

Sunday, December 27, 2020 am

REACHING FORWARD - 2021

Philippians 3:13-14, *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* This text is a mantra that needs to continually be on our minds as we seek to grow as Christians. And what better time to think about this than right now?

This past year has been very different in so many different ways. At the forefront has been the Covid-19 pandemic that has altered everything in our lives in one way or another. It has certainly altered our spiritual activities though I hope in some way for the better. But I am fearful that for many it has actually weakened their faith and standing with God.

I don't know about you, but I know that I am ready to say goodbye to 2020. And while the beginning of 2021 will not bring overnight change in many areas, there is hope for a better year and at least a degree of return to normalcy. It is my prayer that these vaccines will be effective in stopping the spread of this terrible disease. BUT, an even greater hope that I have is that somehow this will bring this world and our nation a little closer to God in some way. But with everything going on as it is, we have a lot of work to do for that to happen.

With the end of 2020, I hope our vision is a little better. And in this lesson, I would like to remind us about the importance of examination and making resolutions. I know that I do this quite often, but it is an exercise worthy of repetition, and I believe especially relevant this year.

I. Planning is Biblical

- a. What are resolutions? Real resolutions are plans one makes that are designed to improve your life. Most resolutions are directed toward physical things. But what about spiritual resolutions. WHEN and if you make resolutions, is improving your relationship with God included?
- b. God planned – while the word “resolution” is not used in scripture (in that form – because “resolve” is – Luke 16:4, Romans 14:13, etc.).
God made plans – and of course He accomplished them. Romans 8:28 tells us that all things work together for good to those who love God...according to His purpose.
Ephesians 3:9-11 tells us that the church was part of His eternal purpose.
- c. Looking to that example alone, we learn that it is good to make plans and resolutions.
James 4:13-17 makes a good point about this – when you make plans, do NOT leave God out of them. Instead, let it be, “If the Lord wills...”

II. Where am I?

- a. It begins with examination - 2 Corinthians 13:5.
Before you can resolve to make changes, you must first KNOW that you need to make changes.
- b. Consider our text – Philippians 3:13-14

- i. **Realization that I am not there yet** – Paul, with all his faith and work, as he writes this letter (likely from prison in Rome – meaning it was written after he completed his 3rd preaching mission), even he realizes he has more to do, areas where he can improve.

I believe it would be safe to say that everyone here, with honest examination, will admit there are some things we need to change spiritually. Some areas that we need to make improvement in. Well now is the time! Romans 13:11 tells us that *now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.*

- ii. **Forgetting those things that are behind** – this is another crucial element to being successful in keeping our resolutions.

Someone may look at their life and see utter failure – and it may be true (but not always – we sometimes judge ourselves harsher than we should). BUT that is no excuse to give up or think you cannot make yourself right with God. You can!

If you have sin in your life – repent of it – Acts 8:22, 1 John 1:9 – and start where you are right now. You cannot out forgive God. He does NOT want you to perish – 2 Peter 3:9 but to come to repentance.

AND when you repent, FORGIVE YOURSELF and move forward.

- iii. **Reaching forward to the things that are ahead...** this explains the next step.

IF you have determined you need to make changes, where you begin? The answer is – RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE!

That is idea of reaching forward. The point is – DO NOT stand still, and DO NOT go backwards. He the warning of Hebrews 10:38-39 – a passage calling for endurance (don't give up) - *Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*

- iv. **I press** – this is a word that means to actively pursue something. Interestingly, the Greek word here (διώκω, diōkō) is often translated “persecute” which helps us understand the intensity of the word.

With this I think of a football team where after the snap, the front line does 2 things – 1) they try and stop the opponents from advancing and 2) they keep pushing forward, inch by inch so that the ball moves in the right direction.

Paul is energetically working to reach that goal. He is determined to make it and is willing to do whatever he needs to do to gain it.

III. Am I reaching forward?

- a. Are there things I need to stop?

- i. Hebrews 12:1 calls for us to lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us.

Ephesians 4:22 calls for us to put off concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to deceitful lusts.

Colossians 3:8 is more straight forward, *But now you yourselves are to put off all*

*these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have **put off** the old man with his deeds,*

- ii. Are there some things in my life that keep trying to hang on?
 1. Are there sins we are struggling with?
 2. Maybe it is a bad attitude such as anger or bitterness.
 3. Maybe it is some lustful thoughts or actions.
 4. Maybe it is a mismanagement of my time and resources - I waste too much time on worthless or worth-LESS activities (not necessarily wrong).
 5. Maybe I need to stop overlooking sin in my life and acting as if it is no big deal (to God every sin is a big deal).
 6. Maybe I need to stop comparing myself to others – 2 Corinthians 10:12
- iii. 1 Corinthians 15:34 says, “Awake to righteousness, and do not sin. The NASB says, “...and stop sinning” (It is a negative present tense verb).
- b. Are there things I need to start?
 - i. When we stand before God in judgment, He is not only going to consider what we did wrong, but also what we did not do right. When we fail to obey His commands we are just as wrong as when we do what we should not. Must not forget that obedience is a two-way street.
 - ii. Luke 6:46, Why call Me Lord and do not the things that I say? Obedience is emphasized greatly in scripture.
 - iii. In Matthew 12:43-45 Jesus tells the parable of an unclean spirit that is cast out of a man and seeks a place of rest but finds none. So he returns and finds the “host” he left empty so he returns and brings with him 7 more unclean spirits, more wicked than himself. And thus the latter end is worse than the beginning. So it is when we purge sinful conduct from our life and do not replace it with something good.
 - iv. As I examine my life are there things I need to start?
 1. First, have I obeyed the gospel? You have to begin a walk with God if you are to finish with Him. Galatians 3:27.
“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.” Romans 13:14
 2. Do I read and study my Bible and pray regularly? If not, I need to set aside a time on a daily basis to do this. It is a crucial element to growth.
 3. Am I doing anything to try and win other souls to Him?
 4. Do I need to start doing more to help build up the local church here?
 5. Do I need to make the Kingdom of God FIRST in my life? (Matthew 6:33)
 - v. James 4:17 – to him who knows to do good and does not do it...
- c. Are there things I need to improve?
 - i. For most of us, this is where we can improve the most. For most who are trying to live the Christian life, they are doing most of the things they need to do, at least to some degree – we attend services, we read our Bibles a little and pray a little, we are not caught up in the “big sins” as we define them. But deep down we know there is room for improvement.
 - ii. 2 Peter 3:18 – we are called upon to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord

- iii. As an example, consider 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 where Paul commends the brethren for their brotherly love. But then he said, *“But we urge you, brethren, that you Increase more and more”*. There is always room to improve and that is what God wants us to do.
- iv. God wants us to:
 - 1. Increase in knowledge – we receive the implanted word that we grow thereby (1 Peter 2:2). And add to this increased wisdom – or applied knowledge. And there is only one way to do this – you have to study and learn (cf. 2 Timothy 2:15)
 - 2. Improve in my “prayer life” – how often and how I pray. Again, like study, there is only 1 way to improve in this – by doing it.
There are all sorts of books that can help you understand prayer, but until you do it you will not improve.
 - 3. Increase in good works – Ephesians 2:10 tells us we were created for good works.
 - 4. Improve my functionality within the local church – can and SHOULD I be doing more for the local work? Am I doing my part (Ephesians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 12:27 says, “You are the body of Christ, and members individually.” And this comes at the conclusion of describing what that body looks like with its various parts. Are you functioning within the body properly.
 - 5. Improve as I worship God with my brethren – whether I am leading the congregation, or just participating. We know from His word that worship involves both action and attitude. Our heart needs to be right. Do we need to improve in this?
 - 6. Care more and more about others. After all the 2nd greatest commandment is to love my neighbor as myself. This includes personal evangelism.

And thus we are reminded of our need to reach forward in 2021. As we noted at the beginning, 2020 has been a challenging year for all of us. And we are not going to wake up Friday and everything has suddenly changed for the better. BUT, in your personal life (and in mine), we CAN resolve that no matter what happens in the world in 2021, we are going to do what we can to make our lives a little better. Think about it.