
¹² Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own.

¹³ Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14 (NRSV)

If you were to describe your life as a 'journey', would you say you are 'getting somewhere'? And if you say you are 'getting somewhere', what is the 'where' that you are getting to? What are your goals and ambitions? What are you seeing to 'gain' in life?

Conversely, what are you seeking to 'lose' in life? 'Gains' and 'Losses'. This is what Paul is speaking about. And, as Christians, we realise and know that sometimes to 'lose something' is a 'gain', as also to 'gain something' can be a 'loss'.

Question: when is a 'loss' not a loss? Answer: when it is something you wanted to lose. Take, for example, 'losing weight'. When you try to 'lose weight', and one day you step on the scales to see you have lost a substantial amount, usually we think we have 'gained something'. Or it could be that you are battling some addictive behaviour, perhaps smoking or drinking too much alcohol. When you consume less (or none at all), it is often seen as a 'gain'. Or when there is a conflict in the world, and the aggressor seems to be too strong, but they do not win the territory they seek, or the hearts of others, this too can be seen as a gain.

There are times in our lives when we think we have 'lost something', and there are times when this is truly 'real', and truly heart-breaking: the death of a loved one; declining health; a break-down of a relationship; things happen outside of our control that mean we are no longer able to do what we wished we could do. A 'loss' is a 'loss', and it is real. But there are times in our lives where we do have to 'let go of things'.

Today's Bible passage (Philippians 3:4b-14) is very fitting, as we review and evaluate our successes and losses. Paul narrates his aspirations as a Christian. His life was centred on Christ: to know Christ, gain Christ, rejoice in him, be found in him, and be conformed to him. Paul was never tired or bored of thinking about Christ. His main passion was to know Christ more. This is the proper desire of every child of God. What is your main passion as a Christian? Are you excited about Christ? Are you confident that Christ is enough?

As the Apostle Paul is writing to his dear friends in the Congregation at Philippi, he says this (Philippians 3:7-8): *"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ."*

Speaking in financial terms, Paul radically re-evaluates his life. Whatever belonged to the profit column of a balance sheet (all privileges and accomplishments), he put into the loss column. What used to be a loss (the crucified Christ) becomes his gain infinitely. In verse 8a, Paul considers (the present tense) everything (all privileges as a Jew and all his hard work as a Christian) a loss. How did such a radical re-evaluation happen? Paul says, it's "because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

Here, Paul calls Jesus Christ "my Lord," glowing with the warmth of intimacy and devotion. Paul completely changed when he encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. He was intensely persecuting the church to destroy it. But the risen Christ visited this murderous enemy and said, "Why do you persecute Me?" (Ac 9:4) Then, the Lord gave him, instead of condemnation, forgiveness and calling as an apostle. Paul came to know the matchless grace and power of the risen Christ. Nothing can compete with knowing this Christ. Knowing Christ is not mere head knowledge about Him, but personally and intimately knowing Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, who loved us and gave His life for us.

Ever since that blinding experience on the road to Damascus, Paul's eyes of faith were opened, and he now realised that his spiritual ledger radically changed. All those things he took confidence in were actually to his disadvantage. They stood in the way of his having a right relationship with the Lord, and kept the gates of heaven shut up tight for him. They did not gain any righteousness for him but only led him away from the true righteousness in Christ. They were now all to his "loss." And so, Paul says this (Philippians 3:7-10: " *Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him... I want to know Christ[f] and the power of His resurrection and the sharing of His sufferings by becoming like Him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*"

From a biblical perspective the meaning of life is to find your destiny – to know God through Jesus. Without knowing our God-given purpose we can so easily become driven by destructive influences. Here are three of the most common which the apostle mentions that drive many people:

One: People are Driven by Guilt and Fear. This is what drove Paul as he sought to destroy Christians. He was afraid of the message of the 'risen Christ' and what it might do to what he saw as his 'faith'. 'Fear' and 'guilt' can be powerful 'motivators' (or 'de-motivators') in our lives.

Two: People are Driven by Anger and Resentment. Holding on to hurts is incredibly destructive. If we don't forgive and forget, we will remember and resent.

Forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel – it is the meaning of the cross of Jesus. In Hebrews 10:17 we are promised "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." It means He forgives our past as if it is forgotten. When Paul urges us to forget the past, he means that we are to break the power of the past by living for the future. We cannot change the past, but Jesus has changed the consequences of our past.

Three: People are Driven by Wealth and Materialism. The desire to acquire can so easily become a consuming passion. The drive to want more comes from the mistaken belief that 'more' will make me happier, more important, more secure. One Christians writer has said, "Self worth and net worth are not the same. Your value is not determined by your valuables.

Real security can only be found in that which can never be taken from you – your relationship with God." That is why Paul says (Philippians 3:7-8), *"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ."*

Knowing your purpose gives meaning to your life. The greatest tragedy is to live without a purpose. That really is a life sentence. We were made to have meaning. Paul's life had been transformed because the grace of Jesus had taken hold of him. This is why he is so emphatic "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering." (Philippians 3:10). Jesus had shown Paul love and forgiveness in friendship. Jesus had given Paul meaning and hope, a purpose for living. "Hope is as essential to life as air and water.

What is it that you might be counting in your plus column before God? If you're looking to your family history or your own religious accomplishments as the basis of, or even a contributing factor toward, your righteousness before God and your eternal salvation, then you're looking in the wrong place. Those supposed "plusses" then actually become a big minus. Our Lutheran Confessions make this very point when, in commenting on our passage from Philippians, the Formula of Concord states: "If anyone wants to drag good works into the article of justification, rest his righteousness or trust for salvation on them, and merit God's grace and be saved by them, St. Paul himself answers, not us. He says and repeats it three times—such a person's works are not only useless and a hindrance, but are also harmful. This is not the fault of the good works themselves, but of the false confidence placed in the works, contrary to God's clear Word."

The one big gain you have is Christ, knowing him and being found in Him. Christ Jesus has made you His own, cleansing you from your sins and taking you to Himself. And that is why Paul says he wishes to 'share in Christ's sufferings' (Philippians 3:10). This is not some masochistic love for pain, but having a 'share in' Christ's suffering for us.

Here is your righteousness. Here is your eternal salvation. It is in Christ. Christ Jesus your Lord, who Himself suffered loss when He went to the cross, to suffer and die as your Saviour. In so doing, Christ Jesus gained perfect righteousness for you before God, His holiness in exchange for your sinfulness. The Son of God's holy blood covers all your sins.

Paul wanted to know and experience the power of Jesus' resurrection. For him, the resurrection was not just a past, historical event; it had continuing dynamic power that enabled believers to live the Christian life victoriously.

While living on earth, we go through many troubles, sufferings, and battles against sin and injustice. We may experience many 'losses'. But what is Paul's resolute life motto? "One thing I do: 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." Paul was constantly aiming toward the goal to win the prize. What is the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus? It is to be completely conformed to the image of Christ that includes our resurrection body.

When it comes to forward motion, our bodies tend to move automatically toward the place where our eyes are directed. A runner who keeps turning back to see what is behind him will lose his race. Understanding this phenomenon, Paul urged believers to stop looking back at the past and stay focused on the future goal. Paul himself was determined to "forget" or "dismiss from his mind" the former way of life when he violently persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it (Galatians 1:13). He quit dwelling on the hindrances and hurdles of persecution, imprisonment, and abandonment in his past (2 Corinthians 4:8–9; Acts 16:22–40; 23:10; 25:1–12; 28:17–31; 2 Timothy 1:15). Instead, he stretched toward what was ahead of him. He looked forward to heaven, the resurrection of his body, and meeting his Saviour face-to-face: "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:20–21).

The Christian life is lived with our eyes facing forward on Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate priority that makes our lives worth living. Our highest goal is to know Him better, as Paul said (Philippians 3:10): "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death". Walk in the assurance that God's love for us is unconditional and unending. Not only has he ordained a good future for us, he wants to help us attain that future. He wants us to become more like his Son Jesus. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Amen.