

NEW YEAR – NEW YOU

An elderly man moved into a retirement community. It wasn't long until he had made a number of friends among the other residents. There was one lady he was especially attracted to and she was attracted to him, also. They spent a lot of time together. Finally, one evening he proposed, asking her to marry him. The next morning, he woke up remembering his proposal, but he couldn't remember her answer. So, he went to her & said, "I'm really embarrassed to admit this, but I know I proposed to you last night but I can't remember if you said 'Yes' or 'No.'" "Oh, thank goodness!" she replied. "I remembered saying 'Yes' to someone last night but I couldn't remember who asked me."

Do you ever feel that way when it comes to New Year's resolutions? The New Year is a time to reflect. It is often a time when people make decisions and turn over a new leaf. Maybe they decide they are going to exercise regularly & lose weight. They are going to do all kinds of things to improve themselves physically & spiritually. The problem is too soon we forget and slip back into old habits and patterns. As we start this New Year let me suggest to you the attitude you should have:

Phil 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

In Philippians 3 Paul writes about how to succeed in life. In this passage, he briefly explains four keys to successful living.

1. EVALUATION (vs. 13a) – consider myself

In verse 13 Paul says "I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it."

Successful living starts in admitting that you don't have it all together, that you still have a long way to go. You start by looking at where are the areas that need improvement. Paul was honest about his faults and aware of his weaknesses. In the Good News translation this verse reads "I don't claim that I have already succeeded or become perfect."

To me, that's an amazing statement. Paul is an old man now. If anybody had the right to claim he had arrived it would be Paul. He wrote most of the New Testament. He single handedly spread Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. He made an incredible impact on the world. Yet Paul, at the end of his life, says "I don't have it all together. I haven't arrived. I'm not perfect. I'm still growing." The point is that successful people never stop growing. They are always developing, growing, expanding, learning.

Proverbs 28:13 You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up; then God will show mercy to you.

A pastor, a boy scout, and a scientist were the only passengers on a small plane. The pilot came back to the cabin and explained that the plane was going down but there were only three parachutes and four people. The pilot then added, "I should have one of the parachutes because I have a wife and three small children." So, he took one and jumped.

The scientist jumped up almost immediately and said, "I should have one of the parachutes because I am the smartest man in the world and everyone needs me." So, he took one and jumped. The pastor turned to the Boy Scout and with a sad smile said, as I am sure that all of you would, "You are young and I have lived a rich life, so you take the remaining parachute, and I'll go down with the plane." Then the Boy Scout said, "Relax, pastor, the world's smartest man just jumped out of the plane with my backpack!"

The first question you ought to ask yourself this new year is, "Where do I need to change?" Take a personal inventory and be honest about what you see.

2. ELIMINATION (vs. 13b) – forgetting what is behind

Paul goes on in verse 13 to say “forgetting what is behind...”

Part of successful living is learning that you to be you need to stop wasting your time on yesterday. It is behind you. As Pumba the Warthog said to Simba, “You’ve got to put your behind in you past...” Later, when confronted with the wise Rafiki he is struck on the head and told “Yes the past can hurt... You can learn from it.” You need let go of the guilt, grief, grudges. You can’t walk into the present holding on to the past. Success involves learning to forget.

Isaiah 43:18 "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a new thing!"

How do you forget the past? The word here for forget is ZAKAR and means REMEMBER NOT. To forget does not mean that you no longer remember. It means you choose not to dwell on it. You do not let the past affect you anymore and let it control you or have power over you or manipulate you. You can learn from the past without dwelling in it. Move on.

There are two things you need to forget if you are going to follow Paul's pattern:

a. Forget your Failures

Don't rehearse things in your heart that God has long since forgiven and forgotten. Satan's favorite desire is to paralyze us with the past, to manipulate us with the memories. Paul says "I learn to forget the past." Do not sit around beating yourself up for mistakes. Everybody here has blown it. We have things we regret doing.

Paul, of all people, probably had many regrets that could have haunted him. He was a persecutor of the church. He hounded people who were believers and had them locked up and stoned. He could have let the guilt from his past cripple him, instead he used it for motivation. Nothing you ever do will change your past. It is gone, over. Since you can't change it, let it go. Learn from it but then let it go.

b. Forget your Successes

Just like failure, you can learn from success but don't live in them. It is easy to rest on your laurels, to live in the past, to base your security on past performance, to think, "I've got it made!" The good old days are done with. Let them go. Success tends to make you complacent and fills you with pride. Then you stop growing and learning and then you're going to fail.

Over 2,000 years ago a young Greek artist named Timanthes studied under a respected tutor. After several years the teacher's efforts seemed to have paid off when Timanthes painted an exquisite work of art. Unfortunately, he became so enraptured with the painting that he spent days gazing at it. One morning when he arrived to admire his work, he was shocked to find it blotted out with paint. Angry, Timanthes ran to his teacher, who admitted he had destroyed the painting. 'I did it for your own good. That painting was retarding your progress. Start again and see if you can do better.' Timanthes took his teacher's advice and produced Sacrifice of Iphigenia, which is regarded as one of the finest paintings of antiquity.

Luke 9:62 Jesus said, 'Anyone who starts to plow and then keeps looking back is of no use for the Kingdom of God.' (Good News)

You can't move forward looking back. You have to live where you are. Successful living means EVALUATION and ELIMINATION but it also means;

3. CONCENTRATION (vs. 13c) – one thing I do

Paul says here in verse 13 "one thing I do." If all you do is forget the past, you may just have amnesia. Successful people are goal oriented. They focus on the future.

One of the most common diseases in the Church today is Fragmentosis -- trying to do 100 different things at the same time. Jack of all trades; master of none. Most people are spread out too thin. Paul says, find out what counts. He's talking about the power of concentration. If a river spills over its banks you have a marsh, a swamp. But if that river is confined between certain banks, dam it up, channel it and it is a tremendous source of power. Light diffused is powerless, weak. If you take light and concentrate it you have a laser. That is the power of concentration. Life focusing on one thing.

The secret to success is concentration. Pros concentrate on one thing. They specialize. You can't know everything, be everything, do everything. You need to have clear goals. Less than 5% of the people in America ever write down a life goal. It is not by accident that the 5% that do are the top leaders in their field. Write it down and focus on specific goals.

1 Cor 9:24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

What are you living for? What is your goal in life? What's most important? If you don't know where you're going, nobody else does. Focus on the future. EVALUATION, ELIMINATION, CONCENTRATION and then;

4. DETERMINATION (vs. 14) – straining towards what is ahead I press on

Paul ends verse 13 "straining towards what is ahead I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

This is the principle of determination. Absolutely nothing worthwhile in life happens without effort. The only way you coast is when you're going downhill. If you're coasting in life right now, you're headed downhill. Paul said, "I run to the finish."

The great people in life are just ordinary people with extraordinary amount of determination.

They never give up. The word PRESS ON is the Greek word DIOKO which means to run swiftly.

There are three kinds of people -- rowboat people, sailboat people, and steamboat people. Rowboat people need to be pushed or shoved along. Sailboat people move when a favorable wind is blowing. Steamboat people move continuously, through calm or storm. They are masters of themselves, their surroundings, and their fate. In your spiritual life do you always have to be pushed along or only move with the "next best" fad that comes along. Or is your course set and nothing will stop you from moving forward.

Acts 20:24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me -- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

This is Paul's life verse. Paul said he's not going to stop or give up or quit. He's going to keep on keeping on until he's experienced all that God had for him in life. Paul said he was going to finish what he started. Is that your life goal as well? To finish the race and complete the work that God has given you to do?

In the 1986 New York City Marathon, almost 20,000 runners entered the race. What is memorable is not who won, but who finished last. His name was Bob Wieland. He finished 19,413th—dead last. Bob completed the New York marathon in 4 days, 2 hours, 47 minutes, and 17 seconds. It was unquestionably the slowest marathon in history—ever. So, what is it that made Bob Wieland's marathon so special? Bob ran with his arms. 17 years earlier while in Vietnam, Bob's legs were blown off in battle. He sits on a 15-pound saddle and covers his fists with pads. He uses his arms to catapult himself forward one arm-length at a time. He can run a mile in an hour. That is real endurance in the face of adversity.

As we begin this new year, let's remember the great race that is before us. Let us run with evaluation, elimination, concentration and determination.

Joe Scriven was a missionary from Ireland to Canada in the 1840s. He lived in Woodstock ON. He was joined by his fiancé who was also from Ireland. Just before the wedding, she died of pneumonia. Joe buried her with his own hands, and a broken heart. Shortly after he received news that his mother in Ireland was very ill and was expected to die. So, he picked up a pen and wrote her a letter. In that letter he wrote a poem,

"What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged. Take it to the Lord in prayer."

In the 1860s that poem Joe wrote to his mother was turned into the hymn What a Friend We Have in Jesus that we know and love today. Out of such pain came something so beautiful, something that has blessed so many around the world.