

One Thing

Series: J.O.Y. Jesus, Others, and You - #6 A Study of the Book of Philippians

Text: Philippians 3:12-16

Introduction: City Slickers is a movie about three men who are in search for “the meaning of life”. Each year, they get together and go on a manly adventure.

They decide to be cowboys and take a trip to an actual working ranch and help move several hundred head of cattle in a cattle drive.

While on their adventure, they meet their trail boss, Curly: the grizzled, rough, and tough cowboy who would lead them cross country.

As the story unfolds, a conversation between Billy Crystal’s character and Curly takes place, and Crystal asks Curly the meaning of life.

Curly slowly raises his index finger in a gnarly old leather glove and says, “The Secret,” he says, “is ONE THING.” Crystal asks, but what is the “one thing.” Curly says, “That’s what you have to find out.”

- In the Psalms, King David said, ***“One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.”*** (Psalms 27:4 NIV)
- A rich young ruler came to Jesus wanting to know how to inherit eternal life. ***Jesus answered...You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”***²⁰“Teacher,” he declared, ***“all these I have kept since I was a boy.”***²¹Jesus looked at him and loved him. ***“One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*** (Mark 10:19-21 NIV)
- Jesus was visiting the home of his friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Martha was busy in the kitchen trying to get the meal ready. Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to His teaching. Martha was overcome with the stress of all the work and complained to Jesus that Mary was not helping her.

- Jesus said, *“Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: 42but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”* (Luke 10:41-42 KJV)
- Jesus had just healed a man’s blindness. The jealous religious leaders were questioning him about all the details of his healing. They were trying to find ways to accuse Jesus of wrongdoing. The man finally told them, *“Whether he (Jesus) is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”* (John 9:25 NIV)

As we continue our series, J.O.Y., we come to Philippians, chapter 3, where the apostle Paul tells us about his One Thing. Beginning with verse 12...

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

13Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,

14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

15All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently that too God will make clear to you.

16Only let us live up to what we have already attained.” (Phil. 3:12-16 NIV)

PRAY

Over the last couple of weeks, we've talked about joy. We've looked at the happy life versus the meaningful life. We looked at the happiness paradox, that if you try to make happiness your primary goal, you'll never be a happy person.

We talked about the happiness illusion, this idea that if I just had the right circumstances, the right job, the right relationship, the right salary, it would make you happy forever. Of course, it never does.

There are two parts to Paul’s “One Thing,” **Forget what is Behind You**...*Focus on what is Before You.*

I. Forget what is Behind You.

12 "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind..."

Maybe the biggest reason you can't grab hold of joy today is you can't let go of the pain, grief, hurt, suffering, anger, and guilt from yesterday. Everybody in this room has something in your past that you would love to get rid of, but you can't.

STORY: Fred got home from golf later than normal, and he was very tired. His wife asked him, "Was it a bad day at the golf course?" He said, "Initially, everything was going fine. Then Harry had a heart attack and died on the tenth tee." "Oh, that's awful!" she said to which Fred replied, "You're not kidding. For the whole back nine, it was hit the ball, drag Harry, hit the ball, drag Harry."

Not a real funny story, but how many people go through life...waking up, drag my past, go to work, drag my past, enter a relationship, drag my past."

You must ask yourself at some point, do you really want to keep doing that? Do you really want to keep repeating habits and mistakes from your past? How much do you want the bad things that happened to you yesterday depress your spirit and your attitude going into the future?

How do you get free of not just the pain of the past but the power it has over my life today. How do you get free from those old hurts, old habits, old losses, old patterns that hold you back from the future God has for you?

What is one item in your past that you most need to let go of?

Maybe it's a divorce you went through. Maybe there is a relationship that broke up, and you're still hurting. Maybe you got betrayed, and you still feel bitter. Maybe you had a parent who was difficult or negligent or even abusive. Maybe you have a relationship with a child who has broken your heart.

Maybe you lost a job or made a bad choice, or there is a habit or an addiction that you keep falling victim to, or there is a boss or business partner you just cannot forgive, or there is somebody you loved and lost them, or somehow you're afraid you missed a great opportunity, great circumstance of your life, and it's gone forever. What's the one area where you most need to get past your past?

Here's the thing. There are people who get crippled because they are lugging it with them today, and they'll lug it with them tomorrow, and it is killing them.

Do I really want people who hurt me in the past continue to poison my mind going into the future? Do I really want to torture my life thinking about how great my life would have been if circumstances had just turned out differently? The truth is you will never have the abundant, joyful life God wants you to have if you don't learn how to get past your past with grace and truth.

Paul is saying, "every night when I go to bed, I just let it go. Every morning, when I wake up, I press on. Here is the one thing. I choose the power of God and not the power of the past is going to be the guiding power for my life, today and tomorrow and every day."

What's amazing is how often people live as though they are purely victims of their past, and they just drift into their future to see if things might change. "I hope my resentment will go away some day. I hope my guilt will go away some day. I hope my regret will go away some day. I hope I wake up some morning, and it's gone."

Paul says, "I would never do it. This one thing, if I don't get anything else right, this I will. I choose not to be chained to my past. I forget what is behind."

Two things you need to forget if you are going to follow Paul's pattern:

1) Your failures. So many Christians are continuing to rehearse things in their heart that God has long since forgiven and forgotten. They won't forgive themselves. They're holding on to the past. Satan's favorite desire is to paralyze us with the past, to manipulate us with bad and bitter memories.

2) Your successes. Learn from them but let go of them. It's so easy to rest on your laurels, to live in the past, to base your security on past performance, to think, "I've got it made!" Then you stop growing and learning.

Don't misunderstand what the word 'forget' means. It doesn't mean 'to fail to remember.' There is no way you can ever totally erase the past from your memory. The word 'forget' literally means 'to not be influenced or affected by.'

When God says for example, "I will remember your sins no more" it doesn't mean that God suddenly gets spiritual dementia. It simply means He no longer allows your past to affect your relationship with Him.

God will not remove your past. He will redeem it.

To get past my past, I must learn from it, so I become wiser and a better person.
To get past my past, I must let it go. I must look at it and learn from it.

When you think about your past and your future, the one constant is YOU. When you think about yesterday and today and tomorrow, the one consistent factor is YOU keep showing up in YOUR life. That happens all the time. This is deep. I know.

But if you don't learn from your past, you'll just repeat your past. People get into a second marriage, and it starts looking an awful lot like the first one.

People have the same cycle of financial problems over and over because they never actually honestly just stop and ask, "What's the role of money in my life?"

Proverbs 26:11 says, ***"As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly."***

I'm sorry for that unappetizing image so close to lunch. What's that word vomit doing in the Bible? Did a seventh grader write that verse? That's a deliberately chosen image because there is something so tragic, so awful, so appalling, about the human condition where it happened in the past, and I go back to it again.

Forget does not mean, "I refuse to think about the past because it will make me feel bad." It means, "I refuse to permit whatever happened yesterday to keep me from pursuing spiritual growth today, this one thing I do. My past will inform me, but it will not deform me. My past will educate me, but it will not devastate me."

If you think about the bad things that have happened in your past, generally, they will fall into one of three categories.

1. MY Bad

These are items in the past I want to forget that are my fault. Forgetting them means I must own them and acknowledge them and learn from them. The only way past my bad is repentance. I ask God to forgive me and help me do a moral inventory. It takes courage to face up to my bad.

The psalmist says, "***Search me, God, and know my heart... See if there is any offensive way in me...***"

The only way to get past my bad is to repent. God, I want to confess that, and I want to make it right. I want to lay my guilt and my sin down at the foot of the cross because that's why Jesus died. Then I start again." That's how I get past the past of my bad. Then there is another category, and that's your bad.

2. YOUR Bad

In your bad, I must let go of something you've done to me. It's not my fault; you did it. Somebody hurt you. Somebody cheated you. Somebody bullied you. Somebody deliberately insulted you or disrespected you, or there is a boss who was unfair to you, or somebody violated or abused you. You're filled with anger.

We live in what some folks call the age of rage, just free-floating anger, and you keep running into it.

The only way past your bad is FORGIVE. When I'm trapped in MY Bad, in guilt. I must repent. When I'm trapped in YOUR Bad, the only way past resentment, revenge, and anger is forgiveness. That doesn't mean reentering a relationship with that person. Forgiveness is not the same as trust.

With resentment, my attitude is, "I'm going to pay you back. I'm going to get even." When I forgive, I surrender my right to get you back. There are a lot of people who have never learned to do this.

Maybe for you, getting past your past means there is somebody for you to forgive. Maybe you start by writing a letter where you write down, "Here are all the hurts I suffered, all the resentments I've been carrying around." Maybe you have a conversation with that person or invite them to have a cup of coffee. Maybe you just start by talking to God and asking for help.

The Bible says, "***...forgive one another...forgive as the Lord forgave you.***"

This is important. You don't forgive someone because they deserve it. You forgive someone to get out of the prison of your own resentment, anger, or bitterness.

There is another category I must get past, not my bad, not your bad, just its bad.

3. IT'S Bad

To get past my bad, I need to repent. To get past your bad I need to deal with resentment. **"It's bad"** involves regret. Regret always involves a certain perspective, and evaluation of my circumstances.

Regret is an event or a situation that is a disappointment to me because I contrast it with what might have been. "If only." If only I had gone to that school. If only I had taken that job. If only I had married that person. If only I had not married that person. If only I had or had not _____ you fill in the blank"

They've done a study of Olympic athletes. People who win gold medals, of course, are the happiest. People who win silver medals have beaten those who get bronze, but bronze medalists are happier than silver medalists. It's because bronze medalists tend to think, ***"I almost didn't get a medal at all, so I'm so grateful I got a medal."***

Silver medalists think, ***"I almost got a gold medal, and it makes them regretful."*** Silver medalists objectively did better than the bronze medalists, but it's their own mind that traps them in regret. "If only." The only way out of its bad... is hope. The only way you're going to get past your past of regret is you must believe God has a future for you. You must believe there is a hope that surpasses your past.

Some of you have big regrets to get past. In Christ you can do more than just survive, or recover, you can thrive.

This is what you see in the Bible, Joseph coming out of prison, Daniel fearless in the lion's den, David taking on Goliath, Paul in chains in Philippi singing hymns to God in the middle of the night because Paul has hope.

Here is what is most important. Paul's hope is not put in his **own ability** to thrive. His hope is not survival, not recovery, not thriving, but a fourth path that so far has been taken by only one person, but it's there for you and me.

It was taken by Jesus who suffered intensely on a cross, and on the third day rose from the grave. Paul says, "I'm betting the farm on that. That's changing how I look at everything in my life."

Paul says, "And we know..." Not hope, not think. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Paul says, "In all things." He doesn't say, "In some things, in some circumstances, in some problems, in some difficulties, in some places, in some relationships." He says, ***"In all things, whoever you are, wherever you've been, whatever you have done, God is at work to bring good out of it."***

Therefore, Paul says, "This one thing I do. I will not be trapped by my past. I will be found in Christ, to follow Him, to love Christ, to serve Christ, to allow Christ to make me the person he wants me to be, to live with him, to suffer with him, to die with him, to be resurrected with him."

The important thing about the past is that it is past! Our eyes are placed in front of our heads because it is more important to look ahead than back.

The first part of the one thing the bible tells us to do is... **Forgetting what is Behind...**

Would you just bow your head and close your eyes right now for a moment? Think about that part of your past that can lock you up, the guilt you cannot escape, the hurt you cannot forgive, the loss you cannot forget. Just pray this, "God, help me get past my past." Amen!

But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

The second part of Paul's one thing is to:

II. Focus on What is Before You.

Some years ago, NEWSWEEK magazine reported a fortune tellers' convention in Dublin, Ireland. Palm readers, crystal ball gazers and astrologers from all over the world gathered for a week to compare notes and make new predictions. While they were all together in one of the meetings, a thief broke into their hotel rooms and stole all their crystal balls and tarot cards. When the police investigated the crime, they asked the fortune tellers the obvious question: "Why didn't you know this was going to happen, and why weren't you able to predict it?"

No one can predict the future; no one knows what is going to happen tomorrow, but there are two things you cannot do about tomorrow and one thing you had better not do.

First, you cannot PRESUME tomorrow. Tomorrow may never come.

Secondly, you cannot PREDICT tomorrow. You do not know what will happen tomorrow.

But number three, you had better not PROCRASTINATE about tomorrow.

Not only should you not put off until tomorrow what you should do today, you should not put off today getting ready for tomorrow.

Listen to the verse again. ***"Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do;" (P Paul uses this word, which means "immense effort. "...with every cell in my body toward what is ahead. I press on to the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus, the person God wants me to be, the life God wants me to live."*** (Philippians 3:13, ESV)

- Charles H. Spurgeon says, "It is not our littleness that hinders Christ, but our bigness. It is not our weakness that hinders Christ; it is our strength. It is not our darkness that hinders Christ; it is our supposed light that holds back His hand."

To have Paul say he has not succeeded yet is really amazing.

- If anybody had the right to claim he had arrived, it would be Paul. He has already completed 3 missionary journeys across the Roman Empire, written Galatians, Thessalonians, Corinthians, Romans, Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians.
- He made an incredible impact on the world. If he says he has not arrived, I wonder who has.

You cannot sail the ship of your life into the seas of the future with joy and peace if your anchor is stuck in the mud of the past. You can't run forward if you are always looking backward. That is why Paul talked about, ***'forgetting those things which are behind.'***

Before you discount everything I'm about to say, because you are a senior adult, remember Caleb was 85 years of age when he said, "I want that mountain." Colonel Sanders discovered "finger-licking good" chicken at 70. Ray Kroc introduced the "Big Mac" after he was 70 years of age.

Casey Stengle was the Manager of the New York Yankees when he was 75. Picasso was still painting at 88. Thomas Edison invented the mimeograph machine when he was 85.

As you think about tomorrow, there are problems you are going to always face. You're going to have to face foes. Nobody ever encountered more opposition than Moses, Jesus, and Paul.

Do the following names ring a bell with you: Shammua, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, Gaddiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi, Geuel? They probably don't, but those were the first names of the other ten spies that were sent out with Joshua and Caleb to investigate the land. They were the ones who brought back a minority report that said: "the land could not be taken."

They were the ones who minimized God and maximized giants. They assumed their god was too weak, they were too small, the task was too difficult, and the giants were too big.

This world is full of dream killers. It is full of people who will tell you that you can't reach your goals; that you shouldn't dream bigger dreams; that you should not have bigger visions; shouldn't try to climb more mountains.

There are always going to be people around you who will cloud your vision, who try to destroy your determination, because they are always looking at the future in a rearview mirror. A great man once said, "A blind man's world is bounded by the limits of his touch; an ignorant man's world by the limits of his knowledge; a great man's world by the limits of his vision." Mark it down - you're going to have opposition when you try to reach goals and dream dreams.

Focusing on what's before you requires:

A. CONCENTRATION:

If all you do is forget the past, you may just have amnesia.

1 Cor. 9:24 ***"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to win the prize."***

What was Paul's goal? 2 Cor. 5:9 ***"So we make our goal to please Him."*** There is no more rewarding goal in life than to please God.

Paul wanted to be able to stand at the end of his life and hear Jesus say, "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

B. DETERMINATION:

The principle of determination: Absolutely nothing worthwhile in life happens without effort.

The only time you coast is when you're going downhill. If you're coasting in life right now, you're headed downhill. Paul said, "I fight to the finish."

The great people in life are just ordinary people with extraordinary amounts of determination.

They don't know how to quit. They keep on keeping on. They never give up.

Notice the terms Paul uses in v. 12 & 13: ***"I press on, straining toward the mark... I press on to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."***

Can you feel the intensity of Paul here, the determination. "Press on" in the Greek literally means "I overextend myself. -- I go for it with all I've got. I throw myself into it, straining with every nerve and ounce and muscle to reach the prize." He's a man of intensity, maximum effort. No gain without pain. That's the way to live!

Two words make all the difference in the world, '**one thing.**' Paul understood the power that comes from concentrating on just one thing.

What was the one thing Paul was seeking? He says, ***"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 2:14, ESV)

The Greek word for "goal" is "*skopos*" which means "to look at." We get our word 'telescope' from that word. It means a small mark on which your eye is fixed.

In other words, Paul said the key to living a productive life is to focus. Paul had a one-track mind, but his mind was on the right track.

I am convinced the reason why so many Christ-followers are so ineffective in their Christian life...they don't really concentrate on one thing.

Concentration is the secret of power. If you take a river and make that river flow in one direction and not overflow its banks it can become a tremendous source of electric energy. If you can take light and concentrate it, you can make a laser that can cut through steel. Likewise, Paul said, **'This one thing.'**

That is what the Lord's Supper is all about - one thing - Jesus Christ and His death, which paid for our sins. One thing has made it possible for us to go to heaven - Jesus Christ's sacrifice upon the cross, His resurrection from the dead and His offer of eternal life. One thing makes that a reality for us, which is our faith in Him as Savior and as Lord.

Remember Paul's parting words to the Ephesian elders - Acts 20:22-24

22 "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. 23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

Listen to what Paul says at the end of his life - in the last book that he wrote - 2 Tim 4:7-8. **"7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing."**

Paul summarizes by giving three suggestions in v. 15-16 on how to be persistent. How do you keep on keeping on.

- 1) **Be mature.** v. 15. **"All of us who are mature should take such a view of things."**

You're going to face your faults, focus on the future, forget the former, and fight to the finish. All of us who are mature will act this way. He's saying here, don't become complacent, don't become satisfied.

- 2) **Be teachable.** **"And if on some point you think differently that too God will make clear to you."** Stay open, God will teach you. The moment you stop being teachable, you stop learning. The moment you stop learning, you stop growing. The moment you stop growing, you're dead.

3) Be persistent. *"Let us live up to what we have already attained".*

Two Promises:

Galatians 6:9 *"Let us not grow weary in doing good. For at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Don't give up. Don't give up on your marriage, your dream... You will reap a harvest at the proper time if you do not give up.*

Philippians 1:6 *"Be confident of this very thing. That He [God] who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion unto the day of Christ Jesus."* What God starts; He finishes. He doesn't lead you out on a limb and cut you off. You do your part and God will do His part. You do your best and He'll do the rest.

You need a power outside of yourself to let go of the past and to be able to focus on the future and to have the power to keep going, to keep on keeping on doing the things you know the Holy Spirit is calling you to do. That comes in a relationship with Christ.