

Happy New Year! I trust 2007 is off to a great start for you. I am writing my first *Mid-South Baptist* column for 2007 during rest stops on a 1,898-mile car trip across the country to move my oldest daughter, Meredith, to her new home in San Diego, California. Last month, she was a resident of New York City. This month she resides in California. (Must be great to be young and adventurous!) She is excited by the prospects of her new job, new home, new church, new ministry opportunities, and new friends in a new place. Our trip has been punctuated (when she hasn't been sleeping in the car) by frequent conversations about "how cool" this new beginning is for her.

I, on the other hand, must confess that I am not "totally" excited about "how cool" this trip really is. I have been more prone to think about and dwell upon "how hard" this trip really is. I have been daunted by the specter of winter storms, potential car trouble, heavy traffic, and traveling almost 1,900 miles in two-and-one-half days with three people, five suitcases, six large, framed pictures, and a box of lampshades in a Jeep Liberty. Then, I get tired and unenthusiastic just thinking about how much work we have to do to get Meredith settled into her new apartment when, or if, we ever finally arrive in San Diego. When I am able to clear those thoughts from my troubled mind, I generally turn to thoughts of how totally "uncool" it will be to return to Memphis next week and leave my "firstborn" 1,898 miles away. I guess I would have to admit I am not handling all these "new opportunities" very well.

New beginnings are exciting...and challenging. There seems to be something in most of us that works against accepting change and getting comfortable with new opportunities. The knowledge of how hard new things can be sometimes thwarts our enthusiasm for new things that will be good things. While we smile and greet one another at this time of year with "Happy New Year," there is still the possibility that we can get less than excited about what a new year might bring. Scripture encourages us to welcome and embrace new opportunities and new beginnings. The Apostle Paul said, *"...but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things."* (Philippians 3:12b—15, NIV) Paul cuts right to the "bottom line" and reminds us that our journey with Jesus is not complete until we receive the "heavenly prize" He has for us. And...he reminds us that the essence of our journey with Jesus is to refrain from holding ourselves captive to the past and allow God to guide us to and through all He has in store for us in the future.

What "new thing" does God want to do in you in this new year? What "new opportunities" for ministry, evangelism and Kingdom growth is He showing to your church? What "new steps" of faith and obedience is He asking you to take in your journey with Him? What "new blessings" does God have in store as you faithfully engage in "new beginnings" and new opportunities? These are the

questions I am asking of myself as I walk into 2007. I hope you might apply them to your own life and your particular church. I am praying for myself, and for you, that we will not allow the toughness and challenge of change to dissuade us from embracing and enjoying the “new things” God wants to do in us and through us. TO HIM BE THE GLORY!! And to you...Happy New Year!!

Bro. Mike