a Pharisee, think about it, his life as a Pharisee was looking to point out what was wrong with life and what was wrong with people's lives. So I believe the Apostle Paul, in his pre-Jesus life, will look at, nitpick at the little things.

[25 : 13] And once Jesus, once the Holy Spirit came into his life, I believe the Apostle Paul said, you know what? All things are possible. And he was looking to see what God could accomplish next.

We approach every day either expecting the best or expecting the worst. Now think about this. How does the Christian life begin? The Christian life begins by faith.

The Christian life begins by faith. Verse 5 of Romans 1. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So how were we made right with God? By faith. By faith in Christ. So our life begins with faith, but then we see, in Romans 1, verse 17, just a few chapters prior to that, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from what?

From faith to faith, the just shall live by faith. So how do we live every day? Wake up every morning and by faith, trust God that it's going to have a lot of possibilities.

[26 : 24] So we begin to live a possibility conscious life. So what's our second goal for 2018? The first goal is forget the past.

The second goal is live by faith. In 2018, let's live by faith. And here's the thing, as I expand it, don't let fear rob you of God's best for you.

Live by faith and don't let fear, fear of failure, fear of what somebody might think, fear of what something might, of anything that might happen.

Live in faith, live by faith, and don't let fear rob you of God's best for you in 2018. And thirdly, why should our goal be eternal rewards?

Why should we be future focused? And we see this, as the Apostle Paul says in verse 14. Back to verse 14. Paul says, I press. What does he press toward?

[27 : 34] He presses toward the goal for the what? Prize. For the prize. We talked about that a few Sundays ago. That the whole purpose of our salvation is heaven.

The whole purpose of our salvation is God wanting to spend eternity with us in His presence. And so, Paul says, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

And here we have, Paul gives them the analogy of a foot race. Have you ever seen those in a race near the tape on the finish line? How do they finish?

And how are they running? Do they run looking behind? What happens to runners who look behind? They lose because those end up catching up with them because it's hard to run when you're looking behind.

Paul also uses that as an agricultural analogy. He says, nobody ever takes his hand to the plow and looks back. What's going to happen? Your furrows are going to be, they won't be straight.

[28 : 43] And he also uses that same analogy in a foot race. Forget what's in the past. Forget about those people who are behind in the sense of, you know what, I can't compare myself to them.

I've got to look toward the prize of the upward calling, the goal. And so, how does a runner run the race, especially near the finish line where the tape is?

What do you see them do? Lean forward and push through and press as hard as they can toward the goal. Also, what do we see in a relay race?

You see one who is waiting for the baton and you see the one who is passing the baton. What do they do? Again, they lean forward. They press as hard and far as they can to hand that off.

So that's the analogy. That's the picture Paul is using. As we run the race, as we live our daily lives, are we future oriented? Or are we living for the present?

[29 : 45] You know, it will make a difference in our life if every decision we make is based upon our future in heaven.

How will this decision affect my relationship with Christ? How will this, even as we look at politics, as we look at finances, as we look at everything, if we live with a future orientation, how will this affect the future?

How will this affect my relationship with Christ? So Paul was determined to hold nothing back from the Lord. He was a fully surrendered man and he was consistent in his Christian walk.

Now one thing that we know when Christ comes back, he will have rewards for his servants. Verse 12 of Revelation chapter 22 says this, Eternal rewards are so much more valuable than any reward that this life could give to us and bring to us.

So, what does all this mean for us? Let's forget those things that are behind. Forget yesterday's failures and let's look toward the future.

[31 : 14] Reach toward those things that are before. See, the future is fantastic for believers. This future on earth may not be all that great because there may be pain, there may be rejection, but our future reward, our future rewards are out of this world.

Literally and figuratively. We have so much to wait for. And think about this, the best is yet to come. It's like the old saying, keep your fork because the best is yet to come.

Our dessert, so to speak, will be, we'll be able to enjoy that for eternity. As we close with this, 1 Corinthians 2, 9.

But as it is written, I have not seen nor ear heard nor have entered into the heart of man. Here's this. The things which God has prepared for those who love Him. You think we've got it? Great. God's got so much planned. We haven't seen it yet.

[32 : 29] We haven't heard of just a small portion of it. And neither has it even entered into our imagination the things God's prepared for us.

So truly, the best is yet to come. Let's live with a future orientation. That's our third goal. So, our three goals.

Number one, forget the past. Number two, live by faith. And don't let fear keep you from experiencing God's best for you.

And then number three, live with a future orientation. Live for the future. Forget the past. Don't live solely for the present.

But live with a future orientation. Let us pray. Lord God, this morning, as we have learned from the Apostle Paul, your servant, how to live the Christian life.

[33 : 25] Not allowing the past to influence us or affect us any longer. But, living our present by faith.

Not in fear, but in faith. Trusting you. And also, living for the future. Living, pressing forward for the goal of being ushered into eternity to spend with you forever.

Help us to make 2018 the best year ever as we serve you with a pure heart, a pure conscience, having confessed our sin, fully surrendered, devoted to you.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.