

Seize the baton and run!

St Paul says in his letter to the Romans: “Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (Romans 12;2)

Necessary new beginnings are often hard! Why is that?

The old ways slip back so easily don't they? But life itself especially in today's world is full of starting all over again. We lose a job, we lose a spouse to cancer, we are termed out of office...

I think of politicians and what they and their staffs have to face. One day you are Prime Minister of Canada and the next you are not. One day you are President of the United States and the next day you have to return to ordinary life after having held the most powerful office in the world. Or one day, after serving a church for many years you are no longer the minister. All of us, on all levels, have these forced new beginnings. If we wallow in self pity or live in yesterday, we can get into deep trouble...

Like the couple who were arguing all the time. The man came home at 5 pm and the arguments started.

By 7 pm they were still at it and so the man said “Honey why don't I go outside, pretend I just came home and we can start over again.”

“Fine” she said “That might help!”

So, the husband went outside and then came back in and announced, “Honey I'm home!”

And his wife said “And where do you think you’ve been? Its after 7 o clock!” 😊

I was reading a book recently that was talking about Baby Boomers losing their investments and having to make a new beginning and work well past retirement age. Suddenly in this modern world of downsizing and restructuring, very highly qualified people find themselves shoulder to shoulder with those with similar qualifications, who are much younger. The book suggested plastic surgery for Baby Boomers to level the playing field. The book argued that it would be a good investment to get rid of the wrinkles and thus get the job.

This reminded me of the joke about a woman called Esther who made an emergency appointment to see her doctor about her problems of aging, after hard partying the night before. “Doctor,” said Esther, “Just look at the mess I’m in. When I awoke this morning, I looked in the mirror and was shocked to see my hair all wiry, my skin wrinkled and blotchy, my eyes bloodshot and bulging out of their sockets and my face so white that I looked like a corpse. What on earth is wrong with me, doctor?” The doctor looked at her and calmly said, “Well, for a start, there’s certainly nothing wrong with your eyesight...”

Chaim Potock once said “Beginnings are hard”...I wonder if that facelift advice was perhaps unfortunate, especially if what is needed is not **outward appearances** but **inner transformation**? 😊

And what transforms us the most, except Life itself? If this world is a place for making our souls; if God is actually with us in the New beginnings, then what makes them still so hard?

I think a lot of what makes new beginnings hard is **the drag of the past**. All the best teachers tell us, that we have to let the past go, if

we are to move forward. We need to get out of the old chapter and turn the new page.

In many prisons like the Stratford Jail, in order to visit someone, you must go through a set of electronic doors. The first door must close completely behind you before the second door will open.

Life is like that.

So many of us hang around in the last chapter and try to keep the door open. We have legacies from the past. We can easily say; “ I am all washed up, I failed, I messed up no one will hire me now, Life is over for me, I’ll never get married now, She will never forgive me’ and we remember the good old days when we were doing well... and we can’t let them go.

And so, we choose the Victim mentality and start to feel sorry for ourselves! And with the weight of this past on our shoulders, we find having to start all over again very hard, if not impossible.

Og Mandino has some excellent advice for us about how to move forward.

This is what he counsels us;
“Live this day as if it will be your last. Remember that you will only find "tomorrow" on the calendars of fools. Forget yesterday's defeats and ignore the problems of tomorrow. This is it. Doomsday. All you have. Make it the best day of your year. The saddest words you can ever utter are, "If I had my life to live over again...
“So, take the baton, now. Run with it! This is your day! Beginning today, treat everyone you meet, friend or foe, loved one or stranger, as if they were going to be dead at midnight. Extend to each person, no matter how trivial the contact, all the care and kindness and understanding and love that you can muster, and do it

with no thought of any reward. Your life will never be the same again.”

What Og Mandino is talking about is taking this kind of spiritual transformation into the most basic commandment of all religions, The love of God and the neighbor:

To live in the moment, act in the moment and love in the moment, both yourself, God and your neighbor. And to put a sense of urgency into it!

There is no victim in this advice, no being stuck in the past, there is only **action**. If we are to make a new beginning we have to act, not go home the same old way! Instead, we open ourselves to new possibilities. If, the world pushes us to our knees, then that is the place to pray and ask for help.

For God cares for us. As the old saying goes “If God brings us to it, he will bring us through it.” As the African America spiritual says: “He didn’t bring us this far to leave us.” God does not park us by the side of the road at the gate of possibilities and leave us there. God is interested in travelling with us through the gate of possibilities into new life.

Don Flyn was not a man whose emotions were close to the surface. He did not entertain romantic ideas. He rarely told his wife that he loved her and when she would bring up her idea that she wanted to re-celebrate their wedding vows, he thought she was nuts. She would bring the idea up on wedding anniversaries or when they attended a wedding together. “Oh Don, wouldn’t it be nice to say our vows over again to each other? I’d love to invite some guests and do it all over again.”

Don believed that once was enough! But over the years this idea still seemed important to her and so he said, “Well maybe if we were on a vacation somewhere, just the two of us...”

But then Sue was diagnosed with melanoma. The surgeon cut into her leg and removed a mole. All seemed fine but the cancer returned and in November she had a lump on the same leg as

before. Sue went in for surgery and had lymph glands removed. The news was good. The cancer had not spread beyond the lymph glands. But, one week afterwards Sue's father was also diagnosed with cancer. This was not a good time for Sue at all, and she took it hard.

Christmas was coming and Don struggled with what he should give Sue. She was always very clear about this. She wanted something 'personal'.

After the cancer bout, Don really searched his soul. What could he give her to show her that she was valued? Her idea of renewing their vows began to take on new meaning. This was a way that he could show her that he wanted to do it all over again and make a new beginning, but with a deeper intimacy than they had ever had before. He thought of his wedding vow- "in sickness and in health" and began to cry softly...

Sue, despite all she had been through, wanted to host Christmas at their home. Don called on their neighbor, a justice of the peace, and asked her whether she would preside over a recommitment ceremony? The Justice of the peace was busy on Christmas Eve and so Don asked for a 4 pm ceremony and told her why. With tears in her eyes, the justice of the peace said that she would! Don was over the moon!

For once he was not just going to do something that never was to happen, **he was going to seize the baton and run with it!**

He talked to Sue's parents saying that he really wanted them to be there and her father now on chemo, said that no matter how sick he might feel on that night, he wouldn't miss it for all the world!

Don's son Shaun recorded their special wedding song off the Internet. Don ordered flowers, cake, champagne, and boxes of Kleenex for happy tears!

At the florist he found a small snowman statue that had the word Hope on it and Don began to cry all over again. This undemonstrative man, who never showed emotion before, was now often in tears.

Christmas Eve came and Sue, when she arrived home, looked very puzzled to see everyone two hours early. “What is going on?” she said a little upset.

Then their wedding song began to play, people started taking pictures, and Don said to her:

“Merry Christmas, honey. I love you. Will you marry me again, tonight?” There were tears of joy and lots of champagne afterwards...

Don Flynn had learned that The saddest words we can ever utter are, "If I had my life to live over again...."

Touched by a brush with death, he could now understand these words:

“Extend to each person, no matter how trivial the contact, all the care and kindness and understanding and love that you can muster, and do it with no thought of any reward. Your life will never be the same again.

Or, as St.Paul says: “Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person **by changing the way you think.** Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”

Amen.