

Happy ReNew Year

The apostle Paul often used the image of someone running a race as a metaphor for human life. It is impressive to witness Paul's faith. From 2 Timothy 4:7-8:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness.

What confidence! These words were spoken at the very end of his life and it appears that he didn't have any regrets. I certainly hope I can be like him when my time comes.

There are other passages that Paul wrote during his active years where he describes human life as running a race. One of them is Philippians 3:12-14 which we read today.

I thought this passage would be a good one to reflect on as we begin the New Year. Let's learn from a person who lived his life with confidence!

From his writings, we learn that Apostle Paul never allowed circumstances to conquer him. Rather, he was always determined to win the race.

*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. 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, **I press on toward the goal to win the prize** for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:12-14.*

I found three lessons in these writings of Paul:

1. We are all still in a work in progress.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect...

I confess, I find relief when I hear that we are still in a work in progress. I remember a time when I made a major mistake on a test in school. I was dreadfully ashamed of my bad grade, until the teacher told us that there would be a make-up test. What a relief! Even though my life is not perfect, and I still mess up, I decided not to be discouraged because I know I am a work in progress. There will always be a second chance that God has provided for me.

Happy ReNew Year

Deborah Ann wrote this beautiful poem called, "I am A Work In Progress.

I am a work in progress,
you probably are one too
each day Jesus is working
something new inside of you.

His grace is forming us to be,
His warriors and His saints
He is shaping us to live
with principles and restraints.

He is clearing out the trash,
removing the world's debris
when He is done with that
we'll be one of His draftees.

He is molding our hearts,
to live sober and clean
so the likeness of Him
in our souls we can glean.

He knows all the lumps,
that need to be re-formed
He is shaping us daily
till in Him, we're transformed.

We have unlimited potential,
He'll never be finished with us
but you and I must believe . . .
His remolding is always just.

I am a work in progress,
you probably too are one
every day God is shaping us

Happy ReNew Year

into the image of His Son!

God is not done with us. I do not know how you finished up last year as you entered into this new one, but the good news is: we can all have hope for the future! That is because, as Paul tells us, we are a work in progress.

2. The second lesson is, “Forget the imperfect past.”

But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead...

The term “forget” as Paul used here does not mean an issue of the memory function (which I do well...), but it means “do not regard the past as having any bearing on your present outlook.” “*Forgetting what is behind*” represents the motivation to go beyond our history and not get stuck in our past failures.

Many of us, actually I think it is safe to say that ALL of us have some ugly things in our past. We not only suffer from our own failures or the sins we have committed, but also from sins others have committed to intentionally damage our lives.

The apostle Paul had a pretty ugly past. He had literally beaten up, belittled, arrested, and, even, killed followers of Jesus. That is until he met Jesus on the road to Damascus.

I personally cannot imagine the guilt he must have felt when he reflected on his shameful past life. But in spite of his past, it is clear he was moving forward. He recognized his past, but he refused to be held back by it. He made a decision not to get stuck in the things he cannot change, but pressed on to create a better future.

I have met people who are living in the bitterness from their past. Every day they suffer from it.

So as we begin the New Year, we may need to make a decision to forget past failures, guilt, and shame, and to forgive others who somehow damaged our lives. I know it is impossible to actually forget what happened, but we can forgive them so that the past cannot enslave us.

Forgetting what is behind... What is holding you back today? What is it that prevents you from moving forward? ... Something to think about.

Happy ReNew Year

3. The third lesson is that we press on to the future with a determined effort.

Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize.

It was interesting to read that the driving force for Paul's race was to win the prize. I had to stop and think about this passage because the word prize just did not sit well in me.

I pictured the Olympics, where athletes run races seeking the gold medal. How many times have we witnessed athletes acting overjoyed because they had won a medal? But also, how many times have we witnessed the other athletes that did not get a medal and their obvious disappointments? They consider themselves as losers, even though all of them put out a tremendous effort during the race. I do not want that kind of pressure in my life.

But then I thought again, perhaps the prize that Paul was seeking was something different than gold, money, or fame.

What was the prize Paul anticipated to receive? The prize was, "becoming like Jesus." That was his goal for his life.

His entire life was dedicated to that goal and he did everything in trying to get to that goal. He fought a good fight until the very end.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness.

Then a question came to my mind, what kind of prize do I want to receive when I finish my race? I found this question a little more difficult to answer than, "What do you want for Christmas?" What prize will satisfy me to run my life with dedication? What do I really want for my life?

For me, the prize I would like to receive is "Peace". Peace in my loved one's lives, peace in my neighbors lives, peace in Bethlehem, peace in Syria, peace in North Korea, peace in the world. That will be an honorable prize to receive from my race.

Happy ReNew Year

Some pictures I saw confirmed my desire.

[Slides shown of people experiencing God's peace, even in the midst of great devastation:

- In Aleppo, celebrating Christmas worship in their church, the roof of which was destroyed by an air attack;
- Children in Iraq in their destroyed home, welcoming Santa with gifts; and
- Iraqi refugees whom Pastor Hey Young had met in Jordan two years ago.]

These glimpses of peace that people were able to find in the middle of a broken place gave me so much satisfaction. I would like to run my race if I can get peace to people as prize.

What motivates you? What prize would you like to receive at the end of the race? When we see a goal, isn't it easier for us to make a plan on how to run your race?

My New Year resolution will be to work towards peace in my life and for those people whom I love.

As we begin the New Year, three things to remember...

We are a work in progress, and God is not done with us;
Forget about the things behind you; and
Run towards the goal to get the prize God has prepared
just for you.

And the most important thing we should know as we begin this New Year, wherever you go and whatever you do our God will be always with us.