

You'll be excited to know that a survey in the UK has revealed the top ten New Year's resolutions for this year. Number one on the list is to enjoy life more. Number two for women is to lose weight. Guess what is number two for men? It is to find true love. Wonder why men in the UK are having trouble finding true love?

So, why should we care what people in London, Manchester, and Bristol have resolved to do? Well, we don't. But it does provide a lead in for our new sermon series. 77% of those surveyed have made resolutions to improve their lives in some way. I think that is a good sign.

Furthermore, a significant percentage recognize the need to lose weight. And that's what we are going to be talking about over the next several weeks. Not about losing physical weight, but about getting rid of excess spiritual baggage that keeps us from "running the race God has set before us."

I love that metaphor for the abundant life God promises us. You know what I would say to all those Londoners who have resolved to enjoy life more this year? I would say "you have to get in the race that God has set before you." And this morning I would say that one of the things you have to get rid of in order to run that race is the weight of past regrets. Unresolved regrets can stop you in your tracks.

Watch this. (Show film clip from *Fever Pitch*.)

Missing a ball game may not be the biggest regret in your life, but all of us have them and they can become deadly. To others they may seem trivial, but to us they are gigantic. They are the "what ifs" of life. They are the decisions we made and think we shouldn't have, or they are the ones we didn't make but think we should have. If only . . . I hadn't moved . . . invested that money . . . turned down that promotion . . . bought that car . . . left things unsaid . . . been absent from my family . . . been such a jerk . . . been so lazy . . . been such a fanatic . . . dropped the ball . . . been such a coward. These things eat at us all the time.

The question is how can we keep these regrets from ruining our lives? How can we keep them from owning us? How can we keep them from weighing us down?

The Biblical answer is in Philippians 3 given to us by the Apostle Paul.

Just think about the Apostle Paul. If anyone could have been wrecked by past regrets, he is the one. Before he became a Christian, he persecuted Christians. Acts 7 says he stood by and watched when the first Christian was stoned to death. Acts 8:1 says "And Saul (Paul) approved of their killing him." Do you think he might have had some regrets about what he had done? If he was human, he did. But did he let his regrets defeat him? No way.

In Philippians 3:13, he says, "This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on."

Now Paul is not saying he simply forgets the past. Have you ever tried doing that? As soon as you try, you end up remembering every last detail. Forgive and forget? Not really. To forgive, you have to remember.

Jesus gives us some help here. In Luke 9:62, he tells his would-be followers, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Both Jesus and Paul are warning us against living in the past. They are warning us against living our lives by riding backwards. Just try driving a car that way. Try plowing a field that way. Remember Lot's wife? Genesis 19 says she looked back as she and Lot were leaving Sodom on God's instructions. Why did she look back? She regretted leaving this wicked city. Her regrets turned her into a pillar of salt.

Do not let what has happened in the past become your master. It will keep you from the future God has in store for you. But more than that, Paul is telling us something even more wonderful. What he is giving us is the profound heart of the gospel message. It is the key to the abundant life. Strain forward to what lies ahead.

God has given us in Jesus Christ a sensational life-goal that has the power to set us free from the weight of our past regrets. Paul calls it the power of resurrection. Jesus calls it the kingdom of God. For both, these things are future guarantees by the grace of God. The key to dealing with regrets is to keep our eye on the prize, the goal, toward which we run.

Looking back has always been an issue for God's people. It is one of our favorite things to do. In Exodus 16, we run into it in a big way. Moses put his life on the line to get his people out of Egypt where they had lived as slaves for 400 years. He set them free. But when they got out into the desert they had to cross to get to the Promised Land, they started complaining. They wanted to go back to Egypt where they had plenty to eat and plenty to drink. They regretted that they had followed Moses out into the wilderness. Like a great leader, however, Moses said, "No, we are not going back to Egypt. That's not where we belong. There is a Promised Land out there."

God is constantly having to tell us as he does in Isaiah 43:18-19, "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing." No, don't live your life looking back to what might have been but to the new thing God is doing. There is a future you haven't seen yet. Run toward it with all you have. Live your life hurtling headlong toward the goal God has set before you.

How do we do that? I thought you would never ask. We see what Paul means in Philippians 3:10. Paul says two things.

One, we run toward this goal as we come to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. I find it interesting that Paul says in verse 10 that he wants to know Christ. You would think he has that nailed. "I went to Sunday School. I attended seminary. I have read the Bible several times. I know Christ. I can check that one off the list."

Instead, Paul says he still has a long way to go. Knowing Christ is a lifelong quest. Like knowing any person. The more time you spend with a person, the more you get to know that person, but you never know that person completely. So it is with Christ. We might think intellectually that we have a grasp of who Christ is, but do we know him in our hearts? Does he continue to grow in our hearts? Do we continue to grow closer to him? How do we know him today that is different from the way we knew him at first? There is always more of him to know.

In Philippians 2:5, Paul puts it this way. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."

We run toward the goal by growing in our knowing of Christ.

Secondly, we run toward the goal "by the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death."

That sounds morbid until we see that Paul is talking about discipleship, not martyrdom. Paul is talking about walking with Christ as a servant who empties himself in order to serve

others. Paul is talking about obedience to the will of God. Paul is talking about a unique kind of race toward the goal that God has set before us. We run the race by helping others get to the finish line.

I am sure some of you have seen a video from a Special Olympics several years ago. The contestants line up for a race. The gun goes off. You can see the seriousness and determination in their faces as they head down the track. Suddenly, one of the runners falls. The lead runner notices and stops. He bends down and helps his competitor to his feet. He puts his arm around him and together they walk across the finish line. This is a great picture of what Paul means. Giving up ourselves for the sake of others like Jesus did. Living like Jesus lived who came to serve and not to be served.

Maybe you saw the interview of Colt McCoy after the University of Texas lost to Alabama in the National Championship Game on Thursday. He was in the game for only 5 plays when he was injured. He did not return to play. Can you imagine how he felt? Here he was at the pinnacle of his college career, his last game as the starting quarterback for the Texas Longhorns, and he did not get to play. After the game, the television reporter stuck a microphone in his face and asked him a dumb question, "How do you feel?" For a few moments, McCoy could not speak. You could see the wave of emotions in his face. Then he said some gracious things about his team and about Alabama. Then he said, "I know God has control of my life." Was it a cop out? Shouldn't he have been angry like I was? He was disappointed, to be sure, but here is what I heard. Colt is running the race God has set before him. He has an even bigger goal than winning the national championship. I just pray that he will keep that perspective and that faith even as he goes into professional football. Will he have regrets? No doubt. Will he let his regrets ruin his future? No way.

Want to enjoy life more? Forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead.