

NEW STARTS

Psalm 107, Psalm 118:25, Philippians 4:13

New starts aren't easy--after illness, after bereavement, after some colossal failure it is never easy to begin again. It never was, still ain't. never will be. No, it is never easy to pick yourself up after crashing flat on your face. It is no simple matter to dust yourself off after covering yourself in some ignominious failure. And as for starting all over again when some wretched sin or some irrational, ridiculous circumstance has called a halt to your whole way of life--and you can't see how you can possibly carry on--things being what they are--and where do you go from here?--and what next?--and the most courage you can possibly muster is Charlie Brown's simple philosophy, "I dread only one day at a time" and even that isn't easy. As for someone else coming to help pick you up--it's often the wrong sort that rushes to your aid. For example: it's all very well for those amazingly healthy, aggressively happy, and awesomely honorable, successful people to clap you on the back, all bright-eyed and bushy with good cheer to say to you, "Buck up old boy, just pick up where you left off; courage man; never you fear; onward and upward I always say; tally-ho, you'll fox the world some day." After saying which, these dear friends ride off and leave you in the dumps--right where you left off living. They may send you a get-well card and extend deepest sympathy and hope they won't have to see you again soon, because you're too depressing--and besides they have enough problems of their own. So they discuss your situation; confidentially, of course, on the green with several people who are (.....) *Piously* "concerned" about you. They all agree at bridge they certainly wish there were someone, especially someone else who could help you, and isn't it bad, and isn't it sad, and they bury you at high noon with their refreshments, and never once think that you actually can pick yourself up where you left off. Never for a minute do they really believe you can make a fresh start at living all over again. If and when you die, they'll send flowers to your funeral, and one of them will probably go, to count the number who stayed away; and at the next meeting of the "club" they'll tisk-tisk-tisk, and they'll tut-tut-tut. I'm not saying this to be cynical. Some of your friends will genuinely want to help you and some will try, but don't expect "instant" help from everybody or anybody. Nobody in all the world is going to pick you up and dust you off and grant you a fresh start all over again. The reason they will not is that fundamentally and finally they cannot.

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you, or they can council and coach you, or they can reaffirm and reassure you. They may well upbraid and reproach you; they may even help relocate you (i.e. get you out of town); if they're not Presbyterians, lend you more and more money--but ever and always-- they must go back to their own knitting, and any fresh new start in this life for you, and beginning again, with new heart and your head back on straight--is strictly up to you. Not you and your parent figures to build scaffolding around you to support you, not you and your priest, not even you and your physician--or you and your psychiatrist -- (...) but up to you and the only real resource you have beyond yourself: you and your God. *

The reason a man is finally thrown back on the grace of God (....) is that there are some situations which all the most wise, and honest, and loving help in the world -- and all the greatest amount of willpower anyone can muster -- that in spite of everyone's "heave-hoing", "nose to the grindstone", "shoulder to the wheel", and every other cliché you can think of; nothing changes.

One great difficulty in picking up where you left off is that some problems don't ever leave off. They hold you down so you can't even pick your chin up off the floor. As the psalmist said, there are some situations that "swallow up all our wisdom" -- and then some -- and still aren't solved. There are some situations of a very unhappy sort we have no resource-in science, common sense, psychiatrists, much less the government, etc. -- to change. There are some bitter relationships we lack the ability to sweeten. There are long lanes that never will turn--till death do us part--and maybe not even then. I remember a relative of mine--a distant relative (boy, was she "distant"), who didn't get along with anybody telling me once that immortality was a "scary doctrine"--unless she could die and go some place by herself. For she couldn't think of anyone she wanted around for all eternity--certainly not her husband! She's dead now and I hope God put her in a phone booth so she could talk to someone occasionally at long distance.

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pressure, your digestion, etc. Oh well, give depression a try--come on--give up--feel sorry for yourself--be dependent--weep--turn blue--complain--wish you were dead. Or better, try the humming bird technique--artificial excitement--don't sit still--keep going--be happy with nothing to be happy about--make every day one long giggle--make life a colossal joke--"Here's Johnny"! Or try withdrawal--that's it. ^{well} ~~Around~~ people, go off alone--don't talk, hang your head, don't speak, get in your favorite ^{corner, go} bad mood---- the one that ill becomes you so. Think nobody wants to be with you; be sensitive, shrinking, spiteful. Or try anything else you want to try--talk too loud, too much; try the old snapping turtle routine, take exception to everything anybody says; get into fights; stay up all night for several nights, or sleep several days; get drunk; take too much medication, etc, etc. Or, like the 107th psalmist, let panic alone and try instead the presence and power of almighty God.

*Avoid
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That tough-minded, rugged souled old boy who wrote this psalm recognized that circumstances just do not always work out for saints, sinners, or Presbyterians. It is indeed, a test of saintliness to be able to accept the inevitable and pick it up from there with much faith and some renewable hope.

Miss Fuller (Margaret) once said rather grandly, "I accept the universe", to which , Thomas Carlyle replied, "She'd better!"

There are in this life many painful things which must simply be taken with the salty presence and power of God--and "so be it". This is a part of their character. It was certainly a part of the character of ~~Jesus~~ Jesus Christ. One of his most characteristic sayings was "be not afraid"--"not my will, but thine be done", his best remembered special prayer.

George Matheson was a student for the ministry when his eyesight began to fail. He was soon completely blind; but he went stubbornly on--when nobody thought he could or even should. He became a help to those who could not possibly help him. It was he in darkness who wrote the hymn "O Light that Followist all My Way".

Indeed, God has placed us in a world where ^{stubborn} (...) courage is demanded to face harsh reality. So God keep us from complaining about circumstances we cannot possibly change, or fretting about difficulties we cannot overcome. Only then can we do our best where we are and with what we still have left.

So the poet trying to make a fresh start renewed his resource: "Out of the vastness that is

God, I summon the power to heal me.”

So the psalmist cries for a new start: “Save me, I beseech thee, O Lord!”

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So St. Paul, having to start over so many times, after so many rebuffs, so many failures, so many (...), finally can call on ~~the~~ no strength but the strength of God: “In Him who strengthens me, I am able for anything.” (Philippians 4:13 Moffatt). “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” It is the whole point of ascension: No longer does place and time limit the presence of Christ. He is our eternal contemporary--available at all times to grant us the courage, the holy calm, and the good cheer we need.

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