

Re-Evaluating Our Stuff

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RE-EVALUATE REJOICING

Are you rejoicing right now? That may feel like a silly question to ask right now. How can we rejoice in the middle of a pandemic and social upheaval?

Let's start with being thankful. Here are **10 things I'm thankful for in 2020.**

1. **Families:** We are spending more time with our families.
2. **Drive-by parties:** They have given us a safe way to connect during the pandemic.
3. **Zoom:** Where would we be without video-conferencing platforms right now? I know that we may tire of video meetings, but I have connected with people I wouldn't have been able to connect with otherwise.
4. **Home improvement:** This has become the year to repair and improve our homes.
5. **Running:** This has been a great year to exercise outdoors.
6. **Football:** The NFL is back, and it was just in time!
7. **"The Crown":** My favorite TV series on Netflix, featuring the life and times of Queen Elizabeth II, is still coming out November 15. I will be there. Don't judge me.
8. **Healthcare workers:** We are all grateful for the people who have kept us healthy and taken care of us when we're sick.
9. **Acts of kindness:** People have found ways to be incredibly generous, kind, and loving in the middle of all the chaos of this year. Here's a picture of a man whose grandmother has Alzheimer's. She has had to stay home and stay safe this past year, which interrupted her normal routine of running to the grocery store regularly. She missed her regular trips to the grocery store, so he created a grocery store in his living room so that his grandmother could go shopping. People have been creative and kind in this past year, and it is easy to forget that!
10. **Valley:** Finally, I am deeply thankful for the opportunity to be your pastor and for my new Valley family.

In a few weeks we will be have our annual Thanksgiving service. I hope you are thinking ahead to that service even now. It's going to be an opportunity for us to gather together as a church family in person and online to say "Thank you" to God. Be thinking now about what you're thankful for in 2020, because there are many, many reasons to be grateful.

In Philippians 3:1, Paul told the saints in Philippi to rejoice.

There's a difference, of course, between being happy and giving thanks.

There's also a difference between giving thanks and rejoicing.

In Philippians 3:1 Paul told the saints in Philippi to rejoice. He didn't tell them to be happy or just to give thanks. He went to the heart of the matter and told them to rejoice.

In Philippians 3:1 he wrote,

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

This isn't the first time Paul encouraged the saints in Philippi to rejoice themselves or to join him in rejoicing. Nor will it be his last.

But Paul also knew that rejoicing was a critical spiritual discipline.

Philippians 3:1-16 is going to push us to re-evaluate a lot of things.

We begin by re-evaluating rejoicing and 2020.

Rejoicing is expressing joy or delight, particularly to God, particularly through words and song.

So rejoicing makes sense and can happen no matter what the days are!

Paul was writing to Christians living in difficult days. He told them to rejoice in the Lord regardless of their days.

Like them, we need to re-evaluate our days and rejoicing. These too are days for rejoicing!

As we make our way toward Thanksgiving this year, I hope we can **"Take Back 2020!"** Some of us may have given up on 2020. We may have begun to think that this year is a loss and that we just can't wait for 2021. Well, let's take this year back for joy and rejoicing.

Let's consciously think and talk about the blessings we have received this year.

And let's think and talk about our God, who is tremendously good, and about what our good, good Father wants us to do with these days.

Let's change the storyline and "Take Back 2020" with joy and rejoicing.

Next, Paul urges us to re-evaluate legalism.

RE-EVALUATE LEGALISM

In Philippians 3:2-7, Paul told us that legalism isn't going to get us anywhere, so we might as well stop.

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Paul divided Christians into two stark teams.

Paul stood on one side, along with the saints in Philippi.

On the other side was the group he described in verse 2 as dogs, evildoers, and those who mutilate the flesh.

Just in case you're wondering, those descriptions are unkind in the original language as well. Dogs served as a metaphor for bad, immoral people. "Mutilating the flesh" was just Paul's most delicate way

of describing Christians who advocated observing all of the Jewish ritual customs like circumcision, in order to demonstrate their own new-found righteousness as Christians.

Paul said to look out for them.

The cuts they made in the skin became a metaphor for the way that they were dividing followers of Jesus from one another.

Ironically, Paul called his team the "true-circumcision team" in verse 3. By that he meant that they worshipped by the Spirit of God and put no confidence in the flesh.

However, Paul thought he of all people would have "made the cut" if the flesh mattered.

He had fulfilled both the details and intent of the Old Testament Law.

In verse 5 Paul wrote that he was circumcised on the eighth day, the custom prescribed in Leviticus 12:3, *"And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised."*

Then, he added that he was from the favored tribe of Benjamin.

Consequently, Paul was able to call himself a "Hebrew of Hebrews," a "super-Hebrew."

He was even a Pharisee, meaning that he observed the Jewish laws and customs religiously.

Paul demonstrated his religious and political zeal before he met Jesus by persecuting the church in its early days after Jesus' ascension. (This is well documented in multiple sources.)

He even went so far as to claim that he had kept the Law blamelessly. Of course, he meant the outward obligations of the Law. (Only Jesus could keep the intent of the Law perfectly.)

If anyone except Jesus could earn his righteousness by doing the right things, Paul would have done it.

However, Paul re-evaluated legalism and found that it didn't lead anywhere.

In verse 7, Paul drew a tally line under everything he had accomplished on his own and counted or considered it all "as loss."

Paul re-evaluated all that he had attained by his legalism.

When he re-evaluated it all, he didn't find it worth very much.

Paul used language inspired by ancient accounting.

Basically, Paul was saying that he thought about his own efforts to be righteous as having value. He had placed his own righteousness on the balance sheet of his life as an asset.

Then, he realized that the asset he thought he had was worth absolutely nothing.

He realized a loss on the profit-and-loss statement of his life. The value was all gone.

It was a massive loss. I can't imagine how difficult that was for Paul.

Paul was coming to terms fully with what he had written in Galatians 2:16,

"... yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."

Trying to earn our salvation, even trying to prove our salvation, never leads us anywhere.

Having re-evaluated legalism, can we stop?

Grace is never easy for us to accept.

Actually, the opposite is true. Grace is difficult. We end up grappling with it like we're wrestling an angel in the night, and we come away limping and changed by the experience.

The scandal of the Gospel is that all we need is Jesus, who died and rose again for us.

We can't do anything to earn the forgiveness and eternal life we get through Jesus.

Even after we accept the free gift of Jesus Christ, there is nothing we can do to prove that we were worthy when God claimed us.

That doesn't stop us from trying!

After re-evaluating legalism, Paul pivoted to comfort.

RE-EVALUATE OUR COMFORTS.

In Philippians 3:8-11, Paul wrote that comfort doesn't compare with what's really valuable.

*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as **rubbish**, in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

To his language about suffering losses, Paul added that he considered everything else rubbish.

Paul actually went on about how great the loss was when he realized that his attempts at earning his own righteousness had not worked.

He didn't just go through an accounting process mentally.

Paul said that he considered all of his efforts as becoming rubbish. He said that it's like trash!

And let's be clear: Paul was doing very well in life before he met Jesus.

Paul came from a wealthy family. They were successful in business.

And he was successful in education and well connected in the religious establishment.

Paul was on his way to becoming a very influential person in Judaism in the first century.

He walked away from it all to go on the mission field, raise support through free-will offerings, suffer shipwreck, be imprisoned, get beaten, and face a trial.

He counted everything he left—wealth, pride, success, esteem, influence, and even power—as a giant bag of trash when compared with Jesus.

He wanted to be found "in Jesus" instead.

Paul knew that his own righteousness amounted to nothing on the balance sheet of his life.

However, he knew that God has true righteousness, the kind that's actually going to amount to something on the balance sheet of your life. So, Paul wanted God's righteousness desperately.

God's righteousness is transferred to us by Jesus Christ.

Consequently, Paul wanted the entire experience of being "in Jesus."

His goal was to get the resurrection power of Jesus in his own life, but Paul strongly associated the resurrection power of Jesus with the suffering and death of Jesus.

So to get the resurrection power of Jesus, Paul wanted to share the same kind of suffering Jesus had. Paul wasn't alone, though. 1 Peter 4:13 reads,

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

Plus, he wanted to share in Jesus' death. Paul explained the connection between Jesus' death and our life in Romans 6:3-5 when he wrote,

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Paul made it clear in verse 11 that he wanted the resurrection at any cost.

Paul re-evaluated all the comforts of life and found that they weren't anything compared to Jesus.

Paul grasped what Jesus was saying in Matthew 13:44 when he said,

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

Long before writing Philippians, Paul had realized that Jesus himself was the precious pearl.

He gave up everything else in favor of Jesus, God's Kingdom, and eternal life.

This is the moment that may be crushingly difficult for us, because we like our comforts and our stuff! However, Paul just called it all a big pile of trash!

And having re-evaluated our comforts, can we loosen our grip on them and their grip on us?

Can we let go of our comforts? This means our stuff, even our really cool, really valuable stuff. Can we look at it as temporary, as something destined for the trash heap literally someday?

Can we do the same kind of thing with our power and privileges?

How about our accomplishments?

This isn't easy to think about, because all of these comforts tend to have us in a death grip. We like these things. We work to get them, and we will fight to keep them.

But they're not worth anything really compared with Jesus and his resurrection.

RE-EVALUATE OUR GOALS

In Philippians 3:12-14, Paul reminded us that our goals may need re-evaluation too!

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul wanted us to keep resurrection and perfection in mind.

We know what resurrection means. It means that we are remade for eternity and God's presence through the power of God. Paul wanted us to keep resurrection in mind.

Paul also recognized that he was pushing toward what our Bibles call "perfection." And he wanted us to keep perfection in mind as well.

When we hear about perfection, we think about being without fault or flaw, that perfection like that will only come to us with resurrection and eternity.

Still, Paul had something different in mind. The word he uses for perfection here is completion, having reached our goal.

Jesus has gripped us, claimed us, and taken hold of us, because he has an end for us.

Paul wanted that end. He wanted to be resurrected and have everything God intended for him.

He wanted us to want that as well.

So Paul saw a big pivot in the goals of our lives!

We haven't yet achieved resurrection or perfection. They're still in our future.

So Paul wanted us to forget what was behind. That's counting everything else as rubbish.

Then he wanted us to start straining to what's ahead—resurrection and perfection. He wants us to anticipate them, long for them, and be ready for them.

Paul re-evaluated all of our goals and made us clear on what's important.

He wants us to press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Keep going after that one-and-only goal that matters. Can we do that?

Then Paul counsels us to re-evaluate maturity itself.

RE-EVALUATE MATURITY

In Philippians 3:15-16, Paul reminded us that maturity may be in the rear-view mirror.

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Paul called his way of thinking "maturity."

It's directly related to the word "perfection."

By it, Paul means "those of you who are being completed and who have made some progress toward being complete."

Paul was thinking about his team—Timothy, Epaphroditus, and most of the saints in Philippi.

He wasn't thinking about the other team—the dogs, evildoers, and mutilators of the flesh. He wasn't thinking about the missionary apostles who preached Christ out of selfish ambition. Nor was he thinking about those people in Philippi who were bringing division to the church.

Paul knew that each one of them would have a very different view of maturity and completion.

Maturity really was and is the issue. What constitutes maturity?

Paul said that thinking the way he is describing here constitutes maturity. Forgetting what's behind and straining toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus is what maturity looks like, according to Paul.

The other team had very different visions of maturity. For many of them, maturity meant adopting Jewish customs to demonstrate how seriously we take faith in Jesus. For others of them maturity involved agreeing with them in their disputes with other Christians. For some of them, maturity meant getting on board with their goals for ministry.

Paul said that God would have to deal with them and actually make their lack of maturity clear.

Do you ever hear people talk about maturity as if it were something in front of us?

It happened all the time in the New Testament.

After the Judaizers were done presenting Jewish customs as the pathway to maturity, someone else came along and said that understanding the mysteries of heaven was the pathway to maturity. They were as flawed as the Judaizers.

What does maturity look like to you? People have different ideas and different visions.

Paul re-evaluated maturity and implied it may be behind us.

In verse 16, Paul told those who were truly mature to hold true instead to what they had already attained.

For Paul, maturity wasn't about discovering or learning new things.

Instead, maturity was all about mastering what they already knew. To put it even more clearly, Paul knew that maturity was about being mastered by what they already knew.

For those of us who follow Jesus, the basics of our faith are behind us.

Sometimes it's easy to underestimate those basic things that are behind us in our faith journey.

The unfortunate truth is that we have rarely, if ever, mastered the basics we've passed over.

Grace is the very first thing we are supposed to get when we begin following Jesus. We accept forgiveness and eternal life not as something we earn but as a gift, as grace. However, very few of us have actually mastered grace as Paul presented it. Even those of us who accepted it once and for all usually find ourselves over and over again forsaking grace and trying to prove our worth to God again.

And the next lesson Jesus wanted us to learn after grace was multiplication. He expects us to share with others what he has given to us. "Come, follow me," he said over and over again. In the next breath, he promised to make us "fish for people." As soon as we accept grace, Jesus wants us to turn around and share it with others. Multiplication is one of the most basic lessons we learn as Christ followers, but it is the sign of true maturity, and very few of us have truly mastered it.

Maturity isn't always ahead of us; it's almost always behind us.

Having re-evaluated maturity, can we press on during these days?

Can we find a way to multiply and make more disciples of Jesus? Paul himself will pivot to the topic in the very next verse.

Can we set our minds on the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus?

Can we let go of the piles of rubbish that always seem to consume us?

Can we accept our need for grace daily and get it from Jesus alone?

And can we rejoice in our amazingly good God?

If we can, then we will press on for sure, and we'll **"Take Back 2020."**