

“Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead” Philippians chapter 3 verse 13

Have you ever messed things up? We all must have at some time in our lives. Some might have messed up more than others. An abiding memory from my childhood is my mum regularly serving Sunday dinner and saying “Sorry about the yorkshire pudding.” It was always either under or over done. No one minded. We can mess up small things and the consequences are not especially harmful. My mum only had to endure our derisive laughter.

But then we can mess up in big ways, with serious consequences. A wrong decision can lead to loss of a job, or a home, or a relationship, or even life itself. What Paul is telling us is that we can never go back to have another go at what we have got wrong, but we can go forward.

It's not always easy to see how that can be possible with life situations. How can you say to someone who has been rendered homeless, or who has suffered life changing injuries “Never mind, forget what is past and push on to what is ahead.” In some situations it must be incredibly difficult, if not impossible to see any way forward.

But Paul is not talking about our life situations, at least not primarily. He is talking about our journey of faith with God. We who believe have been promised a more abundant life in this world, eternal life in the next and an eternal reward for our faithfulness. That is what Paul is saying is always ahead of us. He says “I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ.”

Behind him in his life are his opposition to the Christian faith before he came to know Christ for himself, all the hardships he has suffered, all the persecution and ill treatment he has received and, I am sure, all the ways he must feel that he has messed up. But those things are in the past. He doesn't dwell on them other than to consider what he might be able to learn from them. None of those things disqualifies him from the prize that is waiting for him. To think in this way is a sign of Christian maturity.

And also, if we have messed up in our lives, if we trust ourselves into God's hands then I am convinced that, however low we have come, God is able to show us a way forward to a better way of being. If you are in despair today, then please ask God to help you. I don't know what he will do, or when, but he will do something.

## **Prayer**

*Father, thank you so much that you have a future for everyone who turns to you by faith in your Son Jesus. Thank you that there is nothing that can spoil or change the promise that you have for your children, that there is a better life waiting for us, in this world and in the next. Thank you that, when we make a mess of things, you lift us up stronger and put us back on the road. In Jesus name, amen.*

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