

New Life Family News

January 2006

He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.

Ezra 9:9

It is so hard to believe that we are now finishing another year. Oh, I well remember being told when I was a bit younger, “wait and see - life speeds up the older you get.” But I don’t believe that life is speeding up for me alone; the pace of life has increased exponentially over the past decade. When life speeds up, it is wise to refocus on our purpose, otherwise we will find ourselves swept along by life and end up missing out on the grace He has intended for us to enjoy. The scripture I’ve written above gives us our focus, our hope, and His promise for this coming year.

I remember this principle of focus from the days when “driver’s education” was taught in school. During the tenth grade year of high school, we were taught the basics of motor vehicle law and sound driving principles. We were instructed that once your speed increased beyond 5 miles an hour that it is essential to try to keep the “big picture” in focus. This is especially true when you reach highway speeds on secondary roads. The big picture focuses on all the road conditions: traffic ahead, traffic at approaching intersections, and traffic behind. The speed of the traffic in all directions and their possible actions are mentally noted: How fast is the car to my rear gaining on me, what is the car approaching the intersection on the right going to do, how is the distance holding between me and the car ahead? The importance of staying focused increases with your speed because the number of situations we must deal with increases too. Distractions take away our ability to respond and react to potential driving threats. Focused driving helps us arrive safely, focused living empowers us to become like Christ in character and in lifestyle.

We have learned that our focus in life is not self centered, but rather centered upon God and His plans and purposes; as Rick Warren so poignantly stated, “It’s not about you.” We refocus our lives by setting our attention upon our God and His purposes for us. The verse I wrote above is taken from the historical book of Ezra and teaches us two acts of grace by God toward those returning to the homeland of Israel after being carried off into captivity for 70 years, and two corresponding responsibilities given to the people of God.

First, God’s people were given new life. New life means to cause to stand upright (versus being stooped over or broken). Like these repatriates of the nation of Israel who experienced God’s grace (new life) in being restored back to their homeland, God has called our congregation New Life because of the work He has done for us through Christ and also the work He has called us to engage in, “being neighbors for life.” The New Life family is called to be people whose lives are patterned after the Good Samaritan (LK.10:29-37).

Second, God's people were given a wall of protection. This wall was a gift of God, but it existed because of the empowerment of God upon His people. They rebuilt the wall in the midst of incessant opposition. This opposition was also set against seeing the ruins of the temple rebuilt. The temple is where worship took place. It is where God manifests His presence. Today the temple symbolizes the Church and the New Testament believer. God's grace gave them the ability to stand upright and also the ability to be a part of the rebuilding project. The grace to rebuild and to see beauty resurrected in the midst of ruins is still offered to us today. God is still in the business of restoring broken lives and seeing His Bride, the church, standing strong and full of faith. The church is still God's hope for this broken world we live in. Ruined lives are still being rebuilt!

I do not know what this coming year holds. Like every year given to us before this one, there will be both a growing darkness and a growing manifestation of grace. There will be that ever constant mix of good and ill. In hope then, let's choose to walk in –to hope for –to live out the name He has given to us: New Life. Let's set our hearts upon being part of His rebuilding team here in central Maryland. Let's let His promises purge our hearts of double-mindedness and grant to us a focused vision of who we are and what He has called us to become: Neighbors for life.

Pastor Dave