

The Year of Direction Not Perfection

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[0 : 00] All right, well, once again, Happy New Year to all of you. Who else is sick this morning? Anybody?! You don't want to raise your hand because the person next to you is going to lean the other direction.

Well, I feel like the social distancing between me and y'all is enough here, so we will move forward. I'm excited about what I have to share with you this morning.

How about this last year? How many of you had a good 2025? Good. Awesome. How many of you had an okay 2025?

How many of you just hated this year and you're so ready for it to be over? Thank you for being honest, a couple of you. I'm glad it wasn't just me. I'm kidding. I'm kidding. It's just because I'm sick right now. That's all right.

Listen, it probably wasn't perfect. If you put the year in review, it probably wasn't perfect. But there were probably some good memories, probably some not so good memories.

[1 : 07] But now we're facing 2026, just a couple days away. And this is going to be a great year, isn't it? We say that every year, don't we?

This one's going to be different. These resolutions are going to stick. I'm going to do them this time. I'm going to exercise more. I'm going to eat better. I'm going to save more. I'm going to read more. All the things we know we probably should be doing to better ourselves. And yet somehow, at some point during the year, things slow down a little bit.

And we stop some of the goals that we had. We pivot. We'll do something a little different. Because we realize this year is becoming like so many years before it.

So what do you do? What happens? How do we change 2026 to be different from 2025 and 2024 and so on?

[2 : 16] Let's see what Paul had to say in Philippians chapter 3. Would you go with me to Philippians chapter 3? We're not starting a brand new series this Sunday. This is kind of a standalone message that I'm hoping to leave with y'all about the year of direction, not perfection.

So let that hang in your mind as you turn to Philippians chapter 3. We're going to read verses 12 through 14. The year of direction, not perfection.

The apostle Paul understood this context between what we want and what we strive for and what we are faced with, the hard truths about ourselves and the difficulty of change year in and year out. He understood this. When he writes this letter to the church in Philippians, he's not early in his faith. He's seasoned. He suffered.

He's writing once again from prison where he wrote most of his letters. And in chapter 3, Paul becomes deeply pastoral with these people and deeply protective of them.

[3 : 30] There were voices telling this church in Philippians that faithfulness could be measured by credentials. What you've accomplished. What you've earned.

The amount of bragging rights you have in certain areas of your life. Whether it's spiritual performance. Your religious resume. Your moral achievements.

People were bragging about these things. They were measuring their faithfulness by them. So Paul does something surprising here. He shares his resume.

Maybe that's not exactly what we were expecting him to do. Instead of chastising them for sharing their resume, he actually lays out his, which would top all of theirs.

He said, look, all the things that you're bragging about, mine has been more impressive. I've been a Pharisee. I've received all the top religious training. I've made it to the top of the ladder in the world that you're trying to brag about.

[4 : 35] You have nothing to flex on anybody about. So he lists his background, his pedigree, his obedience, his zeal. He said, I achieved it all.

If righteousness could be earned, Paul would have earned it. But then he does something, once again, unexpected. He says, everything that I once counted as gain, now I count as loss. Everything that used to bring him this swelling sense of pride, now he sees it as so little value. Nothing to brag about. And that's where he leaves us when we arrive in chapter 3 and verse 12. So let's look at it together.

He said, I tell all you this. I lay out my resume. I'm bragging on myself.

[5 : 42] Not as though I have already obtained. Or not that I've already been made perfect. He said, I press on.

Remember, I count all that stuff before as loss. It didn't win me anything. He said, I press on to make it my own.

What is it? The prize of Jesus. He says, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I don't consider that I've made it my own.

Jesus did this for me. You understand what he's saying here? I didn't earn my salvation. I didn't earn God's love for me. Jesus made me that.

And then he goes on to say, but this one thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind. Straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for this prize.

[6 : 42] What's the prize? Can we say it together? Of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let's try that again. Ready? Of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

That's the prize. That was the prize for Paul. Listen, that was the prize for Jesus on his time on earth. He said his father had given him a mission.

His father had called him to a specific task. And he was going to press on until he fulfilled the will of his father. That was good enough for Jesus. That was good enough for Paul.

It's good enough for you. It's good enough for me. It's good enough for your family. It's good enough for your future. That's the prize. So this is where Paul is setting us up today.

He says, I'm not finished. I haven't arrived. I'm still being molded. I'm still growing. I'm still becoming. Still moving upward.

[7 : 43] This is not false modesty. This is God-inspired honesty. That's what Paul's sharing with us here. He's pulling back the curtain and revealing the why, the how, what makes him tick behind all these great accomplishments that we see God doing in Paul's life throughout the New Testament.

He says this is how. So let's look at number one together. The past is a compass, not a cage. The past is a compass, not a cage.

What do we mean by this? Paul says, I'm forgetting what lies behind. Now let's be clear. He's not talking about denying his past.

He's not talking about rewriting history. Paul remembers his past clearly.

He remembers who he was. He remembers what he did. He remembers what he trusted. He remembers what he chased or pursued. And he remembers the damage it caused. The name of Christ.

[8 : 56] He did so much of that in the name of God. Not even realizing at the time that he was doing so much damage to God's mission on this earth.

So Paul is not saying, I'm going to try harder this year. I'm going to go back and try to change my past. I'm going to try to redeem what I've done.

He says, no, I'm forgetting it. I'm moving on from it. I'm going to learn from it. But I'm going to move forward. And I'm not just going to pretend that somehow it's all going to be different.

God is making me different. He's giving all the credit, all the glory to God. Not saying by my sheer willpower, I found the truth. And now this is the new way that I'm walking.

So God had to stop me in my tracks. Can anybody testify that what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus is maybe similar to what's happened to you? That maybe God at some point in your life just had to stop you in your tracks to get your attention?

[10 : 03] I can testify to that. I know many of you have. Some of you have even shared those experiences with me. And that's what happened to Paul. So he had nothing to brag about except what God had done.

From man's perspective, he had plenty to brag about. He had achieved so much. But he realized it earned him nothing of value. It earned him nothing of substance.

So where does this leave us? He says, I'm going to forget what lies behind. And I'm going to strain forward. Remember, strain forward.

Here we go. To what lies ahead. The past is a compass, not a cage. It's telling you where to go. It's guiding you where not to go back to. But it's not locking you there. Unless you let it.

[11:05] So let me say this to you. Lamentations chapter 3 and verse 22 and 23. The faithful love of the Lord never ends. His mercies never cease.

Great is his faithfulness. Great is his faithfulness. His mercies begin afresh. Each morning. This prophecy from the Old Testament and this testimony of God's faithfulness and his goodness still rings true in our ears today because it's the same God that they wrote about all that time ago. It's the same God that was with David. Same God that was with Samson. Same God that was with Daniel. Same God that was with Joseph.

His faithfulness is still great. His mercies still begin new and fresh every morning and every new year.

God's mercies are new and fresh. So there's no reason to feel trapped. There's no reason to feel trapped in the cage of your own inadequacy.

[12:21] There's no reason to feel trapped in the cage of, man, I just can't seem to get over this. I can't seem to get past this. I can't seem to win the victory over this.

Forgetting what lies behind. Because every morning, God's mercies are new. God's mercies are fresh. And they're enough.

They're enough for you. They're enough for your children. They're enough for your marriage. They're enough for your relationships. They're enough for your financial stress. God's mercies are enough.

Every new morning. So the past shows us where we can go. Shows us where to avoid. But it's not a cage that locks us there and says, forget it.

Why even try? Because you know you'll never change. That's man speaking. That's your flesh speaking. But that's not God speaking. So I want to leave you with this thought.

[13:25] A couple of thoughts here. The past first is neither a prison sentence nor a trophy case. What do I mean by that? The past is not a prison sentence.

That's that cage I was talking about a moment ago. That's what locks you down and says, forget it. You'll never be different. You'll always have the same problems. You'll always have the same struggle. You'll always fight the same battles.

And you'll always lose them. Now I know I'm not the only one who's had to fight those thoughts. Fight those fears and those doubts. Especially sometimes lying in bed at night and your mind just starts spiraling.

And man, wish I could change this about myself. Wish I could be different. But the past is not a prison sentence because of the mercies of God.

But then it's also not a trophy case. The past is not something that we would look back and say, oh man, it was so great. It was so great. If we could just go back to that.

[14:25] That's human speaking. That's people speaking. That's flesh speaking. That's not faith in an almighty God whose mercies are new every morning.

That's why I showed you that video a moment ago before I got up here that talks all about a new year. And how one of the key themes about the God we worship is new.

God does new things. He said, behold, I am doing a new thing. Don't you see it? We've talked about that many times. During my time here as pastor.

And I want to remind you that if God's not doing something new in your life, ask yourself why. And then go to him and ask God, why am I not seeing something new that you're doing in my life?

So oftentimes we'll get satisfied with the old. We'll get satisfied with the trophies from our past. And we'll want to go back and point everybody to him and say, remember this?

[15:32] Remember how great this was? There's no reason not to look back at what God has done and say, see what God has done. But then it's not going to God and saying, can you do all that same stuff again?

Can you get us back to that place? When God is saying, no, no, no, no. That was for then. This is for now.

And you're going to trust me with what's going to be for up ahead. This is the new thing that God wants to do. So the past cannot be a trophy case for us.

And that's one of the points that Paul's trying to make here. So what have we learned? The past informs us without imprisoning us. The past informs us where to go, where God's now leading us because of what he's done, because of what we've endured, what we've experienced, how we've failed.

Now the past informs us, but it doesn't have to imprison us. Number two, the future is a direction, not a deadline.

[16 : 41] The past is a compass, not a cage. And the future is a direction, not a deadline. The future points us in the same direction that the past and its compass will be guiding us.

The future lays out the direction only if we're listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. But it's not a deadline. Paul never said, I've got to hurry up and do everything that God wants me to do because I feel like I'm running out of time.

Now look, I'm sure there were times in the weakness of his flesh when he did feel like he was running out of time. There's been times when I have, and I suspect you as well. It's one of those fears that we carry with us.

Are we running out of time? Maybe the clock ticking on our lives on this earth. Maybe times for a certain stage of life and what we hope to accomplish during that stage of life.

Whether you're a kid, a teenager, college age, 20-something, single, married, newly married, first baby, couple kids on their way, young kids, junior high kid, whatever stage of life you're in, you feel like a clock is ticking on that stage.

[18 : 11] Man, I've got to fix my kids while they're little because they're a mess right now, and I don't want to see what that looks like when they get old. Whatever it is, whatever stress is filling your brain and fears are filling your brain, let go of the deadline.

Release the deadline that you've placed on yourself because God has not placed that on you. God is never hurried. God, it's been a truth that I've had to learn only recently.

I promise you, still trying to wrap my head around it. God is never hurried. He's never in a rush. Why?

Because He exists outside of time. One day with the Lord, it's like a thousand years with us. The Bible teaches us this principle that we can't even understand the concept of God's view of time. So release the deadline to Him and follow the right direction. What do we mean by the direction?

[19 : 22] We're talking about future-focused faith. We're talking about future-focused faith. Not past-focused faith.

Not pointing to the trophy case. Not pointing to all our failures. But future-focused faith, what does that do? It grows us in wisdom. Psalm chapter 90, verse 12.

Teach us to realize the brevity of life so that we may grow in wisdom. Teach us to understand that no matter what we do, no matter how hard we work, how hard we plan, how hard we try to make it all fit, life is still short.

Life is still out of our hands. Life is but a vapor. It appears for a little time, and then it vanishes away, Ecclesiastes teaches us.

So, teach us to understand this, God. Teach us to wrap our heads around this idea that this life, nothing is guaranteed. So, that should not fill us with dread and panic and desperation.

[20 : 35] That should fill us with wisdom. The only path forward, when everything is out of my hands, is to follow the leading of someone I trust.

Well, his name is Jesus. And he called us all to follow him. He called us all to be his disciples or his followers. That's how we grow in wisdom.

So, the future is a direction, not a deadline. Paul talked about that back in Philippians 3. He said, I press on toward the upward call.

He had a very specific direction that he was moving. God was leading him onward and upward. And eventually, he led him home to be with his Savior.

But until that day, God continually led Paul onward and upward. Look back at the trajectory of your life. Would you say that God was leading you onward and upward every step of the way?

[21 : 39] Or would you say that maybe he took some detours along the way? I have. I know you have as well. But again, we're not going to look at the past and say, well, forget it, man.

I guess I just can't follow Jesus because I haven't done it faithfully my whole life. Of course you can. Of course we can. The direction is always laid out in front of us right there.

Paul doesn't say, I finally got disciplined. I finally figured it all out. This is going to be my breakthrough year. He said, I just keep pressing on.
I fail. I get back up. I press on. I hurt somebody. I try to make it right. And then I get back up and I press on.
I suffer an affliction. I suffer a struggle. A season of storm in my life.
[22 : 35] God gets me through it. And I press on. Future-focused faith grows our wisdom. But what do we mean by pressing on?
It doesn't mean you're not going to stumble. But it means you won't stop. Paul didn't stop. He just kept pressing on.
It's a far more realistic. It's a far more biblical goal. If you need to set some New Year's resolutions, do that.
If you've got some goals that you want to achieve in this new year, there's nothing wrong with goal setting. But let me ask you this. Set a goal to not stop.
Set a goal that when you stumble in 2026, because it will happen, we're all going to stumble. You're not going to stop.
[23 : 37] You're going to stumble in setting aside dedicated, personal, private, quiet time with the Lord. You're going to stumble in that. But just don't stop.
You're going to stumble in fixing your gaze back on Jesus and not getting distracted by all the cares of this life and all the distractions, the temptations, and everything that this world throws at you.
You're going to stumble in that. But just don't stop. That's the key to a, can we say, Pauline Christianity.
A relationship with Jesus that looks like something like Paul had. Because that relationship was special. That relationship was unique. I want that kind of relationship.
I want that kind of connection with the one who died for me and rose again. We just came through this Christmas season. We celebrated Jesus all over the world. Let's don't stop in 2026.
[24 : 41] This is what separates. You say the sheep from the goats. This is what separates the real Jesus followers from those who just jumped on the Christmas bandwagon. It's when the new year starts.
And they're still praising him. It's when February, March, April, May, June, the summer comes. They're still praising him.
And they're not stopping. They might have stumbled. They might have hit the brakes a time or two. They might have skinned their knee a little bit. They might have caused some harm along the way. But God has forgiven them.
He's restored them. He's lifted them back up. And they're not stopping. That's a disciple. That's a follower of Jesus. Jesus. So, 2026.
Happy New Year. It's going to be a happy New Year. It can be. It can be for all of us. How can we make this new year happy? Dr. Tony Evans once challenged his church by preaching, don't look back when God is calling you forward.
[25 : 51] Can I give you the same challenge this morning? Don't look back when God is calling you forward. The biblical example of Lot's wife comes to my mind.
They're leaving Sodom and Gomorrah, wicked cities. God told them, I'm going to cast judgment on them. I'm going to destroy them. Don't look back.
Keep following me out. And don't look back at those cities. And what did Lot's wife do? She looked back. And the biblical account tells us she was turned into a pillar of salt.
Still one of the harder miracles that we see in the Old Testament for me to wrap my head around. How did that happen? God can do anything, can't he? Don't look back.
Why would you look back at something that caused so much harm? Why would you look back at something that you fell time and time again as a result of?
[26 : 57] But let's switch to the other side of the coin. Why would you look back over and over again at the glory days of the past when God's calling you to look forward in anticipation of what he's going to do today, tomorrow, next week?
Are you ready for God to move and do a new thing in 2026? I pray you'll take that to heart.
I pray you'll consider that, not just in this moment, but as you resume your week next week, as school starts back up in the new year, I pray that you will say, this will be a year not of perfection.

Paul couldn't do it. I can't either. But it will be a year of direction. Listen, God has given this church a direction.

Just since I've been here, I've seen it with my own eyes. Christ's kingdom mission must take first place in everything that we do.

[28 : 13] That's the direction that this church has. It reveals itself in the baptisms that we get to see. It reveals itself in the people that we welcome in, what they look like, where they live, what their socioeconomic status is.

Christ's kingdom mission must take first place over our preferences in everything that we do. The life change that we get to celebrate, we see it there.

The discipleship that takes place, that we pursue together, we see it happening there. This church has a direction. The misplaced priorities that we willingly lay aside to put Christ's kingdom mission first.

We see it there. We see our direction all around us. The Christian unity that we sacrificially protect by forgiving each other, by sacrificing for each other.

We see our direction there. This is the way forward. Even when it feels different, even when it's hard, even through the fear of the unknown, this is the Jesus way.

[29 : 30] Would you bow your heads with me? God, this is my prayer for 2026, that it would be a year of direction for our church. That they would rally, that they would unite, that you would unite this church together around your kingdom mission.

That in every area of the ministry of our church, in every family that makes up our church, in every individual heart, that is a part, an essential part of this church.

That your kingdom mission would take first place. That the direction would be clear. So even when hard times come, even when change happens, even when stumbles happen, we don't stop in the direction.

We're not striving to be a perfect church. Thank God we'll never be. But we are striving to follow the direction that you've laid out. God, move us in the right direction.

Onward and upward. Asking you to do a new thing. In my heart. In the hearts of your people. In the heart of this church.

[30 : 53] We'll give you the glory for it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Thank you for being with us this morning. Would you keep your seats just for a moment? The ladies are going to play. We will have just a moment of prayer before we dismiss.

If God's working on you about something. This is a great time to come forward. Kneel at the altar. You can sit in your seat. Pray. Have some quiet moments.

Just to let God reflect. Your heart. What he's trying to teach you. From his word this morning. If you need to pray with someone.

Come down front. We'll grab somebody to pray with you. If you'd like to place your membership in this church. We'll welcome you to do that. Love to have that conversation with you.

If you need to turn from sin. And turn to the Savior this morning. And accept Christ. As the one Lord of your life. That's the most important decision you could ever make.

[31 : 57] Love to meet you down front. And talk with you about that today. If you'd like to follow Josie's example in baptism.

And make your faith public before the church. We can talk with you about that as well. You just respond to however God is leading you.