

## **Moving Forward by Dave Feick, Logan and Byron, October 4, 2020**

I'd like to begin this morning by introducing you to a couple friends of mine.

This is Logan and Byron.

Logan and I first met about 6 years ago when I received a letter in the mail with no return address and no signature at the bottom of the page. All it said was that Logan was in prison and could use a visit. It just so happened that I had a college or University student who was wanting to do P2P and so we set it up that she and I would visit with Logan each week for the semester that she was available to participate.

Logan and I have kept in touch over the years since then, whenever he's incarcerated. He was released on Tuesday and we're going to work together to see if we can't keep him out of prison going forward.

Some of you will have memories of Dale Schiele or Helmut Isaac bringing someone from prison or the community when they came to speak in churches. I haven't always had someone available or willing to come along with me, but when I asked Logan about a month ago, he jumped at it. He really wanted to be here.

But I thought, this being his first time and all, that maybe it would be easier for him to tell his story if he and I had a conversation that you could listen in on.

So, Logan, how are you doing today?

It's been a few days since you arrived back in town, how has that been?

So we heard the apostle Paul in the scripture reading this morning talking about putting his past behind him. I hear that you wanting to put your past behind you and press on toward a new goal. What would you like to say about that?

You met with a pastor the other day who's also an addictions counselor. He talked with you about needing to grieve those things that are part of your past, didn't he?

Tell us about your Avenue I story. That seemed to be something of a major turning point for you.

Is there anything else you want to say right now?

Thanks Logan. I know that was a bit nerve wracking for you but I appreciate your willingness to do this.

I wanted to also say that if we told you his parents or grandparents' names, some of you will know where he belongs. We won't do that here, so don't spend the rest of the morning trying to figure out where he belongs, but if you want to speak to him privately later, he may be willing to play a version of the Mennonite game. We'll stick around for lunch, though he was really hoping for a bbq.

We should also recognize Terri, who is one of his support people, who wanted to be here with him this morning as well. And hopefully his parents were able to get onto Facebook and tune in also. (Did you want to say hi to them?)

(Introduce Kerry Reimer if he is there – new director of Parkland Restorative Justice in PA.

I've probably known Byron about 6 years as well. We also met at the correctional center, but he's been out of prison for some time now. Lately, he's been stopping by my office for some conversation and it feels like that conversation has changed lately. So on Friday morning I asked him too if he would want to come and talk about what's been happening.

Byron's partner, Monette? Is also here today with him. Byron what would you like to share? What has been happening in your life?

So I'm not sure there's a lot more for me to say.

I guess I wanted to just look at the idea that we all have a past and that sometimes, we just need to put it behind us. Paul talks about forgetting what lies behind, but I don't think he ever forgot where he came from because he talks about it in his letters and in his defense before the various courts that he faced. His was a life of privilege and he used it whenever he could.

In all truth, he was like the vineyard tenants in Jesus' parable. He wasn't about to listen to the prophets and was terrorizing and torturing and killing the followers of Christ. He may not have been involved in the death of Jesus, but his later actions proved that he was fully in support of it.

But in the Philippians passage he is pointing out how meaningless that all was now that he had met Jesus Christ. Jesus knocked him off his high horse, literally. And he learned to put his religious privilege in the past and it was no longer part of his present or his future. He was moving on to something better.

In Hebrews 12 we find similar language of the runner of a race, putting off everything that hinders the race and running the race with perseverance, with eyes fixed on Jesus.

One writer, though suggests that Paul is thinking of the chariot races. Remember the movie Ben Hur? He says that Paul is describing the charioteer, intent on the race, his eyes fixed on the front, not daring to look behind lest the slightest pressure on the reins, which would have been wrapped around his body, would produce a false move and cause him to lose the race and possibly his life. Again, remember Ben Hur?

But the same would be true of anyone running a race. Constantly turning around and looking behind to see where everyone else is will be detrimental to winning the race. That's when you'd be most likely to be passed when you're turning your head to look behind you.

But running a race is perhaps getting into a bit more competitive language than we're looking for. Because we shouldn't be running this race to beat anyone else, to be the first one to the finish line, but we're on a journey. The journey to Heaven, the journey of faithfulness, the journey of life, the journey where all lives matter, but where we recognize that too often we are also like those vineyard tenants and missing out on what's truly important. We need to remember and believe what we've been saying these past 6 months, we're all in this together.

But I also know that you know that. That's been an important part of this congregation for it's 90-year history. Sure, there've been mistakes along the way. We've all made them. None of us are immune to them. But we learn from them. We learn not to follow those old patterns, but to move forward, pressing on toward the prize.

Byron, you talked about God leading you down interesting paths, because you're open to God's leading. You never know what's in store, but it's exciting to see what God will have for you around that next bend in the path. And there are many blessings in that.

And it's a blessing to me when you come to visit, and talk about what God is doing in your life.

I think you've both been reading the Bible lot's lately and finding other books or websites that are helpful for your journeys. Is there anything else either of you would like to add?

It is amazing to learn that though we all strive for the same goal, that it takes a lot of different paths to reach that goal. Everyone has their own journey, their own path to take but God is present on everyone of those paths, guiding that journey, blessing us with fellow travellers on the journey.

Together, may we all forget what lies behind and focus on reaching the heavenly goal.

Amen.