



September 13, 2020 - Philippians 3:12-14

OPEN

There is a forlorn feeling to the poem “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost.

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Do you think about the road not taken? Or do you wonder about the road ahead? Our passage today speaks to looking back. It also challenges us to reach forward, whether we are talking about an individual believer or an entire congregation.

DIG

God wants to do a transformative work in us. He wants to lead us forward on the road of spiritual growth and victory. However, believers can get comfy!

God’s goal of transformation also translates into His Kingdom work being accomplished through us. For this to happen, there must be some reconfiguring and reconstruction!

In his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul challenged them from his own “road less traveled”. Paul’s passion was to be fully and completely identified with the *righteous* and *resurrected* life of Jesus – see **Philippians 3:9-11**.

In our main text for today, Paul confessed this was not yet a done deal. He was on the way, to be sure. But he helps us see that it foolish to presume that we are already all that Jesus has called us to be. Read Paul’s confession in **Philippians 3:12-14**. There are two essential actions in this passage which lead to a life of spiritual transformation and progression.

ONE: The fine art of letting go

We all must learn to let go. Presently we are in the process of releasing summer and accepting the coming fall season. Paul speaks profoundly of letting go in this passage. What is the language he used to convey his awareness that he was “in process” – that “God was not finished with him yet”?

- “not that I have already obtained all this” - verse 12
- “or have already arrived at my goal” - verse 12
- “do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it” - verse 13
- “forgetting what is behind” - verse 13 - “forgetting”

As Robert Frost has conveyed by his poem, we are all shaped by our personal histories. We cling to the past, both the good and bad, wondering what “might have been”! If you look at Philippians 3:4-8 you can see Paul’s list of personal credentials. These include race, education, ritual purity, and more. But he chose not to rely upon these things – see **verses 7-8**.

Tim Keller has deftly observed, “An idol is a good thing made into an ultimate thing.” (**Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Plan for the World**, Viking, 2012) This is why letting go is a “fine art”.

Of course, a painful background can result in bitterness and spiritual stagnation. But even a great spiritual heritage can limit future growth. Just think of how many times a New Testament sermon reviewed the redemptive history of Israel. For us, the saints who have gone before us – whether biblical, historical, personal – instruct and inspire.

Those times of spiritual growth and consecration in our past have set a significant course. But we must not make idols of these! Instead, we must embrace the fact that we are in a process of growth (see Philippians 1:6). Is there something about which God has been saying “let it go?”

TWO: The fine line of reaching forward

According to mathematicians, there is a fine line between a numerator and a denominator! And there is a fine line involved in the spiritual work of reaching forward. Progressing in spiritual maturity is in stark contrast to hanging onto the past. What is the language of reaching forward?

- “I press on” - verse 12
- “straining toward” - verse 13
- “I press on toward the goal” - verse 14

There is both intensity and intentionality to this process. But we must also be cautious to approach it with the correct perspective. The fine line means that there must be a willing heart – yet God alone can accomplish change in our lives.

In *The Prayer of Jabez* (Multnomah, 2000, 40-41), Bruce Wilkinson challenges Christians to seek God to expand their sphere of service for God – think “reaching forward”. Jabez’s prayer is in I Chronicles 4:10 in the midst of the chronicling of the clans of Israel. Wilkinson suggests two contrasting formulas when it comes to desiring a greater work of God *through* our lives.

Human math my abilities
+ experience
+ training
+ my personality and appearance
+ my past
+ the expectations of others
= my assigned territory

Divine math my willingness and weakness
+ God’s will and God’s supernatural power
= my expanding territory

Paul was aware of the danger of trying to “reach forward” based on his own credentials – that’s why he counted them as loss! Notice carefully in verse 12: “that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me”.

This means that God had “grasped” or “possessed” Paul for divine purposes. So, when Paul reached forward, it was God who was moving him! All of Paul’s objectives were rooted in the claim of ownership God had upon his life.

What is our objective? To what are we straining, empowered by God? Verse 14 tells us: “to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” – this is literally “the above calling”.

Is this our current or future experience. Perhaps Paul pictured a Greek runner being called from the stadium to the elevated judge’s stand for his prize? If so, this is our **eternal, future** reward. But comparing our “heavenly calling” (Hebrews 3:1) we see the prize as **temporal, present** salvation and service. Either way, God is eager to complete His work within believers.

REFLECT

- **Are you stuck in the past?**

Is there something God is asking you to let go?

For a very cool way of exploring Paul’s letting go exercise, check out a short Bible study with John Piper, [“Put No Confidence In the Flesh”](#).

- **Are you straining forward?**

Are you doing so based on your own accomplishments or based upon God’s ownership of your life?

All this talk of forgetting the past and reaching forward to the future can overwhelm us! However, that is not God’s way. He stretches and challenges us. But He pledges to be with us, providing His deep peace and power.

Need to be encouraged in this journey of letting go and reaching forward? Listen and reflect carefully on the words of [“He Will Hold Me Fast”](#)