

Running Toward the Goal: A Vision for Recovery... and Life in Christ

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“Brothers and sisters, 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, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:13-14 NIV



We can learn a lot from Paul’s attitude as he shares his journey from his pre-Christ life, to now walking diligently “toward the goal” that God placed in his transformed heart. We can benefit in our own recovery as we “press toward the goal” that God wants to give to each one of us. In the first part of the verses above, the Apostle Paul was talking about forgetting his past human actions, good and bad. Earlier in the chapter, Paul listed some of his actions and traits that might have given him “street cred” when it came to being holy. He also listed some of his actions from times when he was acting in the flesh. In those times, his motivations may have been

to serve God, but the results were devastating. In his previous years as a Pharisee, Paul harmed a lot of people who loved Jesus. Acts 9:1 reads, “Saul [Paul] was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord’s followers.” Paul made some horrific mistakes. There were a lot of broken people in his wake. Those of us in recovery can likely relate. Maybe we’ve done a few good things in our past, but we’ve also hurt a lot of people too. **Regardless of his past, Paul doesn’t sink into condemnation, nor does he adopt a super-spiritual façade. He places his past on the cross, leaves it there, and declares that he is running toward the goal that Jesus Christ has called him to. In our recovery, we need to do the same. We need to place our past failures and accomplishments on the cross, seek God for a specific vision or calling for our lives, and run toward that goal.** It is so much easier to turn away from our sin and brokenness, when we have a specific goal to run toward. God can give us the grace to bypass anything that gets in the way of our Christ-centered goal.

How do we find out what our specific goal is? The first step is to concentrate on building an intimate relationship with the Lord. God is much more interested in developing a relationship with us, than He is about us doing anything for Him. As we build a relationship with Him, He will show us our purpose, and our lives will naturally bear fruit to fulfill that purpose as we live for Him. **We can ask the Lord to give us a vision – a specific burden and desire – of the special calling He has placed on our lives.** This calling can have many parts. The most important is that which is private between the Lord and us as a beloved son or daughter. There will also be specific aspects of our calling that we share with our family and friends, our coworkers, and our communities. Not all of us are called to full-time ministry, but all of us are called to minister to those God brings our way. **As we grow in our understanding of the calling that the Lord has for us, we can evaluate our choices and avoid things that would interfere with our recovery and hinder us from achieving that calling.** Our sin will hinder us from achieving our calling. Recreation is important, but too much recreation at the expense of time with the Lord or fulfilling our responsibilities will interfere with our calling. Spending time with the right people will help us fulfill our calling, but spending time with those who encourage us to compromise will trip us up.

You may not feel very qualified to ask for a specific calling from God, but in reality, your utter dependence on God qualifies you for your calling. 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 tells us that not many of

us were wise, or smart, or respected in the world's eyes when we were called. Paul explains that God purposefully chooses regular people like us – people who fail, people who are powerless, people the world would call losers – to show others that the things the world sees as vital are not important to God. **God shows His glory through imperfect people, so that He alone gets the glory. This is our hope. If you're feeling too disqualified to receive a calling from God, you are perfectly qualified as you depend on Him to work in your heart.**

Buckle your seatbelt, because God gives us a vision that is way bigger than ourselves. You may struggle to believe that God can actually do anything good in your life, let alone fulfill the huge dream that He placed in your heart. A dream that is way beyond your human abilities to achieve. Maybe you feel like Moses who tried to fulfill his calling in his own strength and ended up spending 40 years taking care of sheep in the middle of nowhere. The good news is that God used that 40 years to work in his heart and equip him to fulfill his calling. Maybe you think that you're like the ten spies who returned from their mission to spy out the Promised Land. They freaked out at the sight of the giants, refused to believe that God could use them to defeat the enemy, and ended up wondering in the wilderness until they died. **The problem is that the ten spies refused to handle their doubt in the right way. They turned away from God instead of toward Him. There is always mercy for those who turn toward God.** We see this in the life of Gideon in Judges, Chapters Six and Seven. When God first calls Gideon he is hiding from the enemies, yet God still calls him a "mighty warrior". After the Lord tells him that He will use him to deliver Israel, Gideon says that He must have the wrong guy since his family is the smallest in his clan, and his clan is the weakest in his tribe. The Lord simply tells him to trust Him and that He will deliver the enemy through him. Gideon is full of doubt, but he keeps his heart open to the Lord and asks for a sign. He ends up preparing a huge feast which the Lord supernaturally consumes. Instead of believing, Gideon panics and figures he's going to die since he's just seen the Lord. The Lord reassures him that he's not going to die and sends him on a training mission to tear down the town's altar to Baal. Gideon obeys, but does so at night because he knows the town's people will be pretty ticked off to see that somebody destroyed their altar. He was right. They came to kill Gideon, but somehow his dad talked them out of it. God was gracious to show Gideon that He could protect him from those who wanted to kill him. Soon the enemies of Israel gathered to fight. The Spirit of the Lord empowered Gideon to call his fellow Israelites to arms. Amazingly, even after they answered the call, Gideon still doubted and asked God for two more signs that He would use him and his army to defeat the enemy. The Lord graciously answered Gideon's requests. Afterwards, we see that Gideon learned to trust the Lord. Before the battle, God whittled his army down twice and left him with only 300 warriors to defeat a massive army. He didn't question God anymore. He obeyed and saw a supernatural victory over his enemies. **God will be gracious to us as we turn toward Him in our fear. He will answer us. He will empower us. He will complete the work that He began in our heart (Philippians 1:6).**

Maybe you backslid and feel like you've totally blown it, and there is no hope of ever being restored. Romans 11:29 reads that "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable." If you have lost sight of the vision that God has given you and lost sight of the goal, repent. If you've backslidden and returned to your sin, repent. Get help. Go to the cross. Return to recovery. Return to the church. Resume the journey toward the goal. Embrace the time of restoration and refocus on rebuilding an intimate relationship with Jesus. Jesus can restore you just like he restored Peter after he denied Him. He has invested in you for the long haul. He will never leave you or forsake you.

What is the vision and calling that the Lord has spoken to your heart? If you haven't ever received one, set aside some time to focus on Him and ask. If you know your calling, surround yourself with others who can help you walk toward the goal that God has set for you. Remember to prioritize your relationship with Christ above all else, and He will be faithful to fulfill His plan for your life.