

Press on to the goal: A Christian's decision making matrix.
Forget what doesn't matter
Focus on what does

Dear Christians,

Do you like to make big decisions?

In my most recent "big decision", that call to serve as pastor of Christ in Big Bend, WI – a bunch of you spoke with me or emailed me sharing your thoughts. Several of my neighboring pastors talked with me, my family members weighed in, and I spoke with several people at that congregation too. Every one of those conversations was helpful and appreciated. But just about each of you admitted that your comments were somewhat biased. So - a week and a half ago, I sought out a good friend that isn't a member here, not related, and just a good Christian guy with a good head on his shoulders. And I figured he might be as unbiased as I could find. He asked me all the details of the call and then we evaluated – and he said something that reminded me of our text today. He said – it really depends what your goal is – on what basis you'll be making this decision. At first, he thought I should go. He figured that proximity to family, the higher salary and the Christian school for the kids would make my job easier. And, he said, I'd be sharing the gospel (which I told him was my goal) with tons more people there each Sunday. But then we started talking about urgency and opportunity; we started talking big picture. And that's what our text is about.

Look at this reading from Philippians and you'll see some of the thoughts that were running through my head. This text, really, provides a wonderful decision making matrix for a Christian. Paul tells us to keep the goal in mind – to "**Press on toward the goal**" in everything – forgetting what doesn't matter and focusing on what does. So why did I stay? Because I feel that here, God is giving me so many opportunities to put that eternal goal, that prize in front of those who don't see it or are distracted from it, and even more, he's using me to train you to do the same.

That's what it is all about: Press on toward the goal. And Paul says that we do that by putting out of our minds the things that don't matter. Like a sprinter wouldn't think of looking back in the middle of the race or a basketball player dare not look in the stands as he's shooting a free throw – Paul says not to get distracted. How? Realize what those distractions are. Realize what EVERYTHING else is.

In this chapter Paul had been defending against those false teachers that were trying to draw believers away by touting their credentials. They were confident that they were living the life God wanted and they were worth listening to. This is where Paul gave his list of all the reasons he would have had for pride and confidence if it were about the flesh, all about this life. He was a purebred Benjamite, had followed all those extra rules as a Pharisee, and had been a more zealous Pharisee than any other. But then he says this: "**Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.**" Then our text – "**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** (literally dung...I consider them *gross*), **that I may gain Christ...**"

Think of what a complete change of mind that is from the normal. He wasn't proud of his accomplishments, because he knew they had nothing to do with what really mattered, his standing with Christ. That's why he said he forgot about those things "**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.**"

So let's ask the big questions: Who are you? What really matters about you? Do people know you as a hard worker, a great salesperson, or a wonderful teacher? A faithful husband? A beautiful wife? A good coach? A great parent? Even a dedicated volunteer or powerful church worker... As nice as all those things are, as good as all those things are – when it comes to what really matters – when it comes to who you truly are - Paul uses the picture of what you have to pick up after your dog to describe every single one of the titles I just listed.

Or how about this question: What do you live for? We know there's a problem if our answer is the job or the sports or the stuff or the vice or the extravagance – but what about the good things? Dave Ramsey says that the new status symbol is the paid off home mortgage. What a wonderful thing to think about! Or maybe

you live for your picture perfect family, or your volunteerism? Good things, right? But when we're following Paul's decision making matrix – even they are “what is behind”, even they are loss compared to the goal.

All our accomplishments, all our achievements are nothing because they are things that are part of our own righteousness. Paul says he wants the real righteousness, the one that is through faith in Christ – the one given, not earned. So all things are a loss in comparison. Can we say with Paul – “I want to know Christ more than anything else”?

Realize what that is saying. If we agree with Paul today, we are destroying just about every excuse you've ever come up with for skipping a Bible Study or devotion or worship opportunity. If my accomplishments in athletics or the opportunities I want to give my kids are dung compared to growing closer to my Savior; if the promotion or the overtime at work truly nauseates me if it gets in the way of God's Word, if extra sleep is like the insides of a smelly diaper – and we mean what we say – our lives need to see some changes. We have lived for what is behind more than pressing on toward the goal.

“But come on, pastor, this is just too extreme, right? We've got to live, right?” Yes. It is extreme, but so is what the Bible says. In our Old Testament lesson God said that the rescue from Egypt and the miracle of the Red Sea – that event that changed the entire Israelite worldview from one of slavery and helplessness at the mercy of stronger nations to the undefeatable world power that God made them – that miracle, God said, was nothing compared with what we're talking about today. Try telling that to someone standing at the shores of that Red Sea with the adrenaline rush of their fear overcome by overwhelming victory. That is nothing. Because God has something better.

Every moment of every day, you are making decisions. Apply God's decision making matrix. As crazy as it sounds – forget what is behind, including all your previous sins of bad decisions – Forget them because God made a decision, based on His love and he sent His Son. Forget them because, as Paul says, “**you want to know Christ**” – and look at how he goes on – “**I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.**”

How is it possible to make decisions that are this extreme and so extremely contrary to the way of the world we live in? It would take a paradigm-shifting miracle greater than the one God performed with the water of the Red Sea. Here it is. You just saw it. God takes a child of this world – and makes him a child of heaven. With water more powerful than the crashing walls of the Red Sea, he crushed sin and destroyed Satan's power over us. Just like he took William, he claimed you with His water and the Word and put all that other stuff behind – and gave you the prize, the goal.

So act like it, Paul says. Press on toward the goal – forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. Focus on the prize, the goal. Even though the world waves its distractions more than the opposing team's fans during a free throw – you are here to press on toward that goal – knowing Christ more and more and the power of His resurrection.

That means that we live without the guilt of our failures. They are “behind”. Jesus died for them, and Jesus rose to prove it – and now he connects you to that miraculous act – putting perfection in front of you. In a few minutes, in the Lord's Supper, you'll get a foretaste of what is in front of you, His body and blood he used to pay the price to eat and drink – to make a part of you - to assure you of who you are and that the goal is yours. You've been baptized so that, like Paul wrote – “**we were buried with him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**”

“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, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.” That is the crown. That is the prize. Like Paul says in our text – it's not about my striving perfectly – but knowing Christ, knowing what he has in store for me – I can't help but keep straining toward it.

So with that motivation – make all your decisions. So what do you think? Did I make the right decision on the call? Who cares? That is behind. We're here together to press on toward the goal of heaven. Let's keep that promise in our focus and together – press on toward the goal. In Christ, Amen