

## Press Toward The Mark

Written by Bufrey Dean

Tuesday, 18 May 2010 16:53 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 May 2010 17:00

---

Paul gives us timely instructions for the New Year. "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:14) As we anticipate the next 12 months of 2007, some people might eagerly look forward to what each day will bring. Others might be filled with fear, worried that this year will be worse than 2006. I would suggest that our attitude will make all the difference in the coming year. How we react to each event will largely determine whether it is a year of victory or a year of defeat.

The Apostle Paul was never one to let circumstances conquer him. Rather, with the help of God, he was determined to win the victor's crown. Let us look to Philippians 3:13-21 and notice that Paul's attitude shines through these words.

Paul lays out some principles concerning our attitude that we can carry with us into the New Year. The first of those principles is to:

### FORGET OUR PAST:

At the end of verse thirteen, Paul said, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before," We, as the Lord's people are very special beings, in that God has given us the ability to remember. However, our memories can be our friend or our enemy.

Paul had a dreadful past and it could have easily haunted him for the rest of his life. He persecuted the church. He used his authority to kill Christians. By his own admission he said, "I am the chief of sinners." He could have walked around all his life with this tremendous burden of guilt crippling him and he would never have become the great Apostle to the Gentiles.

Many people dwell on their past failures, mistakes, and sins so much so that they become spiritually paralyzed, unable to live productive lives. Paul is telling us that we can forget our past sins and failures and reach forth unto those things which are before.

## Press Toward The Mark

Written by Bufrey Dean

Tuesday, 18 May 2010 16:53 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 May 2010 17:00

---

Someone once said, "Our greatest glory is not in never failing, but in rising every time we fall." We've failed many times, although we may not remember. We fell down the first time we tried to walk. We probably almost drowned the first time we tried to swim. Babe Ruth struck out 1,330 times, but he also hit 714 home runs. We can't allow ourselves to become discouraged due to our failures. We are all human. We do make mistakes. We do sin. We do fail. But what is worse, is missing the opportunities that God puts in front of us because we are afraid to fail.

God once told the prophet Jeremiah that he would, one day, establish a New Covenant with the children of Israel. And when he did, he said, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34). That covenant was established when Jesus Christ died on the cross. Since that day, God's forgiveness is so complete that it is forgetfulness. If we have been washed in the blood of Christ, God has forgotten all of our failures and sins. It is time that we forget them as well.

Let's follow Paul's example, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before." The first principle Paul teaches us for the New Year is to forget the past, and the second is to:

### FOCUS OUR PRIORITIES:

In verse fourteen Paul says, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." He introduced that statement in verse thirteen with "but this one thing I do." Obviously Paul did more than one thing. He made tents. He preached sermons. He planted churches. He wrote books. Paul did a lot of things.

But what he is telling us is that his top priority in life was to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God. In other words, Paul's number one priority was the kingdom of heaven! He was running straight toward that goal, and with God's help, he was not going to let anything distract him from it.

A while back a professor was speaking to a group of students. After speaking to them for a while, he said, "Okay, it's time for a test." He set a one-gallon, wide mouthed Mason jar on the table in front of him. Then he produced about a dozen tennis-ball-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, inside the jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks

## Press Toward The Mark

Written by Bufrey Dean

Tuesday, 18 May 2010 16:53 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 May 2010 17:00

---

would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?"

Everyone in the class said, "Yes." "Really?" he said. Then he reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. He dumped some gravel into the jar and shook it, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. Then he smiled and asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?"

By this time the class was starting to catch on. "Probably not," one of them said. "Good!" he replied. Then he reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it filled all the spaces between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked, "Is this jar full?"

"No!" the class shouted. Again he said, "Good!" Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour in the water until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked back at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?"

One eager student raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit something more into it!"

"No," the speaker replied, "that's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is this: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."

What are the big rocks in your life? As you look ahead over this year, what are your priorities? Jesus said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). Drawing closer to God through worship, spending time with him in prayer, and seeking his guidance for our life by reading his Word -- these should be the big rocks in our jar.

If you are considering timely instructions for the New Year, let me make two suggestions: (1) set aside 30 minutes every day to read your Bible and pray, and (2) determine to be more involved in God's kingdom. By that I mean, attending the worship every meeting and studying your Bible every day.

## Press Toward The Mark

Written by Bufrey Dean

Tuesday, 18 May 2010 16:53 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 May 2010 17:00

---

It is a sad, but persistent fact that many Christians do not make God's kingdom a priority in life. Those who feel like they are doing their spiritual duty by going to church once a week, are not seeking first the kingdom. If we intend to press toward the mark for the prize of the heavenly calling, then we need to include God and his kingdom as our top priority in our life.

There is one more principle that Paul gives us for the New Year, which is to:

### FUNCTION IN THE PRESENT:

Please notice verse 13 again. Paul said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do." Notice that Paul did not say, "one thing I will do." He didn't say, "one thing I'm going to do," or "one thing I will get around to someday." He said, "but this one thing I do."

Paul was living and acting in the present. Many people today try to live in the future. Do you know what is the busiest day in the world? It's not Christmas. It's not the day after Thanksgiving. It is "someday." Everyone in the world has something scheduled to do "someday." The problem is that "someday" is not on any calendar. I'm sure that we've all made plans for "someday," but the fact is, "someday" will never come.

Paul is the ultimate example of living each day to the fullest, living each day as if it were the last. When he was imprisoned in Rome, he didn't sit there stewing, thinking about all the things he would do when he got out of prison. He wrote letters to churches, sang praises to God, and even converted the jailer who had imprisoned him! Paul used everyday to the uttermost.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Do you love life? Then do not squander time for that is the stuff that life is made of." It was Abraham Lincoln who first said, "The leading rule for a man of every calling is diligence; never put off until tomorrow what you can do today."

Perhaps, the saddest example of procrastination is found in the life of the Roman Governor Felix, who listened to Paul "reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix

## Press Toward The Mark

Written by Bufrey Dean

Tuesday, 18 May 2010 16:53 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 May 2010 17:00

---

trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." (Acts 24:25).

Never again did Felix listen to God's word. Once he had put it off for a time, as with so many things in life, that time never came. We all ought to be more like the psalmist, who wrote, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments" (Psalm 119:60).

What if there were no church tomorrow because we were too busy to worship the Lord today? What if God could not hear our prayers tomorrow because we were too busy to pray today? What if there were no Bible tomorrow because we would not read His Word today? What if there were no forgiveness tomorrow because we did not stop sinning today? We must ask the Lord to help us.

As we embark on the journeys of the New Year, let us determine ahead of time that it will be a year of victory! Let us ask the Lord to help us choose the right attitude and follow the timely instructions of the Apostle Paul. Let us resolve to forget our past: look beyond the sins and failures of yesterday; learn from them, repent of them, and then move on forward.

Let us focus our priorities and add praying to God to the top of our list everyday. Let's worship him. Study his Word. Put his kingdom first in our life and everything else will fall into place. We are to function in the present and stop living in the future. Do not put off until tomorrow what we can do today.

The absolute best way to start this year is to become an active part of God's kingdom. Focus our priorities by being thankful for the cleansing power of the blood of the Lord Jesus to wash away all our sins, and start living our new life in Christ everyday!

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Philipians 3:20-21. May God add his blessings.