

HOW TO MAKE OUR LIVES COUNT FOR SOMETHING GREAT!

Breaking free from the Shackles of Unforgiving Disposition and Overcoming the Poison of Diversion

By Dr. Paul R. Shockley
www.prshockley.org ©

Philippians 3:13; Mark 12:30

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Last time:

In this May 2013 series, “How to make our lives count for something great,” we are considering formidable obstacles that are keeping us from loving others with greatness.

In our first installment we focused on one of the greatest obstacles in truly loving others, namely, **the preoccupation of the self**. We learned a number of ways to begin breaking this formidable wall.

In our second installment we directed our attention to another formidable barrier that is keeping us from loving other with greatness **unresolved guilt**. We highlighted three areas in our lives where unresolved guilt finds pertinent expression, namely, past mistakes, reoccurring yielding to fleshly appetites and sinful tendencies, and the inability to forgive those who have wounded us. All three areas are compounded by *more guilt* when we attempt to rationalize and/or numb what we have done by means of illegitimate or false pleasures that are offered to us by a hostile system to the things of God. After exploring these three areas where unresolved guilt emerges, we turned our attention to the ultimate remedy for unresolved guilt: the extraordinary biblical theme of God’s grace. When you place your trust in Jesus Christ, believing that He is God, who died on the cross for your sins and rose bodily from the dead, you will receive over 215 divine benefits that can never be taken away. Benefits like being declared righteous, eternal life, and reconciliation between you and God you will receive because Jesus substituted Himself on

the cross of Calvary for your sins as predicted in the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). We then unpacked the divine provision of God’s forgiveness for the believer as expressed in passage like 1 John 1:9.

In our third installment we received **eight practical steps on how to handle reoccurring sins** that seem to haunt every footstep. Moreover, we clarified the differences between confession of sin and mortification of sin. See, confession of sin does not deal with our appetite for particular sins we have cultivated. Rather, sincere confession, acknowledging to God what we have done and who we are, gets us right in our intimacy with God. However, confession does not remove our appetite for those sins. Every time we give into sin, our appetite for that sin grows and changes us in the most unexpected ways; our lust for that sin grows deeper. Confession of sin does not remove the lust for that sin. But we can begin breaking down this appetite, this lust, and this propensity for that sin (s) by mortifying the misdeeds of the flesh in the strength of the Holy Spirit as advocated by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 3:5 and Romans 8:13.

To mortify a sin then involves the following:

1. Subdue a sinful appetite, tendency, or temptation;
2. Deprive the sin of its power;
3. To break the sinful habit that we developed we must continually refuse to give into the temptation of that particular sin.

The goal of mortification is to weaken if not break a sinful habit for the danger is that if you yield to a particular sin long enough you may experience the following sequence:

This Time:

Let us turn our attention back to the third sphere of unresolved guilt, by considering, once again, **lack of forgiveness**. But this time I would like to offer 8 practical ways in which we can begin

the healing process of forgiving those who have hurt us. Afterwards, I would like to spend the remainder of time considering one of the most subtle but most formidable obstacles from making our lives count for something great, namely, **diversion**.

8 Steps to Forgiving Those Who Have Wounded Us:

Consider these words from the Apostle Paul, who as Saul, was a former persecutor and murderer of Christians, but who, was saved by grace, a gift given to him and which is always made available to you if you are willing to place your faith in Jesus Christ, believing that He is God, who died on the cross for your sins and rose bodily from the dead. He states in Philippians 3:13:

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead.

What is keeping us from loving others with greatness thus immobilizing our ability to make our lives count for something great can be a lack of forgiveness toward those who have wounded us. These past wounds can become our worst enemy! Let me put it this way:

Have you ever found yourself telling someone about an unpleasant experience you've had whereby you have been wronged in some way. As you tell the story anger or pain builds up inside of you, you get excited and emotional, your skin becomes red, and your facial muscles become distorted! And when they ask, When did this happen, you reply, "Five years ago this May."

There is so much in that moment of re-telling stories. Memory can bring back the pain of that event as if it happened yesterday. Many people have difficulty forgetting wrongs done to them in the past, saying something like:

"How can I ever get over the hurt of being betrayed by who I thought was my best friend?"

"I can never trust my spouse again."

"How can I ever forgive my parents, my siblings?"

"How can I get beyond the rejection of my own children?"

"My boss is a fiend."

Other still find it difficult to forget the years spent in rebellion against God and that past comes back to haunt them, whether they are non-believers or believers. Regardless, *they consider themselves useless to God*. Some of these people want to serve God, but can never seem to take the first step, and take that step with joy. Then there are those live in the past, with nearly every conversation turning back to their past accomplishments. I remember when I....or "*we always did it this way*" ...they are people who always speak in past tense, whose lives are neutralized by their past accomplishments and achievements.

I say all that to say, so many of us struggle with our past, finding it almost impossible to forget it about it and move forward, whether it is past mistakes or great accomplishments. Yes, indeed, all too often our past can be our worst enemy. "*We find it easy to forget what we should remember, and remember what we should forget.*" ~ Mary Whechel

Reflecting upon the Apostle Paul's statement in Philippians 3:13, here are eight steps that should help us breakdown this formidable wall:

1st: **Remember that sin is conquered by God's forgiveness;** there is no exception, whether it be your sin or somebody else. Forgive yourself because you are a recipient of God's grace. Every time you feel the regret surge inside of you, and you confessed that sin, you asked for forgiveness by those whom you hurt, dismiss it; don't feed it. The reason why is, if you are a believer, your past is covered in God's grace. We have to count it to be true that God has forgiven us. *If the God of the Bible has forgiven us, shouldn't we forgive ourselves?*

- 2nd: **You can never forget your past apart from God.** If you have find yourself absorbed by your memories, pray and meditate on the biblical doctrine of grace, counting it to be true. Without God's grace, a victimized mindset, an unforgiving spirit, or past regrets can foster into bitterness. And bitterness robs joy, poisons peace, spoils love, and makes others who love you-miserable.
- 3rd: **Deliberately choose not to allow your past to control you; it is a choice you must make.** The Apostle Paul is continuously making that choice; he is not going to allow his past regrets or accomplishments to haunt him; they are worthless to him. Forgetting your past does not mean that it excuses the other person's sin nor does it guarantee that he or she will not hurt you again. Rather, forgetting the past means you are not going to dwell on it. Moreover, you aren't going use the past to manipulate or control the present or potential future.
- 4th: **Forgetting involves asking forgiveness.** If you have wronged others, go to them and do the following (in the Lord's strength). No doubt, just as we have been wronged, we have wronged others.
- a. Acknowledge what you did wrong.
 - b. Ask for forgiveness to the hurting party.
 - c. Recognize the consequences for your wrongdoing without argument or excuse.
 - d. Reflect upon how you are going to act differently the next time; be determined not to pursue that course of action again.
- 5th: **God understands the challenge of forgiving those who hurt us.** He does not forbid the believer to feel the result of wrongdoing...but He does ask us to forgive them:
- a. Matthew 18:21-22:

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

- b. Mark 11:25:

"When you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions."

- c. Ephesians 4:32:

"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace."

- d. Colossians 3:13:

"Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

- 6th: **If you aren't pro-actively walking with God, don't be surprised to discover that forgetting the past is difficult.**

- 7th: **Learn to recognize haunting memories for what they are--an attack from the flesh, energized by dark spiritual forces.**

- 8th: **Don't wait until you can get the past behind you before you start focusing on God; start where you are.** So many of us think we have to have everything perfect before we can begin. This mindset immobilizes us from doing anything worth doing. Rather, if you are start

where you are, you will find lack of forgiveness to within yourself to begin to melt.

The Poison of Diversion:

Now having offered some practical advice on how to deal with the formidable stone wall of forgiveness, let us briefly turn to one of the most powerful obstacles remaining that is keeping us from making our lives count for something great: the poison of diversion.

Diversion keeps us from making our lives count for something great. When we find our resources, time, and energy, being absorbed by the trivial, the unimportant, and even the urgent in our day-to-day living, then we can only give our leftovers to God. Our ability to loving others with greatness will be anemic, marginal, and uneventful. Even though we are not able to qualitatively make a difference in the lives of others, we will rationalize what we do making more of it than what it actually is...perhaps even demanding to be appreciated for our negligible efforts. But it could be that there is something more going on within the deepest parts of personhood. Perhaps the reason why we are preoccupied by the trivial, the unimportant, and the urgent is because deep inside we are unhappy.

Blaise Pascal, one of my all-time favorite Christian thinkers, puts it this way in his classic work, *Pensees*:

If our condition were truly happy we should not need to divert ourselves from thinking about it (165b).

In other passage Pascal states:

If man were happy, the less he were diverted the happier he would be, like the saints and God. Yes: but man is a man not happy who can find delight in diversion? No: because it comes from somewhere else, from outside; so he is dependent, and always

liable to be disturbed by a thousand and one accidents, which inevitably cause distress.

What is the core of our unhappiness, ladies and gentlemen? Across my experiences it is because we have attached our pursuit of happiness to that which is external, temporal, and earthy and not on that which is most honoring to God. Instead of building our lives upon spiritual pleasures, we have built them on objects, activities, people, pursuits, or resources that were never designed to last. Thus, preoccupied with this quest for happiness in those things which God created (and not God himself), we become taken in by diversions. As a result, we are losing ourselves to that which does not matter. We don't see how we poorly we have lived our lives until after the best of what we are and what we have been extracted from us! Waking up from the stupor of diversion, our hearts, minds, and souls are filled with angst, regret, and/or a reactionary spirit of indifference. We don't really have anything to show for the choices we have made, the values we have embraced, the activities we have promoted, and the pleasures we have pursued. They are all vaporous.

What can we do about diversion? Simply put, focus on what matters most to God in daily living:

First, as you make choices in your daily living, keep asking yourself, "God will this decision give you the most glory?"

Second, beseech God to probe your heart and your mind. In other words, ask God to scrutinize your affections, your thoughts, your desires and reveal to you what needs to be changed.

Third, and related to number two, meditate on God's Word. In particular, I invite you to read the book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Study the life and teachings of the Apostle Paul. Focus yourself upon the decisions, lifestyle, and ministry examples of Jesus Christ. Learn from them.

And fourth, protect your day from the affairs of the world! In other words, do not allow what is trivial, unimportant, and trivial to snatch your day away. Be single-minded! Seize Christ!

In conclusion:

I would like to conclude this four part- series, “making your life count for something great,” with a remedy that is applicable to the four obstacles that are keeping us from loving others with greatness, namely, (1) the preoccupation of the self, (2) unresolved guilt, (3) lack of forgiveness, and (4) the poison diversion, by highlighting the first and greatest commandment: *Love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength* (Mark 12:30).

The “*heart*” emphasizes your deep-seated affections, your inner desires; it is the control center of your human personality. The “*soul*,” while it is a rich concept with a variety of meaning, we can say at least it emphasizes your self-conscious thought life. The “*mind*” emphasizes your capacity to think, reason, understand, and make judgments. “*Strength*” emphasizes your bodily powers (physical & emotional capabilities). Cultivate a mind of moral and intellectual excellence (Philippians 2; 1 Peter 1). God is concerned with harmonization of both your inward character and outward conformity to God’s Word (being and doing).

Let me re-translate verse 30: *“You shall love the Lord your God out from your deep-seated affections and from out of your conscious thought-life and out from your ability to understand, reason, and judge and out from your bodily capabilities.”*

If we will love God by offering Him our utmost in moment-by-moment living, then we will begin to really come to know and understand what is truly important, be able to relish in God’s grace, redemption, and forgiveness, be able to authentically forgive others, and be enabled to pursue what matters most to God!