

Coram Deo
Soli Scriptura, Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia
Sermon preached at
Stouffville United Church by
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“When Giving Up Is Not an Option”

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Philippians 3:12-14

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_DPJygetVk

This life is funny. In a world that is filled with so many beautiful things we often find hazards with them. Roses are beautiful, but they have thorns. Bees make sweet honey, but they will sting you. Mosquitoes will show up at every barbecue with a dedicated mission to irritate everyone present. The first sign of life for a cute little baby is a cry, not laughter. And their first word, No.

Pork ribs, pull pork raises our blood pressure and elevate our cholesterol levels. Our favorite desserts send our A1c through the roof. We have to monitor our salt intake as we eat potato chips and other dry snacks.

There are sicknesses, diseases, and plagues. Many of these plagues have literally altered the course of history. We are tired of Covid19, but Covid19 is surely not tired of us.

Someone came up with these insights about life.

- 1) A balanced diet is a cookie in each hand.
- 2) Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself.
- 3) If the shoe fits.....buy it in every color.
- 4) Once over the hill you pick up speed.

We've entered another year. And having done so, I have always thought it good to pause, reflect and release the past so that we can better move forward into the future. And that was St. Paul was doing. He was in prison reflecting on his life – his successes and his failures - and encouraging people in theirs.

I

When giving up is not an options, St Paul, gives us options. Firstly, **looking back and letting go.**

Paul had recognized he hadn't made it. He said, “not that I have already attained or am already perfect.” He admits he doesn't have it all figured out. However, he does have the faith to believe he doesn't have to.

The Greek word Paul uses for perfected is *'teleos'* which has several meanings, it does not mean without sin or without flaw, but in the context of this passage, it refers to maturing as a

believer. Paul knew his life -as with ours- in Christ is a work in progress. You and I aren't expected to be perfect. We are expected to be in process. To be actively engaged in learning. And part of that learning involves our past. We cannot go forward looking back – at our failures or our accomplishments - however, using the past, like the mirror in our cars, it helps us navigate our way forward.

A customer sent an order to a distributor for a large amount of goods totaling a great deal of money. The distributor noticed that the previous bill hadn't been paid. The collections manager left a voice-mail for them saying, "We can't ship your new order until you pay for the last one." The next day the collections manager received a phone call, saying, "Please cancel the order. We can't wait that long."

Sometimes our past can hinder our present and future.

Looking back can be a way of dealing with what we can and letting go of what we can't. Some of us look back with regret and allow the past to poison the present and potentially kill the future. Others allow the glory days of the past color the present and discolor the future because "nothing could ever be as good as it was in the 'good ole days'".

We've all heard it said that "those who fail to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it." And there is much truth in that. Yet, equally important is the statement that another said, "People who live in the past are doomed to failure in the future." Living in the past (even a good past) can taint the future.

One time Thomas A. Edison's plant was on fire. As he helplessly watched it burn, he called his son Charles. He said, "Come here! You'll never see anything like this again!" Then Edison called his wife. As the three of them stood there, gazing at the fire, Edison said, "There goes all our mistakes. Now we can start over."

St. Paul had had a checkered past. First, there was his past when he was a persecutor of Christians which directly resulted in the killing and martyrdom of one of the Leaders of faith, which he deeply regretted. Yet, after his conversion to Christ there was the work for Christ without which the world would never have been the same. He knew he wasn't perfect and that he had failed and fallen. Yet, he didn't let that stop him from moving forward. He knew that looking back was important only if we were able to let go. *Looking back was important only if we let go of it.*

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, 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

II

When giving up is not an options, St Paul, gives us options. Firstly, looking back and letting go brings us to ***planning ahead and pressing forward***. *"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

"But I Press On." The life that Paul desired required some effort. This act of Pressing On denotes some straining. Some singleness of mind and purpose. It involved some perseverance, some discipline, and some concentration. It also required some sacrifices.

In Alice in Wonderland, at one point Alice says to the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat. "I don't much care where," said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way

you go,” said the Cat. If you don’t care where you are going in life, then it doesn’t matter what you do or where you go.

We have also heard it said that if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. This was proved several years ago when four teenagers were arrested in the parking lot of a large mall in Lakeland, Fla., just before Christmas when, attempting to steal an automobile at random, they tried to break into a police van containing three officers on a stakeout.

That was not good planning!

Life takes planning.

But often we just let it slip through our hands like the soap opera says, “like sands through the hour glass to goes the days of our lives”. The Psalmist said, “the days of our years are threescore and ten and if by reason of strength fourscore. But we are soon cut off and we fly away. So teach us to number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom and the beauty of the Lord our God will establish the work of your hands upon you...” He was saying for us to live wisely the days taking each one and making the most of it – valuing every moment.

How do you value time?

- How do we value ONE YEAR? Ask a student who failed a grade.
- How do we value ONE MONTH? Ask a Mother whose baby arrived prematurely.
- How do we value ONE WEEK? Editors of weekly newspapers know.
- How do we value ONE HOUR? Ask someone who awaits a doctor’s diagnosis
- How do we value ONE MINUTE? Ask someone who missed a plane.
- How do we value ONE SECOND? Ask an Olympic Medalist, or someone who missed saying “goodbye” to a loved one they will never see again

III

When giving up is not an options, St Paul, gives us options. Firstly, looking back and letting go, then planning ahead and pressing forward; which brings us to **living life one day at a time**.

Paul was showing us that you don’t have to change your life. You just have to change your day. Don’t worry about your whole life, just about this day. Don’t worry about everything in your day; just focus on one thing at a time, one moment at a time that will give you momentum.

Don’t think about the 21 to 66 days it supposedly takes to change a behavior pattern, just remember that each day is critical. That could overwhelm you.

You don’t have to change your life. You just have to change your day. And when you change your day it can change your life.

I came across a prayer that speaks to all the things that can stop us from doing so:

Dear God: Please untie the knots that are in my mind, my heart and my life.

Remove the have nots, the can nots and the do nots that I have in my mind.

Erase the will nots, may nots, might nots that may find a home in my heart.

Release me from the could nots, would nots and should nots that obstruct my life. And most of all, Dear God, I ask that you remove from my mind, my heart and my life all of the am nots that I have allowed to hold me back, especially the thought that I am not good enough.

You think about that. Amen

