

NEW BEGINNINGS:

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2026 unlocked: Carry hope, not the weight

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BY DAPHINE NAKABIRI

As the New Year begins, despite the enjoyments and celebrations, many teens continue to carry silent struggles, which, of course, is normal because life continues after all.

This weight includes unmet expectations, an unsure future, wrong choices, mistakes, missed opportunities beginning to feel like a permanent label, broken friendships, family struggles, and questions they are still afraid to ask.

Similarly, as the world counts achievements and memories created, many have simply only considered that they have survived the old year. The kind of burden, though often unspoken, slowly wears down confidence and

joy, making life feel dark, financially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually, ultimately making small challenges feel overwhelming and the future frightening.

Yet, just as the Christmas story, you are reminded that darkness is not the end of the story. You all need to understand that hope is still possible, even in difficult seasons.

As a teen, it is important to note that hope does not erase pain, however, it gives strength to face it, one day at a time.

Therefore, choosing hope as the new year approaches is not pretending the year was easy, but refusing to allow the hardest moments to define who you are becoming.

Pastor Gary Skinner, one of the

founders of Watoto Church Ministries, says amid life's struggles, people are called to love one another. It is through this love, he notes, that healing begins and broken dreams can be restored.

As such, you could begin with setting goals of what you want to achieve in the new year and then work hard within the period to see that you achieve the best from your hard work.

Having this determination and mindset is vital because this helps you to stay focused to improving your life.

Additionally, as young people you need to understand that you are never meant to carry life's burdens alone. As the year begins, it is okay to release the weight of regret, fear, and disappointment that has been building silently.

Pastor Julius Rwigwizyo, the team leader at the Watoto Church, says: "The message of Christ is not that we must have everything figured out or face life by ourselves, but that we are seen, deeply loved, and still becoming. His grace makes room for growth, healing, and new beginnings."

Therefore, as a teen, one of the most meaningful ways to start the year is to carry hope, not the weight.

Why having hope matters

While the world counts achievements, many are simply trying to survive the year.

The kind of burden, though often unspoken, slowly wears down confidence and joy, making life feel dark, financially, emotionally, physically, and even spiritually, ultimately making small challenges feel overwhelming.

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As a teen, it is important to note that hope does not erase pain, however, it gives strength to face it, one day at a time. Therefore, choosing hope as the new year approaches is not pretending the year was easy, but refusing to allow the hardest moments to define who you are becoming.

Just as Jesus died on the cross to save humanity from sin, His sacrifice reminds young people that they were never meant to carry life's burdens alone. As we embrace the new year, it is okay to release the weight of regret, fear, and disappointment that has been building silently in the past year.

A new beginning

With the onset of the New Year, it is important to understand that while it may not arrive with instant answers or immediate solutions, it can arrive with renewed strength.

This requires you to have a positive mindset, because often a New Year does not erase the past, but offers an opportunity to approach life differently, with greater self-awareness, patience, and hope.

For many young people, acknowledging this reality is the first step toward moving forward in a healthier way.

For now, take a moment to pause. Reflection is not about replaying every mistake or regret, but about recognizing how far you have come. It involves letting go of the labels you may have placed on yourself such as failure, disappointment, or not being good enough. These are often shaped by moments, not by your full story, because a single experience should not define your worth, your future, or your potential.

Additionally, speaking kindly to yourself is another important step into the new year. Many teens are their own harshest critics, constantly measuring themselves against expectations from school, family, peers, or social media. Yet growth thrives in environments of grace, not constant self-judgment. As such, choosing kinder self-talk allows room for healing, learning, and confidence to rebuild.

The New Year is also a reminder that you do not have to face life alone. Reaching out for help, whether to a parent, mentor, teacher, pastor, or a trusted friend is not a sign of weakness, but of wisdom. Usually, carrying silent struggles alone often makes them heavier, yet sharing them can bring relief, clarity, and support, because no one was meant to navigate life's challenges in isolation.

As you step forward, it is helpful to focus less on perfection and more on progress.

When you consider setting goals for the new year, do not focus on dramatic resolutions or unrealistic expectations.

Instead, take small, intentional steps such as improving communication, managing time better, caring for mental and physical health, or strengthening faith as these can lead to meaningful change over time. It is crucial to also remember that as progress may be slow, it is still progress.

Equally important is learning to release what no longer serves you. This may include unhealthy comparisons, toxic relationships, lingering guilt, or fear of failure.

Carrying these burdens into a new year only limits growth.

Ultimately, a new beginning is not about pretending the previous year was easy or problem-free but about refusing to let hardship thrive.