



18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
1<sup>st</sup> October 2023

Finding freedom  
from the maze  
of your past hurts

**Main verse:**

*"... 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)

How many of you have ever experienced walking through a maze? I have and I hated it. I found the feeling of being trapped, lost, and continually finding myself at a dead-end infuriating. So, unless I can see over the hedged walls and see my way to the exit, I'll never enter another one.

In many ways, our past hurts or painful memories, can be like a maze in our lives. We can get stuck inside a windy, confusing web where, whichever way we turn, we feel like we're not making any progress, rather we keep finding ourselves at just another dead end.

**Point 1 | We are all susceptible to getting lost in a maze of our past hurts, old sins and painful memories. When we are trapped in the past, we'll see our present and our future through the lens of our past hurts.**

It is easy to find ourselves living in the past, when we allow our past sins or hurts to skew or taint our ability to see the present and the future.

We can be a bit like the person who, while driving in their car, has an accident because they were constantly looking in the rearvision mirror, and didn't see what was happening right in front of their eyes.

About two weeks ago, my message involved sharing with you some vulnerable aspects of my personal story. Today's passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians, encourages us once again, to step into some vulnerable spaces.

I'm confident in sharing some of my experiences, knowing that all of you know what it is like to not only have painful memories, but also what it is like when situations or people trigger those memories to resurface.

The verse I'd like to focus on is where Paul writes,

*"... 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)

We all have a past. Some of us have lived through some very difficult experiences, which have wounded and scarred our hearts, and perhaps even our bodies. These painful memories are connected to certain places, certain music or songs, a certain piece of clothing or jewellery, certain people, or even a certain smell.

When an event or scenario occurs in our present-day moment, that's similar to what occurred in the past, it can be very easy for us to *relive* these past hurts, as though they were happening all over again. It's kind of like walking down a corridor in a maze, only to find yourself at the same dead end you were at, just moments before.

Also, if we become stuck or trapped in the maze of past hurts, we will see or regard our present situation, through the lens, or in the light of, those painful memories.

Allow me to share very briefly an example from my own life. Most of you know that more than a decade and a half ago, I was divorced. When divorce occurs, it is almost certain that one party will experience feelings of betrayal, rejection and resentment toward the other.

It may become difficult to establish new trusting relationships, and the same feelings of rejection can surface over and over again. As I shared a few weeks ago, we may hold onto unforgiveness and bitterness toward people for years, rather than offering forgiveness as Jesus teaches. And, if you are trapped in a maze of painful memories, it will be impossible to find freedom unless healing is found.

I am not the only one susceptible to getting trapped in this maze. In fact, in our church community in the last three weeks, the dynamic of the past influencing the present, has come into play again and again.

So, let us allow the Spirit of God to teach us, through Paul's words, so we can experience the freedom from old sins and past hurts, that God desires. Up to this point in his letter, Paul has been discussing that our salvation and freedom from sin, does not come through human effort, nor through our ability to keep God's holy law. Rather, we are made right in the eyes of God through what Jesus Christ has done for us. (3:9) Therefore, we do not place our confidence in human effort (3:3), rather we depend on Jesus and the power of the Spirit to see by faith (v9) God's ability to transform us (v10).

**Point 2 | The process of letting go of the past, means allowing Jesus to come and heal hurtful memories and experiences, accepting his offer to walk with us toward freedom.**

Paul writes that we are to "forget the past" (v13). Now, it is virtually impossible to forget the past. So why would Paul urge us to do what is impossible?

Paul is primarily referring to forgetting our past sins, for they have been forgiven and removed from us through the blood of Jesus. However, he also includes his failure to live up to God's righteous standard. And when we think about our memories, it is actually the painful ones, that we remember most vividly.

For many of us, it is our vivid memory of past hurts and sins, that causes us to be triggered when we encounter situations or scenarios which are similar to those we've experienced before.

It is helpful to think of Paul's guidance as being for us to, "Let go of the past ..."

Then the question becomes: How do we let go of the past, to be free to see both the present and the future through the eyes of faith?

The only way to exit the maze of our past is to ask Jesus to come and heal us. Think of the person stuck in a maze. Yes, they could just use their mobile to ask for guidance from someone who has done the maze before and knows the way out. But can't you just imagine the communication difficulties ... 'turn right!' 'Oh No, hang-on, not your right, my right.' That is not what Jesus did.

Jesus recognised that we were stuck in a situation from which we could not escape, and so he made his way into the maze, to meet us where we were. Then he held out his hand toward us and said, "Come follow me, and I will guide you toward freedom and heal your heart as we walk."

Now, I would like to clarify. We do not need to walk through this pathway toward healing alone. We may call on a trusted friend, a prayer counsellor, or professional counsellor to walk with us.

However, what I'd like to reiterate is that Jesus brings healing to us, by being present with us – in our pain and in our confusion – walking with us toward freedom. Yet as you all know, the healing process is usually long and arduous. But, once the wound has been healed, there will be a sense of freedom and release.

Because I have experienced healing from my past hurts of my divorce, the memories don't have the same 'sting' as they once did. I may remember everything that occurred, but there is a freedom to share about these events openly and honestly, all the while taking into consideration the appropriateness of the context and with whom they are shared.

While it is true that painful emotions may resurface, especially when stirred by similar scenarios, when our heart has been healed, we will be in a position to help others who are walking the same pathway, assisting them to walk with Jesus towards the freedom and healing. Paul writes that when we "let go" of the past, we will become free to press on toward the future to which God is calling us.

**Point 3 | Joyful living comes as we experience God's healing from past hurts, entrusting to him our present situations, and encouraging others who are experiencing similar difficulties.**

The process of "letting go" means we release from our clutches the hurt of past sins, receiving forgiveness, and we place into the hands of God, what we cannot do entrusting him with the present and the future. This is the essence of the well-known *Serenity Prayer*.

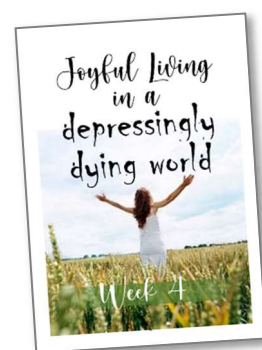
We then apply our faith to believe that God is actively working on the situation, even when we can't see any change taking place. Paul writes,

*"Instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank him for his answers. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)*

Notice that we cannot expect to experience God's peace, until we have entrusted everything to him in prayer.

Some of you didn't like that I entitled our Philippians theme: *"Joyful living in a depressingly, dying world."* I hear you. But I also want to be real with you. Our world *is* often depressing without hope, and it is indeed dying without life.

Joyful living comes when we receive healing and forgiveness from our past hurts and old sins, letting them go, by entrusting them to God. Then we may live with joy and hope, looking forward to what lies ahead, so to receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Jesus Christ is calling us.



## Philippians Devotional – Week 4

We move on further into chapter 3 of Paul's letter to the Philippians. If you'd like a copy of the devotional, printed versions are in the church foyer or the devotional may be downloaded from the church's website.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.  
Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time;  
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;  
Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it;  
Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will;  
That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.  
**Amen.**