

Don't Let the Devil Stop Your Future

If you want to achieve everything God plans for you, don't let the devil-or your past-hold you back. Here's how to press, push and pursue God's plan for you.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul likens our Christian journey to a race we are running-and running to win (see 1 Cor. 9:24-27).

To end up victorious, we have to not only train for the competition but also push past any obstacles that get in our way.

When you are competing in a race, there are certain disciplines your body has to become accustomed to: maintaining a proper diet, getting up at the crack of dawn, wearing clothing that is conducive to running and physical training. Don't forget those infamous warm-ups-stretching, straining, bending! There will be some sweating, some joint pain and some muscle soreness. But as any serious runner knows, "No pain, no gain."

It is the same in the spiritual realm. Paul wrote, "I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should" (1 Cor. 9:27, nlt). There are some disciplines we must practice to win this race and get the prize: effectual, fervent prayer; fasting; studying the Word of God; and communing with other believers in God's house. Sometimes it will mean getting up early in the morning before everybody else does and tarrying before the Lord in passionate prayer, buffeting your flesh and telling it to operate and cooperate with the Spirit of God to see the kingdom of God established in your situation.

I believe that's His purpose for your life—to birth whatever

He has put in your spirit. But it could be that you've gotten stalled on the journey because of your past. Paul wrote to the church at Philippi: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended [in other words, I'm still not all I want to be]: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13, KJV, emphasis added).

What are the things you need to forget so you can "press toward the mark"? Abuse? Betrayal? Bankruptcy? A failed marriage? Mistakes in raising children? Financial blunders? Abortion? Adultery? Paul offers the answer, "Reaching forth unto those things which are before" (Phil. 3:13, emphasis added).

You need to stop reaching back and start reaching forth. How often do you find yourself dragging up the past, replaying the memory of it, rewinding it in your mind, and watching it over and over again? Paul says, "Forget it."

Instead of reaching back, reach forth toward your miracles, your restoration, your financial breakthroughs and your divine purpose in God. Talk to yourself, and encourage yourself in the Lord.

Press, Push and Pursue

If you are a woman who has ever experienced childbirth, you will understand Paul's phrase "press toward the mark." The terms "press" and "push" are often associated with giving birth.

During the birthing process a woman is asked to press and push (or bear down). As she begins to experience active labor, contractions (also known as labor pain) help to birth the baby.

God wants every one of us to press, to push and to pursue Him

with all our hearts so we can birth the dreams, visions and prayers He has placed within us. He wants us to pursue His best for our lives. Until we press and push into Him, the things that have been birthed supernaturally in our spirits will never be born in the natural.

The idea of “press, push and pursue” came to my husband and me late one night while we were seeking the Lord. It came from a word God had spoken to me just before New Year’s 2002 in which He had told me to “press, push and pursue everything I have put inside you.”

God had put big dreams inside our spirits, and from experience we knew that His timing is crucial when it comes to stepping out to do the things He has put within us. We knew that we would never see the plan of God established in our lives and in the lives of those we love unless we were willing to walk in obedience and, if we had to, forsake all for the price of having it all.

God is telling you now that there is ground that has not yet been covered, people who still haven’t heard, lives that are still waiting for you to get finished with your test so that you can have a test-imony that will radically change their lives. There is still somebody, somewhere, who is waiting on you to get finished with your mess so that you can have a mess-age that will catapult them to the next level.

There are people who need to know that drugs are not the answer and suicide is not the answer. They need to know that they have a purpose, that they are anointed and appointed, that they can birth a ministry. They need to hear about the grace of God as demonstrated in your personal experience.

I know my own testimony has helped others press, push and pursue what God has put inside them. Maybe it will encourage you, too.

Many times through the years I have cried myself to sleep and

wanted to give up. Many times I have given up, only to hear the Father say, "When you are weak, then I am strong" (see 2 Cor. 12:10).

Many times I have had to sing, preach and minister while in pain with a fever and swollen tonsils, praying for people to receive a miracle when I needed one myself. Then I would hear the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit say, "I am with you; you are not alone" (see Heb. 13:5).

I can't tell you how awkward I felt when I knew people were talking about me, criticizing me, laughing at and making fun of me—but the Father would say, "Rejoice that you have been counted worthy" (see Acts 5:41).

People told me I would never make it in music ministry. They would say, "Just go back home to North Carolina and be glad God uses you locally." But I would hear the Father say, "Before the foundation of the earth I chose you, and I have ordained you to go to the nations of the earth" (see Jer. 1:4-5).

I'm still not all I want to be, but I'm making it. Maybe you're wondering, How did you make it, and how are you still making it, Judy?

I'll tell you how. Having done all to stand, I still stand strong in the faith! (See 1 Cor. 16:13.) I pressed, pushed and pursued, and I'm not done either. I continue to press, push and pursue.

You need to do the same. In fact, your life depends on how willing you are to press, push and pursue the things that God has said belong to you. Your spouse, your children, your grandchildren, your dreams, your destiny and everything that belongs to you depends on how willing you are to shake yourself loose from those things that entangle you and to go after your stuff with violent force.

Touching God

Some scholars believe that Lydia was the name of the woman with the issue of blood, one who would later become one of Jesus' followers. When you think about someone pressing, pushing and pursuing, she immediately comes to mind.

She represents many of us. She was a person who was familiar with intense physical and emotional pain as well as financial distress. She was someone under severe pressure, who was rejected by society because of her condition.

Maybe you can identify with her. But just as Lydia had a choice, you too have a choice. She could have stayed in her house, thinking about how terrible things were in her life. Had she done so, she would have remained ill.

But she made up her mind, and she didn't care what anyone thought. She had one goal, and that was to touch the hem of His garment.

Many of you need to do the same thing. Determine in your mind that things don't have to remain the same—that the way they are is not "just the way it is." God is bigger than your problems, but there is something you have to do.

You have to lift your voice to Him. You need to pray when you don't feel like praying, fast when you don't feel like fasting, praise when you don't feel like praising and worship when you don't feel like worshiping. You have to reach out and touch Him!

Remember, Lydia had to go after her miracle. Jesus didn't go up to her door and say, "I was just passing through the neighborhood, and I knew I had to come by and touch you." No! He could have done that, but He wanted her to exercise her faith.

There will be times when the Lord will ask you to do something

that will stretch your faith. Forget what tradition and religion have put on you, and be determined that today is the day for your miracle.

The Bible says that Lydia began to talk to herself, saying, "If I can just touch the hem of His garment, that's all, just the hem of His garment, I know I'll be made whole" (see Mark 5:28). I believe she said this to herself over and over again.

She knew the hem had the tassels and the knots, which represented the promises of God and the law that God gave to Moses. It also spoke of the covenant God had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. She knew that if she could just touch that prayer shawl, something was going to happen. She was determined that she would not live one more day as she had lived the previous 12 years.

As she pushed her way through the crowd, she pressed on and pursued her healing miracle. The Bible says that when she touched Jesus, she was immediately made whole. Jesus asked His disciples, "Who touched me?" But the disciples were very baffled and said to Him, "Master, look at the crowd around You and You ask, 'Who touched me?'"

"No," He said, "someone has touched me with faith because virtue has left My body" (see Mark 5:30-31).

There is a difference between the kind of faith that just brushes up against the promises of God and the kind that aggressively goes after the promise and touches Him. The latter kind says, "I am desperate."

As Lydia touched Jesus with her go-for-broke faith, God rewarded her. The Bible says that she came forward and confessed everything, and then Jesus said to her: "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace" (Mark 3:34, NKJV).

There has to come a point in your life at which you tell yourself it's time-time to move on from that relationship,

time to let go of that hurt, time for healing, restoration and breakthrough. Declare aloud, "I'm going to make it."

Whether you realize it or not, God is bringing you to that point and telling you, "It's time." It's time to bring forth that ministry, believe for the salvation of a loved one, seek to have an intimate relationship with Him, and see His power and anointing.

Up to now, you've gone to all the conferences and bought all the teaching tapes, anointing oil and prayer cloths. You've received insight, anointing, information and impartation. Now it's time for you to give birth to your own dream and experience depths you've never known before.

Always remember there will be opposition to your mission. The devil will tell you, "You can't do it; it's too hard," and you'll be tempted to echo it right back to God. "No! Not now, God!" you'll cry.

But when you meet with the greatest difficulties, that is the time to stir up within yourself violent faith. Ask yourself: What does the Word say about this situation? What does the Word say about this relationship? What does the Word say about this sickness? Let the Word be your final authority, not what the flesh says.

God is going to birth something through you, so start pressing, pushing and pursuing. Your dream is becoming reality!

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