



# God's Word for Today

Sonja Hunt Ministries

Teaching Letter 35

## Forgetting and Remembering

*“. . .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 3:13-14).*

**I**n today’s Scripture Paul was referring to the many things he had valued in his life before he came to Christ. For Paul, and for us as well, our lives change focus when we meet and receive Jesus. The things we once may have boasted about—in the flesh—are not the things, Paul said, that truly matter anymore. For him it was Christ alone.

In the earlier verses of Philippians 3 Paul listed numerous things he had and still could boast about. His list was impressive. These were what Paul had once depended on for his self-worth, esteem, and position. When Paul accepted Jesus, he no longer depended on accomplishments and prestige—nor anything of this world—as the source of his self-worth. He decided to pursue one great thing. His life goal became to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” This required “forgetting those things which are behind.”

**W**hat did Paul mean—“forgetting”? Can we truly forget the past? Well, Paul was recommending it, and he’s a great example to follow. When Paul identified himself as a follower of Christ, he immediately “suffered the loss of all things” (Philippians 3:8). Paul lost everything “for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (v. 8). And he sounds so glad about it! He’s not bemoaning his decision nor throwing a pity party. The tone of this entire passage on loss and forgetting all the things he once valued is one of celebration and joy. Knowing Christ and following Him in His calling on our lives is more than worth any and every loss.

“Forgetting” for Paul was a process. He did not say, “I have forgotten.” He said “forgetting,” which shows continuous or repeated action (*The Complete Word Study New Testament* by Spiros Zodhiates). When the things Paul had lost came to mind, he would “forget” them again. Rather than dwelling on them, he let them go each time he thought of them. In Philippians 3, he allowed himself to reminisce briefly, but for the purpose of making his point to his readers. He didn’t say his past was totally erased from his mind, but he wanted to help us and the Philippians to know we must forget the past over and over again.

**I**f we try to carry our past—good or bad—into our future, it becomes a weight. Turning our thoughts too often, too much to the past will hinder our forward movement and growth. If we have suffered loss and we focus on it, we open ourselves to depression. Even focusing on past achievements too much can hinder future accomplishments. Camping out in the past causes us to lose focus on what we need to do today and could cause us to miss something great God has for us now.

Jesus gave an important warning about looking back. He said, “Remember Lot’s wife!” (Luke 17:32). She turned and looked back to Sodom, possibly thinking of what she was losing. Possibly she focused on the life she once lived instead of on God’s future for her and her family. She lost her life as a result.

**P**aul didn’t mention it here, but he also had some ugly things in his past to forget. Before accepting Christ, Paul had hunted down Christians

and had them imprisoned or killed. In the Book of Acts, Saul (he was called Saul before His conversion) is part of the scene in which Stephen was stoned to death (see Acts 7:58ff). In 1 Timothy 1:12, 15, Paul wrote he had been a blasphemer and a persecutor and was the chief of all sinners. He thanked God for forgiving him; then he put those things in the past as well.

One important thing to remember about the past is that it is over. If a hurtful, painful past is still alive in our minds and hearts, there are several things we need to do about it. Forgiving ourselves and others is a major first step in the process of leaving a negative past behind. This too will usually be a process. There have been times I thought I had completely forgiven someone, only to have anger appear unexpectedly when I encountered that person again. That meant I needed to forgive some more and possibly deal with resentment and bitterness too.

**D**eep wounds to the soul and spirit can become submerged in our innermost parts when they have not been surrendered to the Great Physician for healing. This is another way our past remains present with us, causing dysfunction, pain and struggle. Jesus has a treatment plan that includes the forgiveness already mentioned, letting go (the process of forgetting), reminding ourselves over and over that the past is over, and maybe receiving healing and/or deliverance prayer. Other helps include Christian counseling, the support of a community of wise, positive friends and involvement in a faith community. We also must stop saying, “I can forgive, but I can’t forget!”

As we move forward, we want to remember any positives about our heritage and the good we experienced in the midst of our trouble. We want to remember the people and the events that encourage us when we think about them and that help propel us toward the future God has planned.

**P**aul wrote that God is able to take negatives and bring something positive out of them (Romans 8:28). That’s what God did for Joseph whose brothers first planned to kill him, because of their jealousy, but then decided to sell him as a slave to Egyptian traders. Years later—after much suffering and difficulty—when he faced his brothers, Joseph was able to tell them, “. . . you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20 NKJ).

When God at last brought Joseph out of prison and placed him as second in command in Egypt, Joseph could view the hurtful events of his past differently. It was not God’s intent that Joseph’s past keep him from the good future God had for him. We also know that God helped Joseph let go of the past by “forgetting.” We read in Genesis 41: “And to Joseph were born two sons. . . . Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. ‘For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father’s house.’ And the name of the second he called Ephraim: ‘For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction’ (vs. 50-52). Because Joseph could focus on the good and not the loss or evil he had experienced, he was ready for the future God had planned.

**G**od has a good future planned for each of us. We must be able to do as Joseph did so God can make us “fruitful in the land of [our] affliction.” While the full memory of the events we have suffered may not be erased, we can choose to have a different attitude toward them. We can also ask God to take any negative effects that may linger. We must resist the temptation to let our minds dwell on negatives, past or present.

Though all our life experiences surely do shape us, they do not have to misshape us. God said: “Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” (Isaiah 43:18-19 NKJ). Amen!

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www.sonjahuntministries.com

PO Box 21 Cleveland, TN 37364-0021