

Allowing Ourselves to be Stretched Spiritually (Part 2)

Philippians 3

Introduction:

1. How many of you have ever heard the expression, “This is really stretching me”? What do we mean when we say, “This (new job, college class, project at work, problem, trial) is really stretching me”?
2. We mean that we are being taken out of our comfort zone, growing in ways we could have never imagined, and finding strength we didn’t know we had.
3. But how are you doing spiritually in your walk with Christ? Are you being stretched and are you growing? Or have you gotten locked into a comfort zone and you’re coasting?
4. As we know, the apostle Paul was a man on a mission. He was very focused on exalting Jesus Christ and reaching people with the good news of Christ. He accomplished so much for Christ in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.
5. I believe verse 13 gives us some insight into how he was able to do this.
 - He was “*reaching forth*.” This phrase literally means “to stretch oneself forward.”
6. According to God’s Word, we need to be reaching forth and stretching ourselves spiritually in our Christian walk and as a church family.
7. Be honest – are you possibly stuck in a spiritual rut and locked into a spiritual comfort zone? I believe many Christians and many churches are. Spiritual growth has stopped.
8. But we cannot afford to allow this to happen. Church, there is too much at stake! Satan is fervently attacking homes, families, Christians, and churches. He is not letting up, so we cannot afford to let our guard down and think that we can coast to glory.
9. How can we (individually and as a church) stretch ourselves spiritually and accomplish spiritual goals? This text will show us how.

First, we must refuse to trust in our fleshly power – vs. 3

Second, our passion must be for a Person – Jesus Christ – vs. 10

Third, learn from the past, but don’t live in it. – vs. 13

1. Have you ever been high up in the air on a ladder and, if you’re like me, you don’t particularly care for heights? I prefer for my feet to be on the ground. The person down below will often say, “Don’t look down” or “Don’t look back.” Read verse 13.
2. In the same way, we will never know Christ in a greater way - we will never be stretched spiritually - until we decide to forget those things which are behind.

3. Think about it. You cannot know someone in the present if your heart is dwelling on the past. **Illustration:** Many married couples cannot get past the past and it destroys them. Living in the past kills your future and makes the present very miserable.
4. It is the same way in our relationship with Christ. You cannot allow past sins, past failures, and past mistakes to continually haunt you.
5. Paul had a lot of regrets from his past. He talked about things he did *“ignorantly in unbelief.”* Not only this, he was prideful and full of himself because of the fleshly achievements he had attained. vs. 4-6
6. But when he met Christ and began to know Christ, he said, *“...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth...”*
7. Knowing Christ does not change the past, but it changes the meaning of the past. Paul had a lot of baggage he carried from his past (1 Timothy 1:12-17). This could have potentially weighed him down and even destroyed him. Instead, it served as a motivation and a catalyst for godly change in Paul’s life.
8. The events from Paul’s past did not change, but Paul’s understanding of them did after he got saved and began to grow spiritually. This is what Paul means when he says, *“Forgetting those things which are behind.”*
 - *“Forgetting”* doesn’t mean it is wiped from your memory. We’re human and that is not possible (though we wish we could). Biblically, it means that we are no longer influenced or affected by those things in a negative way.
9. Too many Christians live in bondage to the past. They live with regrets, guilt, or bitterness over past events. This impedes their ability to grow and be stretched.
 - It is okay to learn from the past, but you cannot live in it. I can speak this to you from experience. Were there painful losses and defeats in 2012? You’d better believe it. Am I going to live in those events, rehash them, get bitter over them, and dwell on them? Not for a second! I’m moving forward! There is too much to do for Jesus.
10. You can live in the past and continue to dig up bad memories and painful events if you want to, but you need to understand two facts about this:
 - First, it will do nothing to change the past. It is what it is. Do you know what we can change about the events in 2012? Nothing! So, hopefully we can learn from them and change the meaning of those events. Some of the painful events from 2012 in my life have served to accomplish incredible good in my life – good for me personally, good for my family, and good for our church.
 - Second, it will hinder you in knowing Christ in the present and growing spiritually. The past is what you (through Christ) make of it.
11. We can also apply this principle to us corporately as a church. Were there painful things from 2012? Were there setbacks? Were there disappointments? Absolutely (a church is like an individual – there’s good and bad times). Are we going to live in those events and allow them to drag us down? Not on your life.
12. Were there blessings from 2012? We saw all those last week, didn’t we? What an incredible year of breaking new ground in so many areas. There were so many victories and so many wonderful accomplishments.

13. Just as we aren't going to sit around crying over the painful past, we likewise are not going to sit around bragging about the victories of the past. We are going to acknowledge them, learn from them, and then move on for Christ. It is an exciting new year.

Fourth, we must rise above our enemies. – vs. 17-19

1. Paul was determined to reach forth and press forward, but Paul had enemies. These were people who had their own agenda and it was all about them.
2. They are not team players. They are “me” players. People like this will creep into your life personally, try to drag you down, and keep you from growing and being stretched spiritually. They want to shackle you to the past, and they will suck the life right out of you.
3. People like this can creep into the church also, and they will drain the church of its life and vitality if we allow them. They are a drag on the team, and that is why Paul said they are enemies of the cross.
4. This doesn't mean that they don't believe in Jesus or the crucifixion and resurrection. They are enemies of the cross because their lives contradict what the cross is all about (a denial of self, humility, submission).
5. You have to determine to rise above these enemies if you are going to be stretched spiritually in your walk with Christ.

In Conclusion:

1. Paul was pressing toward the mark (goal). Paul had some spiritual goals that he was reaching and stretching for, through the power of Christ.
2. The ultimate prize would be when Paul received the “*high calling*,” that is, the heavenly invitation into the presence of Christ. vs. 20-21
3. Until that day, Paul wanted to keep growing so that when he was ushered into the very presence of Christ, it would be just the next natural step in his growing relationship with Christ.