

How to Begin the New Year

Philippians 3:4-21

Many people will be making New Year's resolutions shortly. They will resolve to lose weight, get out of debt, be a better person, etc. Christians may even resolve to read their Bible through, pray every day, witness to someone every day, etc. Although those are noble and often good things, the Bible gives us some guidelines as to how to begin the New Year. This passage before us tells us how to do just that.

As we consider the ministry here, think about what it is that you and I could do, individually and as a group, to help in the growth of the church (both numerically and spiritually). As the pastor, I have a biblically mandated directive in my responsibilities – and it isn't what a lot of people think it is. It is not any more my responsibility to bring people in than it is yours; it isn't any more my responsibility to do the work needed done than it is yours; it will take all of us doing whatever it is that needs done in order for the church to flourish. It will take each of us to be faithful to church (something I haven't said much about in the 35 years I've been preaching) – to the services themselves; to the activities and special services; to giving; to living a godly life in our community; etc.

I intend to present a goal next Sunday, and preach a message from the Gospels that Jesus taught in order for us to have a clear understanding of the importance our church, and we as individuals within that church, has in the community around us and in reaching people with the Gospel.

Let me say at the outset here, and something that will be repeated next week as well – there will be a

cost involved in service to the Lord: a personal cost to us physically and mentally; a financial cost to the church and to us individually; a cost of time (maybe most important of all at this point). Remember what Jesus said: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required..." (Luke 12:48).

The "Seven Deadly Steps to Stagnation," as reported in the Solar Press newsletter, Directions:

1. We've never done it that way before.
2. We're not ready for that.
3. We're doing OK without it.
4. We tried that once before.
5. It costs too much.
6. That's not our responsibility.
7. It just won't work.

If you [or I] are making comments like these often, do something about it now. Stagnation awaits!

I. FORGET THE PAST

[Luke 9:62](#)

⁶² And Jesus said unto him, **No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.**

[Hebrews 6:1](#)

¹ Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

A. Past failures

The Apostle Paul was prone to depression (referring to being in "tears often") and I believe it was because he had done so much to damage the cause of Christ before his conversion, as well as all the work and effort he put into people to only have them either reject the truth outright, or have them turn on him because they didn't want to hear it anymore.

B. Past successes – vs. 4-7

Referred to in the verses before us – he was the most successful Christian of his day, and perhaps of all time, yet he would not allow himself to rely on his past successes, nor would he let himself become so proud that he thought himself to have "arrived" at being what the Lord wanted him to be.

C. Past trials – vs. 8-9

We must refuse to live in the past, including reliving the same trials and temptations (and failures that came from them).

D. Past victories

The only reason we would want to keep the past victories in mind is to gain strength from them, but if we rely on them to get us through the upcoming battles, we will fail. We must be ever vigilant to guard against becoming complacent.

A man who was losing his memory went to his doctor for advice. He received this diagnosis: "We cannot help your memory without impairing your eyesight. The choice is yours. Would you rather be able to see or to remember?"

The man thoughtfully replied, "I would rather have my eyesight than my memory. I'd rather see where I am going than remember where I have been!"

II. LOOK AHEAD TO THE FUTURE AND ALL ITS BLESSINGS

Philippians 2:12

¹² Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

²⁴ Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

²⁵ And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

²⁶ I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

²⁷ But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Hebrews 12:1-2

¹ Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

² Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

A. By "following after" Christ – vs. 12

He was in pursuit of the end; he was in pursuit of the goal of attaining unto the goal of bringing glory to God in everything he did.

B. By realizing we haven't arrived yet – we have a long way to go – vs. 13

C. By always keeping the goal in front of us – vs. 14

His name is Wersching and he was the great placekicker of the San Francisco 49ers in years past. He (like most today) never looks at the goalposts. They distract him. He looks only at the hash marks on the field. With Paul it was just the opposite. He kept his eye on the goal. Anything between him and his goal didn't matter.

III. AIM AT PLEASING CHRIST IN ALL THINGS – vs. 13-14

2 Timothy 4:7-8

⁷ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

2 Corinthians 4:18

¹⁸ While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

How do we do this, according to this passage?

A. Know we haven't "apprehended" all there is to know – we haven't gotten it

all yet – we're not there yet – we haven't arrived

B. Forget those things that hinder us

C. "Reaching forth" – carries the idea of stretching for all we're worth for something – if we are doing this, we certainly won't be able to reach back

Columnist Herb Caen wrote in the San Francisco Chronicle: "Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle; when the sun comes up, you'd better be running."

Spurgeon wrote likewise: "If you are not seeking the Lord, the Devil is seeking you. If you are not seeking the Lord, judgment is at your heels."

In the Christian life, it's not enough simply to wake up. We are called to run, to become more like Christ, to press ahead in godliness.

D. Keep the "high calling" (call to holiness) as our goal, and "press" for it. The word for "press" here is the same word translated for "persecution" in other passages. The Holy Spirit inspired this word because of what Saul of Tarsus was – a persecutor of the church. With the same zeal he persecuted (as his most important goal in life) he was to "press" to glorify Christ.

Most of the skyscrapers in New York City were built by Indians! It's true! The Mohawk Indians are native to New York state. They are famed for their catlike ability to scamper across girders. They are totally indifferent to heights. It seems to be a genetic trait. A writer spoke of it in 1714. In 1886 the Mohawk Indians built the bridge that spans the Saint Lawrence river. They were the riveters on the Empire State Building and Rockefeller Center. Some people are uncomfortable in high places, but the Mohawk Indians seem right at home. Spiritual heights are uncomfortable for some. They want to live in the lowlands of life, but Christ keeps calling us to higher ground.

Conclusion: As we approach the next new year, let's forget the past year (or years) and look ahead to what God has in store for us as we follow His will, and let us aim at pleasing Him in all that we do.

Another year is dawning; dear Father, let it be,
In working or in waiting, another year with thee.
Another year of progress, another year of praise,
Another year of proving thy presence all the days.
Another year of service, of witness for thy love;
Another year of training for holier work above.
Another year is dawning; dear Father, let it be,
on earth, or else in heaven, another year for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)