

Letting Go of Yesterday

By Wally Odum

Memory can be tricky. Beryl Pfizer captured what I sometimes do. She explained, "I write down everything I want to remember. That way, instead of spending a lot of time trying to remember what it is I wrote down, I spend the time looking for the paper I wrote it down on." Even though I have typical problems with my memory, **my past shows up unexpectedly in my dreams. While I'm sleeping I will experience, in living color, some drama that evokes a deep emotional response. My dreams can go so far into my past that the actors may be people who have passed on.**

But, the anxieties that dreams stir up in me seem so real that I wake up breathing hard. It means that there is somewhere in my subconscious mind a recorder that won't stop taping. It goes back to real events in my life, but also creates scenes that reawaken old worries. It has the power to hit "replay" and not only interrupt my sleep but also disturb my days.

My conclusion is that even though I have memory problems when I'm awake, my past anxieties are still buried somewhere in my subconscious. What do I do when those old feelings bubble to the surface of my mind? Paul's advice to the Philippian believers is still the answer. "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](#)). Interestingly, Paul wrote, "This **one** thing I do" then mentioned **two** things. It must mean that those two actions are so connected that they can't be done alone. We can't strain toward something without forgetting what is behind.

We can't focus our minds on Jesus and what He can do for us while we're focusing our minds on our past and what we've done—either good or bad. Paul wanted all of us to know that we have to lay aside our past successes and failures to possess our futures. Listen to the terms he used to describe the future we're to pursue. We strain toward ... the goal ... to win the prize ... for which God has called ... heavenward in Christ Jesus. Whatever those **things behind** were, we're to focus on God and the goal He has for us in Christ Jesus. We can't look both ways at once. That's why turning from the **things behind** is something we are to **do**. If we have come to the cross and received the forgiveness Jesus provided for us, we don't have to lug old, negative memories with us into a new year.

Thankfully, one of the things we can put behind us is our emotional pain. We have each been hurt. But, we can move on from that pain and whatever caused it to a bright future. We don't want to look back

because, as every runner knows, when we look back we slow down. Forgetting doesn't mean, of course, that we wipe out our memories. It means we make a conscious decision not to let the past absorb our attention and hinder our progress. If we can move from this year to the next by choosing to be free from our past, we will be positioned to focus on the future and what God has in mind. Instead of being consumed with our past behavior (good and bad), we can depend on who Jesus is and what He's done. That will free us from our old worries and fears. As Corrie ten Boom once wrote, "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength." There's a better way. We can forget the **things behind** and spend our energies straining toward what is ahead.