

## Advancing to the next level

Many of you may be dreaming of progressing to the next level, breaking through, or moving to new horizons. Yet, you'll never achieve any of these aspirations unless you are prepared to leave your old baggage behind and just *get on with it*. Listen to what the apostle Paul had to say, ***“Not that I have already arrived, or am already completed; but I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also apprehended me. I do not consider myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward (stretching) to those things which are ahead, I press toward (hunt down) the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”*** – **Philippians 3: 12-14**. Notice, the one thing the apostle Paul invariably did was, ‘*he put the past behind him and got on with it*’. According to this scripture, **positive progress** was his main goal in life! He knew that completion will never come without progress, and the destination could not be reached without a journey.

Positive progress is a necessity for abundant life. Therefore, “advancement” should be the underlying objective for all your plans and purposes. To step into the abundant life that God intends for you, there needs to be an earnest commitment to *advancement*. As with Paul, not just the desire to start, but the determination to break through and finish strong. The condition of your life today is a true reflection of the effort you made yesterday (to this point). Effort is what will drive you forward, no effort no progress - it's that simple! There are far too many ‘coasters’ or ‘freewheelers’ in life. And although nothing appears too threatening when they are around, no progress is being made, and consequently, no momentum is being sustained. Therefore, as God is always progressing (moving forward), those of you who may be ‘coasting’ are being left behind in His perfect plan for your life.

**Progress is a process.** Too many people want to progress without the effort - without the routine! They want the glory without the guts; the destiny without the journey. The key is realising that success (the abundant life) is a journey, not a destination. And that there's no breakthrough without resistance! So remember, if you are truly progressive you will be very determined and also passionate, passionate about everything that pertains to your life. Progressive people never do the things that they were doing a year ago *today*. They have moved on – they thrive on change! They have developed a genuine commitment to advancement, and they accept and co-operate with the process (the routine) that always accompanies progress. Such people are systematically advancing, progressing step by step, toward their destination.

Now, there are some major hindrances to bringing about *positive progress*, things that can slow you down or derail you; things that can keep you distracted and unfocused.

Here are four precautionary measures you need to take to stop such hindrances or diversions occurring:

1. **Prepare for a long journey**. If you do not know where you are going, you will probably end up at the wrong destination. Likewise, if you are not prepared for the length of the journey you will probably end up jumping ship because you are tired and discouraged. You need the strength to endure out over the long haul. God's word tells you *“not to grow weary in doing good, for at the appointed time you will receive your reward.”* But the appointed time may be further away than you think! So hang in there and know that the Captain of your life - Jesus - is still at the helm.

Also, to be adequately prepared for any journey you must know the value of each step. When building anything you should have a starting point, and every step of the building process is essential to the next. It

doesn't matter how small or large the step is as long as it is taking you in the direction you have purposed to go. So remember, any step in the right direction is a step closer to your destination.

2. **Prepare for your destination**. People can be broadly divided into three main groups: (a) Those who *wonder* what's happening; (b) those who *watch* what's happening; and (c) those who *make* things happen. Which one are you? Is your life's walk progressive or regressive? Have you made real advances or are you stuck in a rut? Now, it's ok to be knowledgeable, but knowledge must become active in order to benefit you. Knowledge without experience is like a pool without water. Then, what's the point? Gaining knowledge is vitally important, but knowledge alone won't make you get to the next level. Advancement comes through the effective application of that knowledge or truth and this is called *wisdom*. Therefore, acquired wisdom secures progress. But progress is an action as well as an attitude.

Advancement always involves action. In life we never stop learning, but it is essential that we start living what we've learnt. The Bible tells you to "*be a doer of the word and not a hearer only.*" Doing, or being active, will prepare you for your destination (destiny). Furthermore, by actively applying the knowledge you have acquired, by being wise, you will also place yourself in a position to seize every opportunity that God sends your way.

3. **Prepare to say 'No'**. You'll never progress until you've learnt to say "no." Say no to intimidation, peer pressure, and emotional blackmail. To those people around you who will try to bully you into mediocrity or submission. There are many of you who are controlled by bad attitudes from their family, friends or peers. Some may even have the appearance of being wise, but in reality they reject progress. Often, people who are committed to opposing, preventing and resisting progress are trying to strengthen their own position by having more of the same. There are even people who become jealous of your progress and would want to hold you back. So resist this attitude by simply saying - No!

If people are anti-everything, then they are pro-nothing, and progress cannot be achieved from an anti-position. Advancement can only be achieved with clear and unhindered vision. Therefore, say 'no' to anyone that stands in your way, telling you why you can't go forward. Say a definite 'no' to the variety of intimidating advice that has the appearance of wisdom, but is designed to suppress and hold back. There will always be people who are threatened by your progress, because it lends no support to the shortcomings in their own lives. Note, whatever you compromise to gain you will surely lose! So why not take Betsy Ford's advice? "*Don't compromise yourself, you are all you've got!*"

4. **Prepare for great opportunities**. Life is full of opportunities waiting for you to enjoy. Be fully prepared for great opportunities to confront you and cause you to advance. God loves you enough to bring opportunities your way. The question is this, "*Have you prepared yourself to make full use of these opportunities when they come?*" Opportunity and progress are close allies!

There may be times when it seems that others have amazing opportunities opening up for them, but the door appears to be closed for you. Our God is a God of opportunity, but He is also a God of equal opportunity. He doesn't have favourites, so why should this be? What should others have more open doors than you are having? Where does opportunity come from? If it's not luck or coincidence, fluke or fate, what is it? And, how can you get new and fresh opportunities into your life?

I'm so glad you've asked! Here are three steps that will help produce more opportunities. I refer to them as the three "D's" - *desire, decision and determination*:

[i] **Desire.** The determining factor is always how much do you really want to progress? What are you prepared to sacrifice in order to achieve your goals or, have your breakthrough? Desire is the starting point for all advancement. Your true desires will drag you toward your destiny, and they are sweet. **“A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul” Proverbs 13:19.**

Desire has remarkable creative energy. Energetic go-getters have an intense desire to advance themselves; they have a clear vision of a better future, which they are determined to realise. Note, this is driven by *desire*. You must have the ability to see the bigger picture and then to motivate yourself, through genuine desire, in order for it to become a reality. Healthy, positive desires are tools you can use to bring about a result that is larger and more important than what you have already achieved.

[ii] **Decision.** Positive desires will precede positive decisions. And right decisions place you in the right position for opportunities to strike. You will remain in the path of great opportunities provided your decisions and positive desires always line up. There can be no contradiction if these two steps are going to remain effective.

When ever your decisions contradict the desires in your heart, progress will be stifled, and you will eventually become discouraged. So remember, opportunities come to those whose desires and decisions have placed them in the right position to succeed.

[iii] **Determination.** Many people may find themselves well positioned for opportunity, but it's still not happening. So what's missing? What they need is determination (persistence), which in turn produces endurance and faith. Often the greatest opportunities require you to build your stamina and fortitude. This is because the opportunity is only an open door, and when you step in you may find that the task ahead demands specific qualities. Most great opportunities require you to persist, stand firm and refuse to give up. Determination and endurance will produce these qualities in you and help build your character.

I believe that opportunities are maximised by people of character, and persistence is a trait of strong Christian character. Persistence will keep you committed to your course and *with it* you will make positive progress, and get to the next level, no matter what the circumstances.

To recap: Prepare for your *journey*; prepare for your *destination*; and prepare to say 'No' along the way. Then remember to, have desire; be decisive and be determined!