

PAST MEMORIES

Is forgetting the past biblical?

Question: "Is forgetting the past biblical? Does the Bible instruct us to forget the past?"

Answer: The apostle Paul ends a section in [Philippians 3](#) by saying, "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 (verses 13–14). Is Paul instructing us to forget everything that ever happened before we met Christ? Is this a command to purge our minds of all memories?"

It is important to consider the passage that precedes these words. Paul had just listed all his religious qualifications that, to the Jewish mind, were of supreme importance. He then states, "I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (verse 8). Paul is making the point that no fleshly accomplishment matters in comparison with knowing Christ and trusting in His righteousness alone for salvation ([Ephesians 2:8–9](#)). Regardless of how good or how bad we may have been, we must all come to Christ the same way: humble, repentant, and undeserving of His forgiveness ([Romans 5:8](#); [Titus 3:5](#)).

The word *forgetting* in this passage means "no longer caring for, neglecting, refusing to focus on." Our memories store millions of pieces of information gained through our senses since birth. Some experiences are impossible to forget, and any effort to forget them only makes them more prominent. Paul is not advising a memory wipe; he is telling us to focus on the present and the future, rather than the past.

It's easy to "live in the past." Whether it's a past victory that our minds

continually replay or a past defeat that hangs over us like a shroud, it needs to be left in the past. Nothing hinders present service quite like being mired in another time. Modeling Paul's forgetfulness means we count the past as nothing. We cut the strings that tie us to that bygone moment. We refuse to allow past successes to inflate our pride. We refuse to allow past failures to deflate our self-worth. We leave it behind and instead adopt our new identity in Christ ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)).

We are not to forget *everything*, however, in the sense of being oblivious to it. In fact, there are many times God instructs us to remember. In [Deuteronomy 9:7](#), Moses tells the Israelites to "remember this and never forget how you aroused the anger of the Lord your God in the wilderness. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the Lord." We are encouraged to remember all God has done for us ([Psalm 77:11](#); [103:2](#)), others who are suffering for Christ's sake ([Hebrews 13:3](#); [Colossians 4:18](#)), and what we were before Jesus saved us ([Ephesians 2:11–12](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9–11](#)). But the remembering should be to the glory of God and for our spiritual benefit. If we are cleansed by the blood of Christ, then no judgment remains for past failures ([Romans 8:1](#)). If God chooses not to remember our past sins ([Hebrews 8:12](#)), we can choose to set them aside as well and embrace the future He promises to those who love Him ([Romans 8:28](#); [Ephesians 2:10](#)).