

FROM NOW ON

Throughout history, and today, many have been struck at least once by the thought, “If only I’d been born in *that* time or in *that* generation. I think I was born in the wrong age.” The feeling may come from a romantic notion, or a sense of adventure, or a genuine belief that our personality and gifting would have been better suited to another time. But if we’re right, God made a mistake—and God doesn’t make mistakes. The truth is that each of us was born at just the right time, and that each of us is equipped and enabled to live life *now*, as was said of King David, to serve God’s purpose in our generation (see Acts 13:36).

It’s even possible for us to live in our *own* past. It can be less frightening than the alternative, and more comforting than letting it go. But if we’re focused on the past, we’re simply looking the wrong way.

¹²Not 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.

¹³Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.

¹⁶Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Phil 3:12-16

In a song based on this passage, Stephe Mayers, YWAM Director for Western Europe, wrote: “Move on, move upward, move into your calling. You’ve got to keep moving on with the Lord.”

The year 2004 has ended. Whatever it contained or represented for you, good or bad, it’s over. This is a new day—an *exciting* day—a day in which God has destined us to be alive. It’s a day to move on and move upward—to move on with the Lord.

How can we make the most of it?

Put the past behind

The text says, “*Forgetting what is behind...*”. We say, “I can’t do that yet. I still remember it too well.”

Don’t think of *forgetting* as “losing the memory” or “slipping the mind”. If we forget, we *choose to remember it no more*. We’re deliberately leaving it behind as done with and settled. The word means *forgetting, neglecting, no longer caring for*. It’s a *choice* that we make, to put the past behind.

Some remembering is good. It’s the only way we have any experience to draw on. In recollecting bad experiences, we learn from the mistakes how not to go that way again. Recollecting good experiences can be a guide, or an anchor to fall back on when we’re down.

But in another sense, put the past behind! Someone has said: “Looking back is sure to end in going back.” It’s certainly true that those always looking over their shoulder plough a crooked furrow (Lk 9:62). Remember Lot’s wife?

Some bad experiences we gladly put behind. You may have had bad experiences in 2004. But you’re still here, so you’re a survivor—now put them behind you!

What if it’s not over yet? What if the *past* is still *present*? When Paul wrote these words he was in jail, unable to step into his future physically. Therefore even in the midst of difficulty,

before we have the awareness that the difficulty is over, the attitude must be to put the past behind.

Some have good experiences, but these still need to be put behind. Otherwise, we'll get complacent and rest on our spiritual laurels; or we'll hang on to them and not *move* on; or we'll make negative comparisons—"it's not like it was"—and hanker fruitlessly after what was and cannot be again. This is a new day!

Set course for the future

"...and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal" (verses 13 & 14).

Don't set your course for the future based on the past!

What we tend to do is take stock, look at where we've come from and where we are, and project that forwards. But what if God wants us to go in a different direction? It needn't mean we've been going the wrong way. What we've been doing may have been right, and it's got us in God to where we are. But now we may need to turn.

We stretch out to what lies ahead. We need to acknowledge where we *are* (the present) and stretch out towards the *mark* (NIV "goal"—the distant mark on the horizon, the end one has in view). Continual mid-course corrections and adjustments may be required, based not on the past, but on the *mark*.

Sometimes there will be a direction change. Abram was following God when he left Ur and went to the Land; but it was also God's direction for the nation to *leave* the Land and be incubated in Egypt in the time of Joseph. Philip was powerfully used of God in Samaria, and yet it was *God* who called him away to interact with the Ethiopian eunuch (and there is no record of his return).

If we're heavily connected to the past, it's as if we have a long tail still there that tends to pull us back to the familiar direction. If we try to turn, we experience the *tension of bending*. But if we *forget* and put the past behind us, we can be released from the inertia of the tail and free to set a fresh course for the *mark*. Only if we forget the past are we truly free to respond to the upward call. Otherwise we're restricted, self-limited, pre-conditioned.

Some would ask, "Am I denying my roots and dishonouring my heritage?" No, you're just being free to continue in God who *gave* you the roots and the heritage. Jesus doesn't say: "Seek first your plans", or "Seek first to follow through on what you'd expected". He says: "Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness" (Mt 6:33). If we feel like we're *orphaned* from our past, we need to know we're *adopted* in our present.

Press on in the present

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." v14 (NASU)

What's the *mark*? Where is it seen?

Jesus said, "You know the way to the place where I am going", and Thomas replied, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (See Jn 14:4-6.) The question seems reasonable, but Jesus' answer adjusts the logic: "I *am* the Way."

The *mark* is in Christ Jesus—it's pressing on in Christ Jesus, following the Holy Spirit's leading, in a time called "now".

It's not so much a time for, "Right, let's *do* it!", but rather, "Jesus, lead *on* and I will follow." He's leading us *forward*. We're not looking for new direction or freshness because we're fed

up with the *old* way, but our concern is to ensure we're still going the *right* way. "*Jesus, lead on. Keep us on Your agenda.*"

And so as 2005 unfolds, refresh your flexibility; collect the current past and put it behind; get free from inappropriate expectations for the future based on the past; and press forward in Christ Jesus.

But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

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Note: All Bible quotations are NIV unless otherwise stated.