

FOCUS ON FAITH

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FINISHING WELL

Another year gone – a new one about to start. How time flies!

By the time you read this column all those hectic preparations for Christmas will be just a memory; some of the presents will have been discarded; the Christmas tree will be sagging and shedding pine needles everywhere; some of the remains of the turkey may still be with us although most of it will have been consumed in sandwiches and curries and a few of us will already be back at work. In fact some may even have welcomed the return to the familiar and the routine having spent time with family and relatives!

Thankfully although we may fail...it doesn't mean that we are a failure

Yet with a new year comes the promise of possibilities for the future. Hopes, dreams and plans to be chased and hopefully fulfilled. Many of us will have good intentions – maybe even resolutions – of how we're going change, grow and develop. It could be to lose weight, get fit, play more sport, quit smoking, spend more quality time with the family, study for that degree or achieve promotion at work – a whole host of worthwhile and stimulating goals and aims.

I know that in previous years I've determined that I will achieve many of these kinds of objectives yet within a few days or weeks the pressures of life have meant my willpower has waned and the promises I'd made to myself have fallen by the wayside. In fact even though my maxim for 2009 was to be more intentional in what I did with my life, I still reckon that I haven't achieved all that I wanted to.

It's so easy to be hard on ourselves and as soon as we slip up on one of our objectives to give up completely rather than continue where we left off and try again. I know I've had to dust myself down and pick myself up on a number of occasions when I've failed to achieve what I've wanted to do.

Thankfully although we may fail in areas of our character, or we don't match up to our life values, it doesn't mean that we are a failure. Usually there is a way to redeem situations, to apologise or make restitution and to start over.

One of the amazing features of the Bible in my view is that we read about famous men and women who overcame their weaknesses and flaws. In fact the reason these stories about their shortcomings and failings are recorded is to show that with God's help we can overcome our frailties and the curveballs life throws at us. The stories of people in the Bible who were able to be restored after losing their moral compass or who triumphed after seemingly catastrophic

errors of judgment gives me hope that I can also bounce back again if I "blow it".

The apostle Paul was a man who knew something of this. Originally a fierce opponent of Christianity, he was on his way to interrogate and imprison Christians when a life-changing experience altered the course of his future. Instead of persecuting and harassing Christians he becomes one and in doing so becomes an example of faith in action.

Imprisoned (and eventually killed) for his faith as his life nears its conclusion he writes to a young man he was mentoring: "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*" (2Timothy 4:7). From being someone who vehemently opposed Christianity he confidently asserts that he has achieved his life purpose.

There's an old saying, "*It's not how you start that counts but how you finish*".

January 1st 2010 is a new beginning for us all. The year may bring its fair share of joys and sorrows, achievements and disappointments, moments of wonder and surprise but it's also a clean slate and an opportunity for us to start all over. During January the Prayer for the Week composers will be focusing on the concept of starting and finishing well but as we draw 2009 to a close and as I wish you a happy and prosperous new year, I hope you will join me in this prayer.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

"Heavenly Father,

Although none of us is exempt from difficulties and sadness in life, we thank you for your love and faithfulness to us. You have promised to give us hope and a future; to be with us when times are difficult and to strengthen and comfort us when we are afraid.

We ask that whatever comes our way in 2010 that as we commit our ways to you, you will direct and guide us and help us achieve those aspirations we have that will benefit those around us.

We pray too that you will guide and inspire those who work on behalf of our community; give them wisdom we pray and help us all to think not just about our own needs but how best we can serve one another.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."

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