

## BIBLICAL ADVICE FOR THE NEW YEAR

Every New Year we talk about what we want to do differently, what needs to be changed, and what bad habits we want to drop. We call these New Year's Resolutions.

Actually, rather than resolutions, they are New Year's hopefuls or want-to's. This morning's Parade magazine supplement to the newspaper gave advice about learning to feel grateful, get your finances in order, lose weight, make happy lists, strengthen relationships, and so on.

Here's some truly beneficial biblical advice for the New Year.

### 1. Paul: Grow in the Lord.

Philippians 3:12-14(NIV) Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

The worst thing we can do is to become satisfied and complacent. God created us to grow. Something is terribly wrong when a little baby doesn't physically, mentally, and emotionally grow and mature.

It's the same spiritually. When we became a Christian we were recreated by Jesus to grow. As new creations God wants us to become all He intends for us in Jesus Christ.

This takes place within a tension—as Christians we have died to sin, yet we are still sinners living in a sinful world. But it can be a creative tension.

We know our sins were forgiven, and we were declared righteous before God. We know we have a personal relationship with God.

Out of our thankfulness to God and His love and encouragement, we want to grow and to continue growing. Living in the tension of a sinful world can help us grow. Paul tells us to...

## (1) Forget the past.

The past is past. What happened has happened—it cannot be changed. So leave the past behind, both the good and bad.

The good news is that because of our special relationship with Jesus, we are uniquely equipped to do this, to move on with our lives.

Have you noticed it's mostly the bad stuff of the past that we hang on to? We keep reliving it, remembering, it and resuffering it.

Here's what happens when we refuse to leave the past in the past. We contradict everything we believe about the healing, forgiving, and redeeming power of God.

## (2) Focus on the future.

I'm sure you immediately noticed the emphasis of these verses—I press on; I strain toward what is ahead; and I press on. When we follow Paul's advice we break the power of the past. You cannot change your past, but you can change the meaning of your past.

When you let them, the bad events of the past can affect your present and drag you down. They can cause anxiety, harmful regret, and complacency.

Even the good things of the past—blessings, achievements, and so on—can stop you from growing when you live for them rather than the present and future.

Follow Paul's advice. He had one object, one aim, one great purpose—to be like Christ and to serve Him. Make this your goal also.

## 2. David: Depend on God.

Psalms 121:1-2(NIV) I lift up my eyes to the hills— where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

The 121st Psalm is about God's watch care over us. It doesn't matter how old we are, how mature we are, or how religiously educated we are—we never outgrow our dependence upon God.

Even our ability to live that is pleasing to Christ is dependent on God's power and guidance. When you are honest, you realize how weak you are apart from God.

You know the power of temptation; you know how easy it is to sin. You are always aware of the passions that sometimes threaten to overcome and control you.

That's when we need to remember some things about God. God is our Creator. He made us. That means our personalities and emotions come from Him. He understands everything about us.

Psa. 121:3 reminds us that God never sleeps—he is our sleepless guardian and protector. This means Jesus Christ is not only our Lord, He is also our protector.

He never grows tired of taking care of us. He never forgets us, even for a moment. He is always ready to be strong on our behalf.

Verses 7b-8 say, He will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. Learn to depend on Him.

### 3. Enoch: Walk with God.

Genesis 5:24(NIV) Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

This is one of the most amazing verses in the Bible. Enoch never died. During his life he was so close and intimate with God that God chose to simply take him to heaven without death.

What does "to walk with God" mean? Micah, the Prophet, said it well: And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

The Apostle John had the same thing in mind when he said, "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:6-7).

It is not uncommon to hear glowing eulogies at funerals. Sometimes so many nice things are said we wonder whether we are at the right funeral.

The difference between hearing nice things at someone's funeral and what was said about Enoch is that people said nice things about him before he went to heaven. He walked with God!

This is the ultimate human compliment. Wouldn't it be great if people would say this about you and me? Why not resolve to walk in daily fellowship with God this year!

## 4. Joseph: Run from sin.

There's not enough time to tell the story of Joseph—the Coat-of-Many-Colors Joseph. After being sold into slavery, he attained a place of importance in a very prominent Egyptian household.

The lady of the house desired him because he was young and handsome. His responsibilities necessarily brought him into contact with her every day.

Joseph knew what she wanted was wrong. He knew it would have been a sin against her husband. But more than that, he knew it would have been a sin against God. So he did everything he could to avoid being in a compromising position.

Genesis 39:7-12(NIV) and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

Those last 5 words tell us about the character of Joseph. He "ran" from the house and its temptation. Like Joseph you and I are vulnerable to sin. God has not excused us from living in a sinful world.

Our personal temptations may not be sexual—but every day we are tempted by sin. And sometimes sin ambushes us just as it did Joseph.

You had better make a decision now, before it happens, that, with God's help, you will turn your back on it—that you will run from it. God will give you the strength to do this.

## 5. Gideon: Stay true to God. (Judges 7)

Even when it's unpopular, stay true to God. You know the story of Gideon. He's the one who put out the fleece to test God. He called 32,000 fighting men together to fight the Midianites. He felt pretty good—that was a lot of support.

But God told him to let those who were afraid to return to their homes. Twenty-two thousand left. That was quite a blow to Gideon. But at least he still had 10,000 he could count on.

Again, God said that was too many, and 9,700 more were sent home, leaving him with just 300 fighting men. (You do the math—the Midianites and Amalekites were as thick as locusts; their camels could no more be counted than the sands of the seashore.) These are not very good odds.

But those 300 men in the hands of God were all that were necessary.

In this New Year there are going to be times when you will be required to make a stand for God, and you will realize that no one else is standing with you—that friends and family can't or won't help you.

It may have to do with serving God in your family even though they ridicule you. It may have to do with serving God through your church.

It may be some stand on a moral issue that you believe you should make. Decide right now to stay true to God, even if it seems as if no one else is.

## 6. Andrew: Lead someone to Christ.

John 1:40-41(NIV) Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).

Do you know the meaning of "Andrew?" It means "manly," and what a man he was. Virtually every time his name is mentioned in the New Testament he is introducing someone to Jesus.

After Andrew met Jesus, it seems his greatest joy was to bring others to Jesus. He had become Jesus' friend and he spent a lifetime introducing others to that friendship.

Though Andrew was forever in the shadow of his brother, Peter, he was the one who introduced Peter to Jesus. That must have given him great satisfaction.

I'm so thankful that he did. What an impact on the spread of Christianity Peter had—but first, he had to meet Jesus. Andrew made sure that happened.

We can never foresee the results of us bringing someone to Jesus. We can not know what Jesus will do with that person. Be ready to introduce your friends and family to Jesus.

## Application:

Make your own study of the peoples of the Bible who were used by God in wonderful and unexpected ways. You might start with the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11. Following their examples can help mold your character in the New Year.