

Forgetting what lies behind

Welcome to session five of “Walking with Christ”--“Forgetting what lies behind.” I want you to take a moment and think about the worst mistake you have ever made. Really “live it” once again. How did you feel at that crucial moment that you knew you had made a HUGE mistake that you could never undo? How much guilt did you experience? Maybe you got pregnant or got someone pregnant when you weren’t married. Maybe you beat your wife in a moment of rage. Maybe you’ve said some words that you can never take back and which still haunt you today! As I read through the Gospels after I had made mistake after mistake in my life, I saw Jesus touching the lepers and they were suddenly clean... white as snow! I longed to receive just such a touch, so that the ugliness of my sins was erased. As I was thinking about that, I turned to Acts 10 where Peter has a vision. He kept calling “unclean” what God had declared “clean”! He spoke through His Word and told me, “Don’t keep calling yourself ‘unclean’ when I HAVE touched you and cleansed the sin!”

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Fellowship

1. What is one positive way the ugliness of your past has helped make you a better person today?

As we get started, let me remind you of something very important. In two weeks you’ll have your Celebration Week. There will be no video—you just get to decide how you would most like to spend an evening together...enjoying each other and being a family. It might be a dinner, or game night, singing, sharing testimonies or a picnic in the park with all your kids. Decide before you leave and start making plans. Now, back to our lesson about forgetting what lies behind.

I think the incredible thing about youth for many of us is that the “real world” with all of its problems hasn’t come crashing down on us...yet. For some this happens at a younger age than others. Maybe you grew up in a home with physical or sexual abuse. Or the pain of alcoholism was your reality. Eventually, pain in life will present itself, but until then we have such high hopes! I was saddened to hear the story of a young woman whose expectations came crashing down after high school. Her childhood was a happy one. She had a father with a good job, a mom who stayed home to take care of her and her brothers, and she worked hard in high school looking forward to a fast-paced and high-paying career. After meeting a boy at 16, they dreamed of a brilliant future together. But along the way, the pressure got to her dad and he turned to alcohol. Before long, he was a full-blown alcoholic who lost his job, her mom went to work for the first time in her life, and the only person she could find comfort in was her boyfriend. In a moment of weakness she did what she swore she would never do and shortly after found herself staring at a positive pregnancy test. Their grandiose “plans” were greatly changed as she took a low-paying job while her new husband struggled through college and they were new parents! Their dreams of affluence seemed even more remote 2 yrs. later when baby #2 was born...and her husband decided this was NOT what he wanted for HIS life and left.

She felt like she was at the end of her rope when she met a friend who also had a painful past, yet she seemed so free! In fact, in some ways, her story was worse, but joy emanated from her face...a face

not etched with bitterness! The words of life she showed me are found in Philippians 3: Paul cites an impressive resume that would make any Jew proud. Yet He goes on to say in verses 7 through 10,

“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 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”

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MERGEFORMATINET Discipleship

2. Read Philippians 3:4-10. How do you respond to Paul’s statement that his ethnic heritage was “rubbish” compared to knowing Christ? How do you feel about your heritage?
3. What does Paul say about the good and bad of his past in verses 4-6?
4. How did Paul compare his past social status with his subsequent status after accepting Christ?
5. What was Paul’s desire for his future that made him willing to surrender his past to God (verses 8, 10)?

Well, let me finish the story of my friend, as it’s so much like many of our stories.

Right when she felt like running away herself, hunting for greener pastures and craving a new beginning, her friend showed her how to get one! How to allow God to use her painful past and even use it for His glory!

Who doesn’t love to be clean? We love to be cleansed outside, but God wants to give us a fresh start on the inside as well!

She accepted Christ through the help of her friend...but didn’t feel the freedom she had so desperately wanted! She knew in her mind she was cleansed of her sin, but still felt the dirtiness of her past. You know, blame is as old as the Garden of Eden! Adam blamed Eve; Eve blamed the serpent...and she blamed her parents for ruining her adolescence, her husband for stealing her hopes and dreams...and felt anything but free. Have you ever run a race and tried to look behind you at the same time? Imagine the goal right ahead and you are running with everything in you...but you are craning your neck at the same time to see how close the other guy is. You will lose time...and probably get a neck ache at the same time. Paul knew the danger and fruitlessness of looking to the past-- from his own experience! Imagine living with the guilt of aiding those who ***murdered*** those who worship the Jesus you now love!! From a human viewpoint he could have spent years living in self-afflicted guilt and self-condemnation. But in Philippians 3:13 he tells us that he forgets what is behind and is reaching towards the goal! Of course, he can’t literally forget his past, but he turns it over to God to use for ***good***, to comfort others and show His glory! Our lives aren’t really about us! They are all about God!

God could have called Paul before he had watched Stephen being killed and saved him from his painful past. He could have called me before I slept with my boyfriend. Only God knows the “why’s” of when He calls each of us and why He allows certain painful experiences into our lives, but our job is to trust Him and His Word of Romans 8:28...that He will cause ALL things (painful or joyful) to work together for the good. Psalms 139:16 assures us that He recorded each of our days in his book before one of them came to be!

Trust Him to touch you and make you clean...then only bring up the past to show the power of God to transform your future and help those who are struggling. You have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer you who live...but Christ lives IN you!

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Ministry

6. Paul wanted to share in Christ’s sufferings and become like Him in his death. How might we do that today, and how would that affect how we treat each other?

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Evangelism

7. We often try to evangelize others by telling them about hell, or explaining why they need to repent, but can you think of any ways you might use your past to open up people’s hearts to the healing power of Christ?

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Worship

8. He who has been forgiven much loves much (Luke 7:47) What would you like to thank God for freeing or cleansing you from today? After some time in prayer, begin to plan your celebration.