

## **“From Striving to Thriving”**

Philippians 3:7-16

---

We're closing a chapter and turning a page. We're entering a new season and breaking into something fresh. For 2024, we're looking at the word “engage” and we're *engaging* the new year. Rabbi Jason Sobel said the theme for the new Hebrew calendar year is “open doors” that we're about to step into. As we end 2023, we do well to remember that how we finish one season has an impact on the way we begin the next. How we finish “today” could have bearing and weight toward how we begin our tomorrow and how we step into the new day ahead.

A lot of people in the world today are *striving*. That word has a tone of desperation to it, like just trying to hang on, or get through until the next thing begins. But, no matter how down, weird, or off-the-rails the world gets, we can still choose to thrive in it - to “live up in a down world”. When everyone else thinks the sky is falling, we can look up and say, *“No, it's not, because God Himself upholds it with His righteous Right Hand. God's got this, and, better yet, God's got me.”*

So, no matter what happens in this world - how things go - how spun-up people around us get - we don't have to. That's the idea of moving from a place of *striving*, or just hanging on, to the place of *thriving*, where we say, *“I'm going to make a conscious and informed choice - a quality decision - that this year, 2024, we'll choose to live up in a down world - no matter what!”*

Todd Beamer is famous for the phrase “*Let's roll!*” when, on September 11, 2001, United Airlines flight 93 was hijacked by psycho-terrorists as part of a coordinated attack. Passengers on board learned about the other hijackings and decided to resist. With that phrase “let's roll” that he uttered on a phone call with his family, he indicated the determination of the other passengers to do something about their situation - to take action - to engage. The passengers heroically fought the hijackers by crashing through the cockpit door.

Even though some of them died in the attempt, they determined to do whatever it took to regain control of the plane. Because of them, the plane crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and was prevented from reaching its intended target in Washington, D.C. True heroes, their courageous actions on Flight 93 are widely regarded as an example of selfless heroism during a tragic day in American history.

That phrase, “Let’s roll”, was all about engagement, and as we step into a new year, we have the opportunity to turn the page on 2023 - to run through the tape and finish strong - ready to live up in a down world - ready to live and *thrive* in a world that seems to be striving.

The word **engage** means *To throw oneself into. To enter into combat. To participate or join in an activity. To establish a connection or contact with someone. To attract and hold the attention or interest of someone.* We’re *engaging* a new year - the year of open doors - opened by God and not by us striving to kick them down ourselves.

We get the opportunity to step into some things that God is going to open up before us, and open doors compel us to go through them. Imagine God opening the doors for us all year long! We should lean into that and say, “*Yes, Lord, thank You for open doors in 2024 that You will have for us.*” Let us go through and engage, and not remain silent anymore - in love - but also not fearing potential conflict, even if it’s political (there’s nothing in this world that’s not “*political*”).

Who *better* to speak into the mores, morals, issues and ills of our nation than people who are living by The Book - the Word of God? We shouldn’t be trying to kick doors down, but we *should* be throwing ourselves into every open door that God puts before us.

Philippians 3:7-12 NASB

*“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”*

Jesus Christ laid down his life for every one of us. He gave the very best he had - *his utmost* - for us. He gave everything for us, saying, “*I’ve laid all of this down, and by this I have purchased your righteousness, your salvation, and your eternity. The only thing I can’t buy is your love, but I have purchased your heart.*”

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NASB

*"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."* That price was Jesus' own life.

Philippians 3:13-14 NASB

*"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

Paul says, *"I press on..."* to lay hold of that - to overtake and apprehend that which Christ Jesus purchased for us - our righteousness. Our part now is to *receive* it - to chase it down and overtake it - that which Jesus says is now ours because of his death and his life. And, what is now *"behind" us*? - what's in our rear-view mirror? We can't drive ahead while keeping our focus on what's behind us - living our lives while looking backwards to what's in the past - gazing at our failures and mistakes - things that didn't work out - missed or stolen opportunities - offenses towards us.

*How's that working out for you?* Would we be deemed reckless if we were in a car doing what we're doing in our *lives* right now? - constantly looking over our shoulders - thinking about it - rehearsing and nursing it? *Engagement* is throwing one's self into something. If we're engaging the future - what's coming - let's just rip that mirror off the windshield. Some of us need to do that in our lives.

What is God saying for us and *to us* regarding stepping into the new year? We have a choice today to say, *"I'm going to stop driving while constantly looking in the rear-view mirror. I'm going to stop living paranoid about my past. In fact, I'm going to receive what's ahead of me and in front of me."*

There's a reason why our windshield is so much bigger than our rear-view mirror - it's because we need to be looking forward at what's coming, whether it be opportunities or challenges, we need to see them out before us. God has made wide-open vistas before us if we'll just open our eyes and stop looking in the rear-view mirror. It starts by us saying, *"Father, I find that I'm constantly rehearsing things that happened years ago. I'm feeling sorrow, regret, and the weight of those things, even from decades ago."*

Our winning the race won't come by striving and straining for the finish line, but by simply letting go of what has been pursuing us from the past. We stop looking behind and *stretch* towards what's ahead. We can be leaning towards 2024 with open doors, good days, living up in a down world, refusing to live offended and to stay angry - but instead saying, *"You know what? This is going to be a good year!"*

News-feeds will continue to shout doom and gloom - where everything's falling apart - but *is it really?* - or is it possible that God really *is* sovereign, and he'll only let us screw this world up just so much? We need to keep praying for reformation, repentance, revival, and redemption. Revival *is* coming, and we're in the *foothills* now.

Rabbi Sobel also said, *"Past revivals were marked by fear. The people were desperate for God because things were so bad, but this isn't going to be that. This will be a revival that is marked by radical love. God will impart a Spirit of love that is so real - so powerful and compelling that we're going to love people through their 'stuff'. We're going to get through the mess and see what's behind the veil - behind the brokenness and the hurt - we'll be able to see behind it all. We'll feel compassion instead of anger and contempt. We'll be compelled to pray for people more - compelled to go to war on behalf of those who are opposite. A revival of Love - bring it on, Lord. Let it be."*

Philippians 3:15-16 NASB

*"Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained."*

We are challenged in 2024 to press on towards the goal - towards what's out in front. Forget the rear-view mirror - we can't change what happened. We can only move forward today to win "the prize". There *is* something to be *won* here - something to be *apprehended*. We are all on this journey. We hit plateaus, then grow again - over and over - and there's no need to look back *"...forgetting what's behind."*

## **Prayer**

*Father, it is our heart to engage the coming year and not live like we're driving a car by only using the rear-view mirror. Help us deal well with any plagueing, painful memories and traumas that come back by submitting them to you - taking every thought captive, and bringing it into the obedience of Christ. Holy Spirit, as we finish this day and run through the tape, and we engage what You have for us in 2024, open doors - Yes; a love revival - absolutely; living up in a down world - completely and utterly!*

*Lord Jesus, we give You 2023. Thank You for the experiences, both good and difficult, because You have taught us so much. We don't want to waste any of it - the down times - the pain - the trauma - we want to truly live and truly learn. We are moving from striving to thriving. Father, we love You. Thank You for Your Word.*

*In Jesus' name. Amen*