

FROM THE HEART  
Part one, Finishing Well  
By Dr. Greg Wiens

Christmas can be a hectic time of crowded schedules of programs, parties, appointments, counseling, shopping, cooking, traveling and visiting family. It can also be a time of joy, celebration, fun, excitement, pain, frustration, fear and embarrassment. I want this season to find you encouraged and yet challenged in ministry. You need to know that the staff of Florida Church of God Ministries and I have committed to pray for each of you as leaders and pastors during this season. I also know that 2009 has the potential to be a very difficult year for many of us.

One principle I have learned from running is that how you finish a workout today will directly influence how you run your workout tomorrow. In other words, there are certain things I need to do as I finish my workout today, which will allow my body to recover and be in better condition to run tomorrow. The principle applies clearly to ministry as well.

To start 2009 well means we must finish 2008 well. The first thing we need to do is to schedule some downtime before we start. If you are exhausted from the flurry of activity at the end of the year, you will; with no doubt; find yourself less than adequate for the coming storms. I find Jesus is a great example of this principle. As people were flocking around him and seeking his attention all the more, he was very intentional to schedule some time alone by himself. He appeared to take a regular time alone, but he also would take the disciples away for a longer period of solitude and recovery. There was a sense of rhythm in his life. We see this clearly in the opening seven chapters of Mark.

In Mark 1.35ff we read, *“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”* Jesus chose to leave this place. Mark 3.7 tells us that Jesus withdrew with his disciples. Of course people followed them. As you read the next four chapters you find that he enters a very intense time of ministry: teaching thousands, healing many, doing battle with those who were opposed to him, and even the emotional stress of family members being murdered. But in 6.46ff we see him sending off his disciples so he could have some time alone to pray. He also wanted some extended time alone to relax. In fact, in 7.24 we read, *“Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and DID NOT WANT ANY ONE TO KNOW IT...”*

Jesus knew the rhythms of grace and how to say enough was enough. My prayer for each of you is that you too will take some time at the end of this year

so that you can experience God's grace. Let me encourage you to take a notebook with you. Write down the major events of your life this past year. List the lessons that you have learned. Meditate on how God has changed you this last year. How has God spoken to you this last year (or maybe whispered)? What decisions would you make differently and why? How are you different than you were a year ago? What books have you read and how have they helped you be a better person or leader? How have you grown with your spouse or children?

As we close out 2008 and look forward to 2009 I would personally like to thank each pastor, leader and laity who made this past year a phenomenal success. In spite of our economy being in one of the worst recessions since the great depression I have many things to thank God for. We have seen a large number of our churches turn around this year. New Venture in Titusville now as over 200 attending when last year at this time there was barely 20. And the good news is that they have baptized 28 of these men and women. This is just one example of growth and health that has taken place across the state. I can name at least other 15 churches that have seen similar changes this past year. Within the last decade of my leadership, there has never been a year where we have witnessed such growth.

This isn't just a fluke. This is the result of God clearly honoring the outward focused efforts of many of you pastors, leaders, ministers and laborers in the churches. There are many other churches that have also made tough choices this year to reach out to their communities, which will produce fruit in 2009. I think as we look back at 2009 a year from now, we will be blessed again.

But that is what I want to talk about next week, part two: ***Starting Well***. Preparing for the roller coaster ride of 2009.