

New Year Message 2012

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Heb 12: 1-3

As we come to a New Year, here are a few thoughts with you which I hope will encourage you in your desire to serve God with all that He's gifted you with, and with all that He's placed in your heart.

The Seasons of Life

I don't know about you, but life is not usually an endless stream of exciting events! Of course it's great when everything's going well, but unlike in some Christian books that you may read, there are also periods of time when not much seems to happen at all, or when everything that happens seems to be designed to stand in the way of all your hopes and dreams. It's in those times when we need to have the courage to stay the course and not *grow weary and lose heart*.

What has God given you to do? Are you a pioneer who is prepared to take risks in order to bear more fruit for God, or are you a settler - one who doesn't like the status quo of your life ruffled too much? Not all of us are called to be pioneers (at least not in major ways): some are called to be faithful in the positions God has placed us in; however some of us are called to push boundaries with new initiatives. None of us, though, are called to be passive settlers!

All of us experience unsettling times in our lives. Often God can use this to shake us out of our complacency or to encourage us to increase our dependency on Him alone. We may not choose to embrace change, but if nothing ever changes, and if we become completely risk-averse, the chance of God being able to use us fruitfully is greatly reduced!



Some of us are called to dream big for God and to take risks to see the gospel preached in new and innovative ways (and I don't mean only with words!). A number of people in the Musicians Network have taken risks over the last 3-4 years. Whether it is starting

a new community choir, travelling to other countries as a musical missionary, putting on creative concerts using visuals, poetry etc, hosting arts evenings at local coffee shops etc, making new innovative recordings or leaving a secure job to follow God's leading, it is clear that God has been at work. See the [News Page](#) on the Musicians Network website for more recent examples.

Further down the road

What is not often discussed is what we face 2-3 years down the road when the first flush of excitement begins to fade and the reality of what we've done kicks in. It is in these times that we are most vulnerable. We begin to ask 'did God really say'...

There are 3 possible responses to times like these:

- To have the courage to press on until we see the fruit which we believe God promised would come from our obedience to the vision He gave us
- To adapt and change even cherished ideas so that we become more fruitful
- To give up completely

Sometimes we need to face the fact that something simply isn't working and we need to have the courage to stop, but it never right completely give up too quickly just because the going seems tough!

Many great ministries have been through periods of frustration and doubt before they've seen the breakthrough that they longed and believed for. John Wimber went through years of seeing no healing despite praying for many people, then it was as if a dam broke and miracles began to flow. Jackie Pullinger went through many years seeing no change in the lives of those she reached out to, but because of her persistence and openness to the Holy Spirit's leading, she began to see the destitute of Hong Kong coming to faith in Jesus and coming off drugs through the power of prayer. Sometimes it can take great perseverance and years of faithfully following a vision before we see the fulfilment of a God-given dream.

Someone very wisely wrote: *Never doubt in darkness what God has revealed in the light.* If God has spoken, He will bring it to pass. If you struggle with this, don't struggle on your own - get other trusted friends, who are not afraid of being honest with you, to pray things through with you and to test with you what you believe God has said.

Discouragement is such a powerful weapon of the enemy! And it is when we take the biggest risks that we see both the greatest rewards but also the greatest discouragements. Taking risks implies the possibility of failure, but without risk taking, a life of fruitfulness is much harder to attain.

Finishing well

I've started, so I'll finish! (the famous phrase from the TV series 'Mastermind')



When God called us to start something, some don't even get off the starting block, but for those who do, how we finish is even more important! We are called to ***press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:14)***. Are we those who've faced obstacles which have caused us to decide that the race isn't worth pursuing? Much of what we're called to as Christians is more akin to a marathon than to a sprint.

In any marathon most runners hit what is often called the 'wall' around 20 miles into a 26 mile run. Here's how one website describes this:

After running about 20 miles, racked with total body fatigue, unsteadiness and possible light-headedness, a marathon runner hits an invisible wall, an apparently insurmountable physiological barrier which stops them in their tracks.

This is the time when many give up. But for those who get through this pain barrier, the prize is reaching the finishing line. Let's not be counted among those who have heard the call of God only to give up when the going gets tough.

In summary

God's call to us is not to give up too easily when life is challenging, or to limit what we believe God can do through us because of past failures. God is doing a new thing in our day and has uniquely gifted us as musicians and artists to bring life to those around us:

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. Isaiah 43: 18-19

May you know God's rich blessings in the year ahead, the strength of the Holy Spirit to spur you on and the courage and determination to finish the race to which God has called you.

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