

- ***READ II Samuel 12:15-23*** It was a week ago yesterday afternoon that I was sitting in my recliner scrolling through Facebook when I saw a post by my friend Jennifer. She said she couldn't get into details but that they were in dire need of prayers for her son Isaac who had been in a drowning accident. He had been transported to Vanderbilt where he was fighting for his life. Two excruciating days later, Isaac Shepherd Mattson passed from this life after only being here for 19 months.
 - There was an unbelievable outpouring of love and prayer for this wonderful family, and the vast majority of us can only imagine that pain they have endured since that day and will continue to live with from now on. It was on Tuesday that Isaac's dad, Art, took to Facebook to share what had been weighing on his heart over the past few days. His words were poignant as you can expect, but they were just as powerful and heart touching. While recounting what had transpired, Art shared his and Jennifer's motto that they kept reminding themselves as they looked towards the future. Two simple words that carry all of the meaning in the world... "Only Forward."
 - As I sat there reading these words and being touched to my soul, I couldn't help but think of this story that Art himself referenced in his post. I couldn't help but think of how beneficial and impactful such a motto and mindset could be in the lives of all people. I hope to God that none of us ever feel the pain of losing a child. Parents shouldn't ever bury their children. Yet, many of us have felt our own pain from different tragedies that this life throws at us from time to time.
 - I would like to take a few minutes to talk about this idea of "Only Forward," and why it is so important that this be our own personal motto as we move through this life. The usefulness isn't because this is an invention of man, but we will quickly see that this type of mindset finds its true roots in the mind of God and His word. Let's begin by looking at why we need to be reminded that we should be moving only forward. Isn't this something that we all do naturally? This isn't the case at all...
- I. There are many events in our lives that can cause us to be held back from moving forward.**
- A. We suffer loss.**
1. The account we read just a few minutes ago is a prime example of the loss we can experience in this life that leaves us with so much heartache. I can't think of anything worse than for parents to have to bury their young child, but that is exactly what David experienced in **II Samuel 12**.
 2. Of course, the greatest example of loss we find in Scripture is that of Job. This blameless, upright, and God fearing man lost everything. His possessions of 7,000 sheep, 3,000, camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and innumerable servants were all taken away from him. Even worse... his ten children, seven sons and three daughters, were taken from him. (**Job 1:13-19**) On top of it all his body was ravaged with with boils as he mourned his unfathomable loss. (**Job 2:7,8**) Surely Job was a man who we would all pity greatly.
 3. Even in the New Testament we see a great servant of God, the Apostle Paul, experiencing great loss. In **II Corinthians 11:23-27**, Paul lists the incredible sufferings he had endured through his ministry as an Apostle. He was imprisoned, beaten, lashed, stoned, and shipwrecked. He often found himself in great danger from rivers, robbers, his countrymen, false brethren, and the Gentiles. He was in danger in the cities, in the wilderness, and on the sea. He often found himself exhausted, hungry, thirsty, and cold. Certainly Paul was a man who experienced his unfair share of loss and difficulty in his life. He, Job, and David could've all been held back by the loss and difficulties they endured.

B. We sin.

1. Paul not only suffered loss because of his faith, but his prior convictions led him to lead a life where he sought to harm the very people he would come to love so much. In **Acts 8**, we read of Paul, who was currently Saul of Tarsus, being in full agreement with Stephen having been put to death. He then grows in his zeal against the Way, and begins going from house to house dragging off men and women and putting them into prison.
2. Of course, this all changed in **Acts 9** when Jesus appeared to Paul and appointed him as one of His Apostles who would spearhead the efforts of spreading the Gospel. From Damascus on, the Apostle Paul was a pillar in the Gospel and the spread of the Kingdom. His efforts are well documented throughout the New Testament, but that doesn't mean that his past was erased from the history books.
3. In fact, soon after his conversion there were some of the church in Jerusalem who were hesitant to allow him to associate with them because they were well aware of his horrible past. As great of a turnaround as Paul experienced in his life, his past couldn't be erased and he had to live with the knowledge of what he had done. In **I Timothy 1:12-15**, Paul acknowledges his past life of sin even referring to himself as the *"foremost of all sinners."* How difficult it must have been for Paul to live with his past so full of sin and regret.

C. Worst off...we suffer loss because of our sin.

1. Individually...loss and sin can be hard enough to deal and cope with in our lives, but worse than dealing with either of them is dealing with loss that has been brought upon us because of our sin. This wasn't the case at all for Job. Remember, he was a blameless, upright, and God fearing man, but Satan wanted to try to prove he'd change if he faced loss. Job suffered innocently his loss innocently without it being any cause of his own.
2. However, this was not the case for David in our opening text of **II Samuel 12:15-23**. It is important to remember why it was that David found himself in deep heartache over the loss of his child. Notice that **v.15** records that it was the Lord that struck the child of Bathsheba to be so sick to the point of death. Why would the Lord do such a thing? It was a response to the great evil David had committed in taking Bathsheba as his own even though she was already married to Uriah. Then to make things worse...David had Uriah killed. (**II Samuel 11:26,27**) The anger of the Lord burned greatly against David for this evil, and His punishment towards David for what he had done was the death of his child. David's loss was a result of his own sin.
3. When confronted with those things that we might experience in this loss that cause us pain... loss and sin...we are presented with an opportunity to respond in a couple of different ways. One way is to constantly be looking backwards in regret, and the other is to keep our eyes only forward as we move along in this light. One of these ways is desired by Satan and the other is God's will for our response.

II. Satan wants for us to be stuck in our past.

A. It is during these times of loss and trial that we often find ourselves the most vulnerable.

1. Even a man as godly as Job still found himself really struggling with the reality that had set in all around him. He trusted in God and he didn't sin against Him by blaming Him, and yet we find him wondering why such evil things happen to those who are godly. In **Job 23** we see Job asking why it is that evil continues to happen as if God isn't even aware of it taking place. *"From the city men groan, and the souls of the wounded cry out; yet God does not pay attention to folly."* (**Job 23:12**) In Job's mind, God wasn't seeming as if He was aware of what was going on within his life, but we know that not to be the case.
2. What we must recognize from Job is that the difficulties of this life, all of which are a result of Satan's workings, are designed to cause us to lose faith and to doubt our God. It is during

times of great loss that Satan wants for us to feel as if God has abandoned us and isn't aware that we are suffering as we are. It is during times where we feel the guilt and pain of our sins that Satan wants for us to give up our pursuit of holiness and righteousness. He wants for us to be so entangled in our past difficulties and failures that we have no ability to move on and try again. Satan wants for our pasts to destroy us and our faiths. He wants for us to lose faith and trust in God's grace, power, and strength. If he can get Job to at least start asking questions out loud, then we must be so wary of his power to cause us to falter. In times of pain and suffering, Satan wants us to turn completely away from God.

B. However, even during times of great heartbreak we can lean upon the Lord and His strength.

1. There is one thing that is extremely consistent with these three men who we have noted as having experienced loss and the grief of sin in their lives. During their times of difficulty and distress, each of them sought and found strength in the Lord.
2. Even as his child is on the edge of death, we find David petitioning God that He might heal his dying child. *"David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground."* (**II Samuel 12:16**) David knew that the current situation was all a result of his sin, and yet he still laid it all before the feet of God and begged Him to change His mind and heal his child.
3. On the darkest day of his life...as all of his family and possessions have been taken away from him...we find Job's response to be one of excellence. *"Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said, 'Naked I came from my mothers' womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'"* *Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God."* (**Job 1:22**) What an example for us to consider and emulate in our own lives! This Godly man recognized that God was the blessing Giver and He had every right to take away that which He had given. Instead of blaming God we see Job worshiping God from his broken and grieving heart.
4. Lastly, Paul was able to endure the difficulties of his life because he knew that God was always with him every step of the way. In **II Timothy 4:16-18**, we see Paul recognize that strength of the Lord as being that which was with him all along the way of Him experiencing his difficulties. He knew that when everyone else had deserted him, it was the Lord who stood with him and strengthened him. He knew that the Lord would rescue him *"from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom."* (**II Timothy 4:18**) Paul's full confidence was in his God and His power to help him through whatever circumstance he might find himself in. No matter how much Satan may pressure us into giving into our past, we know that God desires something so much better for us.

III. God desires for us to move only forward towards the goal of pleasing Him.

A. This is His desire because we can't change the past.

1. Each of these three men expressed this fact to a degree in the passages we have already looked at or referenced. They had to move forward because there was truly nothing they could do about what had already been done.
2. After David's child had passed, his servants were worried about how they were going to deliver the news to David given how poor of spirits he had been in up to this point. David recognizes what has happened, asks if the child is dead, and once he learns that the child has passed he gets up, cleans himself up, and goes to the house of the Lord to worship before he sits down to eat. (**II Samuel 12:18-20**) His servants are amazed by his reactions and question how he could be in this type of shape after going through what he just went through. His response is simple and to the point. He had begged for the child to live, yet now that he is dead, what

can be done about that? *"Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."* (**II Samuel 12:23**) David knew that his only truly choice was to move only forward.

3. Job's family and possession were gone, and yet he did like David and worshipped he Lord following his loss. He knew that God had blessed him and that it had been taken away. Yet, he still continued to worship and bless the name of the Lord. How could he do such a thing? It was because he was confident that God would be with him as he sought to move forward. Nothing was to be gained by continually dwelling upon what had been lost.
4. Similarly, we find the powerful words of Paul in **Philippians 3:5-7**. He lists the high achievements of his past life and he also mentions his persecuting of the church that were a result of his fleshly achievement. He recognizes that nothing can be done to change them, yet he wasn't going to let them hold him back. Instead he was going to simply count it *"as loss for the sake of Christ."* He goes on to say that he was striving to forget what lied behind him so that he could reach forward to what lied ahead of him. (**Philippians 3:13**) Neither David, nor Job, nor Paul could change their pasts, so they only had one other option...only forward.

B. We have all the power in the world to determine how we move forward with our lives.

1. David was resolved to live in such a way from that point on that he would be able to go and be with his child who had just passed on. Job was going to continue to bless the name of the Lord. Sure he had his difficulties with doubt and friends who questioned his integrity, but in the end we see the Lord blessing him abundantly because of his strong faith.
2. Paul in the same way was determined to simply move only forward in his walk on this earth. *"Not that I have already obtained sit or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I many lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: **forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on** toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* (**Philippians 3:12-14**)
3. Paul's past was completely in the review mirror as far as he was concerned, and that is the exact same mindset we must have if we too are going to be a people are are only moving forward. No matter what we might have suffered. No matter what we might have done. No matter what we might have suffered because of what we might have done...we must be like Paul and forget what lies behind so that we can reach forward and press only forward. This is God's will for us in our lives. It is His will that we not allow the past to control us, but that we be like Paul and press on towards *"the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* (**Philippians 3:14**)

My friends...your brother and sister... have been faced with the awful reality that they will no longer have their youngest boy in their lives. They could allow this new reality to hamstring them and their faiths, or they could choose to accept reality, lean upon the Lord, and move only forward in such a way that God would be pleased. I greatly applaud and look up to their great examples of faith. May each of us have this same type of mindset that was first in David, Job, and Paul. May we do just as **Proverbs 4:25** says. *"Let your eyes look directly ahead and your gaze be fixed straight in front of you."* When Satan and life hit us hard, there is only one direction in which we ought to go...that is only forward and towards God.

PRAYER Our loving Father in heaven...we approach your throne of mercy and grace recognizing that this life can truly be so difficult at times. We suffer loss and we sin, and it is such a temptation for us to just give up and become buried in our pasts. Father, may Satan not have the victory in this way, but may we always keep our eyes fixed on You and the desires You have for our overcoming of our pasts. May we forget those things which lie behind and ever press on towards the goal of pleasing You. May we always look to You for the great strength You so greatly desire to give us, and may our victories be to Your glory. Father, Your strength is shown in our weaknesses, and may that strength carry us to an eternal home in heaven with You. Help each of us to move only forward in holiness and righteousness. It is in Your Son's glorious name that we offer this prayer up to You...amen.