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Welcome back to normal life after the hustle and bustle of Christmas and New Year celebrations!

How many people did you wish, in writing or in conversation, something like, "*Here's wishing you, all the very best in 2020*"? We started the year with this hope, that things will be better in 2020 - a new year and a new decade, but on the third day into the new year, the hope of a positive desire that some-thing good will happen, was dashed to a trembling wish that the worst will not happen.

We know we are not animals driven by the ***Survival of the Fittest***, so *why are people so committed to destroying each other?*

Perhaps we might explore a different question, *What is it that drives human beings to be nasty, to want to kill and actually kill others?*, because the answer to this question makes a powerful case for the existence of sin!

We have often defined ***sin*** as living life without God and outside His laws, either as a deliberate choice, or through ignorance, because the wool covers our eyes so very tightly.

A year ago, Thom S. Rainer, President of LifeWay Christian Resources, identified attitudes which kill church attendance<sup>1</sup>; every attitude which kills church attendance has to do with a ***personal interpretation*** of Church, and not a Bible-based understanding of Church. People who defend their personal interpretation of Church, have the attitude that Church membership is not Biblical, and the attitude that we are part of a church primarily to have ***our*** needs met: *I need healing, I need friends, I like to sing, ...*

These top two attitudes cause serious divisions in the church. People demand their own style and their preferred order of worship; churches have split over the shape, size and colour of the building; people want Pastoral leadership based on their personal interpretation of a leader, and not a Bible-based understanding of Christ-ordained leadership. None of this is new. To the Church at Philippi, Paul says, "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves.*"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [4 Attitudes Killing Church Attendance](#), by Thom S. Rainer (@ThomRainer), President and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources and author of several books, including his most recent *Scrappy Church*. Read more at [www.ThomRainer.com](http://www.ThomRainer.com), where this post originally appeared

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 2:1-4 (verse 3 in particular)

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Every now and again, the head of the Catholic church, the Pope, makes a powerful, Bible-based statement. When visiting Australia in 1986, Pope John Paul II said, **"We are an Easter People and Alleluia is our song!"**<sup>3</sup> The Church is people, not a building; people are alive because of the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ, ever grateful to God with continuous praise, because of the precious, invaluable gift of new life given to them!

It was God who planned our salvation, and made possible through the obedience of Christ first, to leave the comfort of Heaven and live among us, and then to obediently surrender His life on earth to the most cruel form of torture the human mind has ever devised! Because of Christ's obedience unto death, we are **"an Easter People and Alleluia is our song!"**

What then will be our response when our hope for something good turned into a trembling wish that the worst will not happen? Being Church, being an Easter people, Hope is what we cling to, and the way hope keeps us going, is through the ministry of encouragement: supporting, cheering and inspiring each other, keeping hope alive in each of us!

We the Church exist to encourage each other, because that is what Jesus said the Church does.

Replying to a question posed by an obnoxious teacher of the law, who tried to corner Jesus into identifying ONE of 613 laws to be above all else, Jesus said, *You have to consider two things together. The first is that your source of Hope comes from your worship of God with all your heart, soul and mind; from this worship, flows a second commandment which is just as important as the first, which is, to love your neighbour as ourselves, which is to encourage each other as living, functioning members of the body of Christ, for the greater good of the body of Christ!*

Let me leave you with **THE** most encouraging verse in the entire Bible, spoken by the most intolerant, violent and bigoted man, whose life was turned around by an unexpected, personal encounter with the risen Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul. Writing to the Church in the Roman province of Philippi, he says, *I have neither achieved, nor reached the perfection that Jesus calls me to, but I press on to possess that perfection, for which Jesus first possessed me! ...I do this by focusing on this ONE thing, forgetting the past,*

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<sup>3</sup> "Angelus" by Pope John Paul II delivered at Adelaide, Australia on Sunday, 30 November 1986

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*and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the Heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.<sup>4</sup>*

If you want to live victoriously in 2020, read these three verses and note the following:

First, Paul recognises he has *not **YET** achieved nor reached the perfection Christ Jesus expects of him*. He does not feel defeated by this "failure", he simply states a fact: *I have not **YET** reached that which Christ expects of me*.

Which is why he next declares, ***This ONE thing I do!*** It's the only time this particular phrase is used in the New Testament: a single-minded concentration on the things of God is essential to running the race to win the prize that Christ calling us to. If you talk to rally racing drivers, they will tell you their training is to identify an object in the distance to which they are speeding towards, and when they approach it, to identify another object in the distance and race towards it, and so on, until they win the race. This is what Paul means when he says, *"this one thing I do." I am totally focussed on driving myself from one goal to the next, until I finish the race!*

What is this **ONE** thing Paul does?

*Forgetting the past, straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on **to the end of the race** to receive the prize which only God in Heaven is holding for me, which is eternity with Him, achieved by Christ Jesus<sup>5</sup>.*

The clue to happiness, the precondition to clinging onto a positive hope is, ***Forgetting the past...***

There are four things we need to forget:

## **1. YESTERDAY'S MISTAKES**

It happens to every one of us. Everyone makes mistakes, and it happens with remarkable regularity. Everybody does stupid, foolish things. God's Word says: *"forget it! I have forgotten your past, why shouldn't you?!"*

## **2. YESTERDAY'S HURTS**

Life is a battlefield and you are bound to get hurt. Sooner or later, someone is going to hurt you, lie about you, verbally or physically harm you, misrepresent you, even

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<sup>4</sup> Philippians 3:12-14

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 3:14

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slander you. You have a choice, either allow the resentment and hate to build up and destroy you, or forgive as Christ forgave you - just as He forgave the Roman soldiers who didn't know what they were doing.

### **3. YESTERDAY'S POSSIBILITIES**

*"What if...?" and "If only...!"* Two phrases which blames someone in our past, and we cannot forgive them! It starts with ... if only my wife, ... if only my parents (my children), my business partner, the war hadn't... and ends up blaming God - *"if God would have... or if God wouldn't have..."*

People are dissatisfied with life because they had an expectation that hasn't worked out. Paul says, *forget your past hurts, forget your past mistakes and forget living with what might have been*, and finally...

### **4. YESTERDAY'S SINS**

People go through life carrying a burden of guilt for a past mistake, a moral failure, a stupid, hateful remark, a poor decision, a sin so horrible that they believe either God will not forgive them, or they will not forgive themselves, both of which are a lie.

To anyone who thinks like this, please be reminded, *There is no sin, no matter how great or small, once it has been confessed to God, it is forgiven. To carry the memory of it and the guilt associated with it, is to make God a liar, and that cannot be.*

If you want 2020 to be greatly enjoyable year, then keep reminding yourself as Paul did, *This ONE thing I do: forgetting the past and reaching out to that which lies is before me, I will press on with concentrated focus and every ounce of energy in me, to reach the end of the race, where God is holding the prize that makes it all worthwhile, to spend eternity with Him, which Christ achieved for me!*

This is the sure promise we can cling onto in 2020. Will you commit yourself to doing this? It makes for a much pleasant journey, if we are not carrying the baggage of the past, and it makes the journey more pleasurable as we encourage each other through the ups and downs in the road ahead!

**AMEN.**