

The Driving Force

Welcome back to session five of Walking with Purpose! Do you realize that how you *view* your life *shapes* your life? One summer day, young Antonio's mother sent him to pick a quart of raspberries. Reluctantly he dragged himself to the berry patch. He felt sure that his afternoon was ruined! Then a thought came to him: he would surprise his mother and pick *two* quarts of raspberries instead of one. Rather than drudgery, his work now became a challenge. He enjoyed picking those raspberries so much that fifty years later that incident was still fresh in his mind. The job hadn't changed...but his attitude had! And *attitude* affects everything.



Fellowship

1. Describe a distasteful job you had this week. What was your attitude like?



Discipleship

A person's mental attitude has an almost unbelievable effect on his strength, both physical and psychological. The British psychiatrist, J.A. Hadfield, gives a striking illustration of this fact. He asked three people to submit themselves to test the effect of mental suggestion on their strength, which was measured by gripping a dynamometer. They were to grip this device with all their might under three different sets of conditions.

First, he tested them under normal conditions. The average grip was 101 pounds. He then hypnotized them and told them that they were very weak. Their average grip this time was only 29 pounds! In the third test, Dr. Hadfield told them under hypnosis that they were very strong. The average grip this time jumped to 142 pounds!

Well, regardless of your views of hypnosis, God tells us of the incredible power of our thoughts to affect our lives...both negatively and positively! Second Corinthians 10:5 says, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." We're all familiar with arguments: verbal battles about what's true! A "pretension" is a claim or an effort to establish a claim. Paul is telling us in 2 Corinthians that we are to destroy every argument or claim that negative thoughts try to make on our thought life!

Whether it refers to your past, present or future, God doesn't want us bound by any chains of negativity, guilt he's already paid for, or doubt in His power! He knows that our attitude and the thoughts we entertain will be the driving force of our lives, whether for good or evil. We cannot fulfill our purpose in life if we are bound by chains instead of walking in freedom.

I heard of one man that said to his friend: "Say, you look depressed. What are you thinking about?" "My future," was the quick answer. "What makes it look so hopeless?" "My past."

Yes, focusing on past failures can destroy the joy of both the present *and* future. Charles Colson was an aide to American President Nixon. He was found guilty and sent to prison for his part in the Watergate scandal. As a result of his experience as a convicted felon, Colson founded Prison Fellowship, now the world's largest Christian outreach to prisoners and their families. Prison Fellowship has more than 50,000 volunteers working in hundreds of prisons in 88 countries around the world. It's a ministry that has blessed millions of people, and got started twenty-five years ago because Charles Colson committed a crime. God's eternal purposes for that man included even dealing with the sin that sent him to prison. It was a part of God's plan from the very beginning. But Colson only found his purpose because he didn't allow his past to cripple his future.

I imagine Satan tried relentlessly to pollute Paul's mind regarding his life's purpose and usefulness to God, using against him his past persecution of Christians. Peter? How often did he have to take his accusing thoughts captive? But the story that matters most to you isn't Peter's, Paul's, or even Charles Colson's. It's yours. What I pray you hear today is that the story of your life has not been ruined, not by your sin or anyone else's. God's good plan for your life is not buried under the mistakes of the past. God has a plan for your life, a good plan, a wise plan, a loving plan, a sovereign plan, and that plan is still in effect. You haven't missed it. He is working out that plan in your life right now.

I will never forget the day I watched about 40 khaki-clad men get off a beat-up old bus. Some had scars on their faces. I especially remember one man whose arm had been amputated. Some of them looked tough. I remember thinking that I wouldn't want to meet some of those guys in a dark alley. Others looked like clean-cut, innocent boys. Yet they all had two things in common: each had served time in prison and each had been freed. Freedom had been a long time in coming. As I talked with some of those men, it soon became apparent that adapting to freedom would require some adjustment. They were so used to prison that some of them really couldn't grasp that they were free.

As children of God, we sometimes don't quite comprehend the fact that we have been set free by our Savior. Lloyd Ogilvie said, "The memory of past failure is like sand in the gears of our effectiveness." Yet God hasn't put the handcuffs of past memories on you; they are *self*-imposed.

So what's the key to living in freedom? Let's look at the second half of Second Corinthians 10:5: "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." The

moment you have a negative thought about your past, your present circumstance, or your unknown future, realize where it comes from! Satan and the world are the sources of all negative thoughts. So speak the truth -- out loud if possible: "The past is behind me and God will use it for His purposes; the present is totally under His control and His will is going to prevail. I don't need to know the future, because You, Oh God, are already there!" You do not move ahead by constantly looking in a rear view mirror.

In the same way, the past is a rudder to guide you...not an anchor to drag you. We must learn from the past but not live in it.

30% of an average person's anxiety is focused on things about the past that can't be changed. If we were honest with ourselves, we all would say that there is something in our past that we regret doing and wish we could yell "Do-Over". We all long for that clean slate, and that's exactly what our heavenly Father offers us! The story is told of a father and his teenage son who lived in Spain. Their relationship became strained, eventually shattering, and the son ran away from home. The father began a long journey in search of the lost and rebellious son, finally putting an ad in the Madrid newspaper as a last resort. His son's name, along with countless other young boys, was Paco! The ad simply read: Dear Paco, meet me in front of the Madrid newspaper office tomorrow at noon. All is forgiven. I love you." The next day at noon there were 800 "Pacos" in front of the newspaper office, all seeking forgiveness.

The amazing power of forgiveness: God's for us, and ours to ourselves. This is the force behind your purpose.

2. According to Acts 3:19 and Galatians 5:1, why did Christ wipe out your sins?
3. Are you currently experiencing more refreshing/freedom or regret?
4. Have you forgiven your past, but find that others haven't? Using the principle in II Corinthians 10:5 and any other Scripture, how can you combat that negativity?
5. Read Romans 12:2. What keys does this verse give to a healthy thought life?
6. Read Philippians 3:13. How can you relate to Paul in needing to forget your past mistakes?



Ministry

7. If your group made plans to: Share communion together today, using Mark 14:22-26 as your guide. Preface it with a time of personal prayer time and confession for any lack of forgiveness, and an opportunity to allow any conflicts within the group to be resolved.



Evangelism

8. What is a service project that your small group can do for your community or neighbors? Spend a few moments brainstorming and developing an action plan for this coming week!



Worship

9. Spend some time in prayer for each other and then thanking God for His faithful forgiveness and blood that has set us free from bondage.