

New Year's: Reflect, Renew, and Press On

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A new year always brings a sense of hope, doesn't it? New Year's Eve is a moment to pause and reflect, to leave behind the challenges of the past year, and to look forward to the promise of a fresh start. It's a time when many of us resolve to make changes and embrace the opportunities ahead.

The apostle Paul captures this spirit beautifully in Philippians 3:13-14: "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Paul's words resonate deeply, especially when we consider the weight of his past. Unlike most of us, Paul's past was marred by severe actions against the early church. He described himself as a "blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man" (1 Timothy 1:13). In 1 Corinthians 15:9, he admitted, "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

Despite such a heavy history, Paul didn't let his past define him. Instead, he focused on what lay ahead, urging us to do the same. On this New Year's Eve, Paul's example offers us three transformative steps:

1. Forget the things which are behind.
2. Reach forward to the things which are ahead.
3. Press toward the goal.

Forgetting the Past: Redefining Your Identity - Forgetting the past doesn't mean erasing it from memory. Paul didn't literally forget his past; in fact, he often recounted it as a testimony of God's mercy and grace. Similarly, the psalmists, such as David in Psalms 51, and Moses in Psalms 90, reflected on their past sins and experiences to grow spiritually.

What Paul advocates is a shift in identity. He reminds us that our past does not define who we are. Instead, our identity is rooted in Christ. Paul declared in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."

No matter what burdens your past holds; failures, sins, or regrets, you are not bound by them. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

This New Year's Eve, let us resolve to stop identifying with the mistakes of the past and embrace the new identity Christ offers. As God assures us in Psalms 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

Reaching Forward: Embracing the Future - The power of forgiveness enables us to move forward. Without forgiveness, we would be shackled by guilt, unable to progress. But with forgiveness, we have the freedom to embrace a new future.

As the psalmist declared in Psalms 32:1-2, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity.”

Reaching forward involves engaging in the mission Christ has set before us. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus commissioned His followers to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” We might question our ability to carry out such a mission, especially if we are haunted by past failures. But God sees us through the lens of His grace, not our past.

Reaching forward also means committing to fellowship and unity within the body of Christ. In Ephesians 2:13, Paul reminds us, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” This unity and fellowship are the “why” behind our mission to bring others into the joy and peace of the family of God.

Pressing Toward the Goal: Fixing Our Eyes on Eternity - Finally, Paul challenges us to press toward the ultimate goal, our heavenly inheritance. In 1 Peter 1:3-5, we read about this glorious destiny: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who...has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”

This hope fuels our perseverance. Life may bring trials and setbacks, but they pale in comparison to the eternal glory awaiting us. Paul encourages us in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Pressing toward the goal also requires a mindset of vigilance and anticipation for Christ’s return. As Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:4-10, “Let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.”

On this New Year’s Eve, let’s take these steps to heart:

- Forget the past—Release the hold of past failures and sins on your identity.
- Reach forward—Embrace the mission and fellowship Christ calls us to.
- Press toward the goal—Live with hope, perseverance, and a focus on eternity.

If you haven’t yet embraced the forgiveness and new identity offered in Christ, there is no better way to begin the new year than by doing so. As Paul reminds us in Romans 6:3-4, baptism symbolizes dying to our old selves and rising to walk in newness of life.

For those already in Christ, let the hope of heaven inspire you to live boldly and joyfully in the year ahead. Remember, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

Let us walk into the new year with confidence, peace, and a renewed commitment to our faith.

Happy New Year!