

A vibrant rainbow arches over a rocky waterfall in a lush forest. The scene is filled with green foliage and the sound of water cascading over rocks.

A New Beginning

*Forget what lies behind;
move forward with hope.*

A NEW BEGINNING

Many of us like to look back as we move forward in life. But our past may be filled with regrets and mistakes. There may be things we wish we didn't do, or things we wished we had done. We tend to brood over the past, and wonder how life might have been different.

The Bible, however, offers us the possibility of a new beginning. It shows us how God wants to give everyone a fresh start in life. Even though we may have made mistakes and racked up failures before, we don't have to be imprisoned by our past. We can live our lives anew, and set our eyes and hearts firmly on the future.

God promises us assurance and hope for what is to come. That means we can stop looking back at what we didn't do but should have done yesterday, and start focusing on what we can do today, so that we can be ready for the challenges of tomorrow—knowing that He will be with us forever.

This selection of articles from *Our Daily Bread* talks about how God has offered each of us a fresh start in life. If you find these articles helpful and would like to receive the *Our Daily Bread* devotional, just complete the request form in this leaflet and return it to us. Our materials are offered at no charge. We are supported by the freewill donations of our members and friends.

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LOOKING AHEAD

*Today's Bible Reading***PHILIPPIANS 3:7-14**

Many people like to start off each year with reflections on the past year and resolutions for the next 12 months. Fittingly, the month of January is named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings. He was symbolized as a man with two faces, one looking back and the other looking ahead.

Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal.

PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14

Some people have trouble looking ahead with hope because they keep looking back and moping over the mistakes of the past. Their outlook for the future is dimmed, and their enthusiasm is dampened. But there is no use “crying over spilled milk.” History is likely to repeat itself if they keep on brooding over failures of the old year, or continue complaining about the injustices they suffered during the last 12 months. Nothing is gained by continually grieving over the past.

Do you want to make a new start? Perhaps you can begin by admitting your past failures and wrongdoing. Make right what needs correcting, and then, “forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead”, press onward with confidence and trust in God (Philippians 3:13–14). That was the apostle Paul’s secret, and it worked.

Let’s stop looking back and brooding over past failures. Rather, with a forward look, let’s move ahead with hope and joy. —*Richard DeHaan*

Instead of living in the shadows of yesterday, walk in the light of today and the hope of tomorrow.

PLANTING TIME

*Today's Bible Reading***GALATIANS 6:6-10**

Somewhere in the world right now a farmer is dropping seeds into the ground. Soon those seeds will begin to change the place where they were planted. The carefully prepared soil that appears barren today will become a field ready for harvest.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

GALATIANS 6:7

In the same way, resolutions to change can be seeds to alter the landscape of life for others and ourselves. This prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi is a powerful model of this longing to bring positive change in a hurting world:

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

A farmer who sows wheat is never surprised when wheat grows from the ground where it was planted. That's the universal law of sowing and reaping. Paul used it to illustrate a corresponding spiritual principle: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). Our natural self says, "Satisfy yourself," while God wants us to please Him.

Today is planting time. God has promised: "At the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (v.9). —*David McCasland*

Sow today what you want to reap tomorrow.

HANDLE WITH CARE

*Today's Bible Reading***PSALM 90:1-12**

We live in a society that's overrun with warning labels. From disclaimers on pills and "use-by" dates on soup cans to danger signs on chain saws, warning labels

draw our attention to impending hazards. Recently I received a box with a precious gift inside. The sender had attached a big red sticker to the package that said, FRAGILE: HANDLE WITH CARE. When I think about life and its fragility, I wonder if we shouldn't all wear one of those red stickers.

It's not a good idea to cruise through life thinking that we are invincible and that everything is going to be just fine—only to discover that we are far more fragile than we thought. It only takes a call from the doctor telling us that we have a life-threatening disease, or the swerve of a careless driver in front of us, to remind us that life is extremely uncertain. There are no guarantees! None of us can be certain of another breath. So the psalmist has an important piece of advice . . . a warning label of sorts: "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

Let's choose to live as though this were our last moment on earth by loving more deeply, forgiving more readily, giving more generously, and speaking more kindly.

That's how to handle life with care. —*Joe Stowell*

**Teach us to
number our days
aright, that we
may gain a heart
of wisdom.**

PSALM 90:12

**Yesterday is gone; tomorrow is uncertain;
today is here. Use it wisely.**

FACING THE FUTURE

*Today's Bible Reading***JAMES 4:13-17**

While going through some old files, I came across a 1992 special issue of TIME magazine titled “Beyond the

If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.

JAMES 4:15

Year 2000: What To Expect in the New Millennium”. It was fascinating to read the predictions made two decades ago about what the future would hold. Some general observations were on target, but no one foresaw many of the events and innovations that have radically changed our lives. The most telling statement to me was, “The first rule of forecasting should be that the unforeseen keeps making the future unforeseeable.”

James reminds us that any view of the future that omits God is foolish and proud. “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that’” (James 4:13–15).

Many people used to begin their statement of plans with, “God willing.” The phrase may have become trite, but the acknowledgment of God's overruling hand is not.

As we look ahead with God firmly in view, we can face the future with confidence in His loving plan.

—David McCasland

**We may not know what the future holds,
but we can trust the One who holds the future.**

TOO LATE TO CHANGE?

Today's Bible Reading

JOHN 3:1-8, 13-16

There are sayings in many languages about the difficulty of changing long-established habits. In English, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” In French, “*Ce n’est pas à un vieux singe qu’on apprend*

à faire la grimace” (You can’t teach an old monkey how to pull a funny face). In Spanish, “*El loro viejo no aprende a hablar*” (An old parrot can’t learn to speak).

When Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be “born again” to “see the kingdom of God”, he replied, “How can a man be born when he is old . . . Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” (John 3:4). Professor and author Merrill Tenney suggests that Nicodemus was saying, in effect, “I acknowledge that a new birth is necessary, but I am too old to change. My pattern of life is set. Physical birth is out of the question and psychological rebirth seems even less probable . . . Is not my case hopeless?”

Jesus’ reply included these words, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (v.16). That is the offer of new life and a new beginning for anyone, young or old.

Whatever our age or situation in life, with God’s power, it’s not too late to change. —*David McCasland*

**Jesus declared,
“I tell you the truth,
no one can see
the kingdom of
God unless he
is born again.”**

JOHN 3:3

**Failure is never final for those who
begin again with God.**

RECALL NOTICE

*Today's Bible Reading***ACTS 3:13-21**

In 2010, auto manufacturers recalled a staggering 20 million cars in the US for various defects. The thought of such a large number of defective cars on the road was startling enough.

But what was more disturbing was the apathy of some owners. In one instance, the executive director of the Center for Auto Safety warned owners, "It's a free repair. Get it done. It may save your life." Yet, despite the risk to their own lives, 30 percent never responded.

Likewise, many ignore God's "recall notice" to the entire human race. Unlike a defect found in automobiles, the moral defect of the human race is not the Maker's fault. He made everything "very good" (Genesis 1:31), but people's sin ruined it. God's offer to us is "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out" (Acts 3:19).

God offers not just a free repair of the human heart but also a replacement (Ezekiel 36:26; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Though the offer costs us nothing (Ephesians 2:8-9), it cost God the life of His only Son Jesus Christ. "[Jesus] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

Don't ignore the Lord's call. The free and permanent remedy offered by God for your spiritual defect will save your life! —C. P. Hia

**Repent, then, and
turn to God, so
that your sins may
be wiped out.**

ACTS 3:19

For a new start, ask God for a new heart.

