S1 - New Year 2025: A Time to Renew, Reflect, and Rejoice

Sunday 5th Jan 2025

Philippians 3:12-16 & John 15:5-8

Introduction

Today marks the beginning of a new chapter, a fresh start for each of us. The world celebrates the turn of the calendar with fireworks and resolutions, but as Christians, we are invited to go deeper—to step into the new year not just with hopes and goals, but with a profound sense of God's presence and purpose in our lives.

Our Scripture focus today is **S2** Philippians 3:13-14: *"But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

This passage challenges us to reflect on our past, renew our commitment to Christ, and pursue His calling with vigour and hope.

Let us explore these three themes: **S3 REFLECTION, RENEWAL, AND REJOICING**.

1. S4 Reflection: Learning from the Past

The Apostle Paul's words invite us to forget what lies behind. But this forgetting is not about erasing the past; it is about releasing its power to paralyze us.

S5 Our past—whether marked by failures, pain, or even achievements—should be a teacher, not a chain.

Consider Joseph in Genesis. Betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, and unjustly imprisoned, Joseph could have been consumed by bitterness. Yet, he reflected on his journey and recognized God's hand, saying, *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good"* (Genesis 50:20). Reflection turned his wounds into wisdom, his pain into purpose.

In our world, there is a story of Thomas Edison, whose laboratory burned down in 1914, destroying years of research and prototypes. Edison's response? He reportedly told his son, "Thank God all our mistakes are burned up. Now we can start anew." Like Joseph and Edison, we are called to reflect not with despair, but with trust in God's redemptive power.

As you look back on 2024, ask yourself:

S6 What lessons has God taught me?

Click - What burdens must I leave at the cross?

Click - What victories can I thank Him for?

Reflection prepares our hearts for renewal.

2. S7 Renewal: Pressing Toward the Goal

Paul's challenge to "strain toward what is ahead" is a call to renewal. The Christian life is not stagnant; it is a dynamic journey of becoming more like Christ. **Click** **Renewal requires intentionality**—a resetting of our focus on God's purposes.

Jesus illustrated renewal beautifully in **S8** John 15:5, where He said, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit."* Remaining in Christ is the key to renewal. It involves daily habits of prayer, Scripture, and obedience.

In the secular world, the concept of renewal is echoed by athletes. Consider marathon runners. They push their bodies to the limit, but they also know the importance of hydration and pacing.

Without these, they risk collapse. For us, spiritual renewal is like hydration for the soul. Neglect it, and we will burn out.

S9 What steps will you take in 2025 to remain connected to the vine?

Perhaps it's committing to a small group, starting a daily devotion, or serving in a new ministry.

Renewal begins with a choice to prioritize Christ.

3. S10 Rejoicing: Living with Eternal Perspective

Paul's ultimate focus is on the prize: the eternal glory found in Christ Jesus. Rejoicing is not about ignoring life's hardships; it is about seeing them through the lens of eternity.

The Bible is filled with examples of rejoicing in unlikely circumstances. Paul and Silas sang hymns in prison (Acts 16:25). The early church rejoiced despite persecution. Their joy came not from their circumstances, but from their confidence in God's faithfulness.

In the secular world, Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl wrote about finding meaning even in suffering. He observed that those who survived concentration camps were often those who clung to a purpose greater than themselves. As Christians, we have the ultimate purpose: to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Rejoicing is not passive; it is active gratitude.

Click - What can you rejoice in as you step into 2025?

Perhaps it's God's provision, His presence, or the promise of His return. Rejoicing transforms our outlook and strengthens our witness.

Application: Steps for the New Year

As we stand on the threshold of this new year, here are three practical steps:

1. **S11 Set Spiritual Goals:** Just as people set fitness or career goals, set goals for your walk with God. Perhaps it's reading through the Bible, deepening your prayer life, or inviting a friend to church.
2. **Let Go of Weights:** Hebrews 12:1 encourages us to *"throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles."* Identify what is holding you back—unforgiveness, fear, or distractions—and surrender it to God.
3. **Focus on the Prize:** Keep your eyes on Jesus. When challenges come, remember Philippians 1:6: *"He who began a*

good work in you will carry it on to completion." God is faithful.

Conclusion

The new year is more than a turn of the calendar; it is an invitation to reflect, renew, and rejoice. Like Paul, let us press on toward the goal, confident that God is with us.

As we leave today, I encourage you to take a moment to write down

S12 one reflection from 2024,

(e.g., 'Grateful for growth and lesson learned').

S13 one area where you seek renewal,

(e.g., 'Renewed focus on faith and purpose').

and

S14 one reason to rejoice in 2025.

(e.g., 'Excited for new opportunities and blessings').

Keep this as a reminder of God's faithfulness and your commitment to Him.

May we step forward into the coming year with courage, hope, and joy, knowing that we are held by God's unchanging love. Whatever lies ahead, we walk with the assurance that Christ goes before us, beside us, and within us. Amen.

S15 Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, thank You for bringing us into this new year. Help us to learn from the past, embrace renewal, and live with joy. May we glorify You in all we do. Amen.*