

A YEAR OF NEW BEGINNINGS

January 1, 2012

Romans 13:11-14 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

What is the one thing most people have in common at the New Year? Most of us make resolutions, don't we? One young boy asked his father what his new year's resolution was, and his father said he was going to do everything possible in the New Year to make his mother very happy.

The boy asked his mother what hers was, and she said, "To do everything possible to make sure your father keeps his resolution."

Why do we make those things anyway? We make them because there are areas in our lives we are either unhappy with, or areas in our lives we want to be better. They did a survey a few years back and the number one resolution was to lose weight.

A wife came into the bathroom to see her husband standing on the scales with his stomach sucked in. She told him that sucking in his stomach wouldn't make it any better. He said it would, because if he didn't suck it in, he couldn't read the numbers.

This is one of those very few times when everybody, believers and non-believers alike, are going to be doing the exact same thing at the exact same time: Leaving one place and going into another. Of course, I am talking about leaving 2011 and entering 2012.

So, what are you planning on leaving behind as you enter the new year? When we leave 2011, I think we should ...

1. LEAVE IT COMPLETELY

Philippians 3:13-14 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

When we pray, we often take our needs to the Lord and ask His help in dealing with them. And then what do we do? Instead of leaving them with Him, we take them back with us as we finish

praying.

We need to learn to leave things where they belong. If 2011 really is a year of completion for you, don't you think you should learn to leave some things completely?

What are some of the things we need to leave behind? I think it can be summed up by just saying that anything in our lives that keep us from fully focusing on the Lord should be left behind. Being a Christian means to always be going forward. Have you ever noticed how we always talk about our walk? We talk about our walk in life; our walk of faith; and walk with the Lord. By its very nature, walking means moving forward. And as we move forward, we are always doing two things: We leave one place and go into another.

As we leave, let us leave behind those parts of ourselves that do us no good. Here are some suggestions as to what you might choose to leave behind.

- - LEAVE YOUR RESENTMENT BEHIND

Each of us resent something. We might resent something we have said and done, or we might resent what someone else has said and done. But along with resentment comes unforgiveness. And unforgiveness is a very dangerous thing to keep in our lives.

Jesus said that if we forgive, God will forgive us. But if we do not forgive, God will not forgive us. Now, we must understand that to forgive does not mean the same thing as to forget. We cannot erase our memories, but we can erase our resentment.

I would suggest that we just look at things from a different perspective. Instead of looking at your resentment from the negative side, start looking at it from the positive side. In other words, when you remember those things, as you surely will, look at them as an example of what not to ever feel again. Understanding where they will lead you should be enough encouragement to do so.

So forget those things which hurt you. And forgive those people who did or said them. I like the old saying: "Look lovingly upon your enemies, for it is you who have made them." We choose to dislike people, based upon what we like or think. We must realize that we are not the perfect examples, so we shouldn't hold others accountable to our standards.

Also, if you stoop low enough to begrudge others - - THEY WIN! So make a decision to leave your resentment behind.

- - LEAVE YOUR WORRIES BEHIND

Worries are very much like rocking chairs. They give you something to do, but they never take you anywhere while you're doing it. We only worry about two things: Things we can change and things we cannot change. Why waste time doing something that not only hurts us and never helps us?

When we worry, it ends up taking over our every thought and it becomes the predominate thought of our lives. Yet, it is also worry that causes mental illness, stress, and many other things that destroy our lives. Worry has killed more people than hard work ever did. Worry is the cause of fear.

So, leave your worries behind as you enter the New Year, too.

- - LEAVE YOUR FAILURES BEHIND

We try so hard to be the best we can be, but we don't always succeed. And it is in those times when we don't succeed, that we get discouraged because we have failed. But what have we failed in? We may not have achieved just what we originally set out to achieve, but we haven't failed.

The only time you fail is when you don't try to do anything! We need to understand that God has called us to have faith long before He ever called us to achieve. We are called to be in Christ, and as long as we are in Him, we are successful.

The ancient Israelites never seemed to get it right. They would all turn toward God and worship Him and everything in their lives would drastically improve. But after a couple of hundred years, they would turn their backs on Him again and see doom visit them and their nation. But, we are told that God will turn our failure into success, if we allow Him fully into our lives.

1 Kings 8:33-34 When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers.

When we as a nation, or as individuals, have strayed from our Lord, we will find failure in our lives. But when we turn back once again to Him, He will hear our pleas and He will restore us to success, for He is a God of restoration.

As we leave 2011, we should pay close attention to the words of the Apostle Paul.

2 Corinthians 13:5-6 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.

In other words, look deep within your heart. Is Jesus in you, or do you just acknowledge Him as you live the way you desire? If you try to live for Him, the way He wants you to live, then Jesus is in you and you have been a major success!

So, as we head into a new year, make sure Jesus is firmly planted in your heart so He goes with you, covering you in God's wonderful grace and blessings. And then choose to leave those things that distract you from realizing Jesus to the fullest possible extent.

Imagine a trapeze artist swinging from one swing to another, high above the ground with no net under him. As he reaches out to the next swing, what must he do? He must let go of the one he is on. If he refuses to let go of the swing he is on, will he ever be able to go to the next swing? Absolutely not. And in the same way, we must let go of our old year before we can go purposefully into the New Year.

And as you let go of the past, we must learn to

2. GRAB HOLD OF THE FUTURE

Each New Year is a representative thing. It represents to us that there is a whole range of new opportunities for us; an unlimited chance to have a better life. At the start of every year, we see magazines publishing predictions on how they think the world will be in the upcoming year. Some of these predictions have been accurate, but most have fallen way short of being true.

One such prediction was that in the 21st century, technology would be so advanced that the world would not work more than about 20 hours a week. I think we can all agree that prediction missed the mark by a mile.

It seems that, no matter how far advanced technology gets, we just keep getting busier and busier. Someone said that the merry-go-round of life has gotten so fast that we now have no chance of stepping off. If that is the case, we need to go into our tomorrows with as much help as possible.

How do you think we will fare in the New Year? Will it actually be a year of new beginnings for us? Will we have the wherewithal to analyze ourselves honestly, so that we will know what areas to leave behind and what things to bring with us? We need to be very wise as we step through the doorway of time.

One of the best suggestions along this line is found in –

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

If we are going to make the best of the future, we need to understand a few things. Thing first thing we need to really get a grip on is that

- - OUR TIME ON THIS EARTH IS LIMITED

Psalms 90:10 The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Our lives seem so long – to us. But in reality, they are so very short. Considering that, wouldn't it to us good to make sure that we use 2012 as a time to really get right with the Lord? I am talking about getting totally sold out for Jesus, and stop worrying about what our friends, neighbors, and co-workers might say to us for doing so!

What seems like forever to us is only a blink of an eye. The psalmist writes that our life lasts no longer than the vapor of our breath; it is here and then it is gone.

Two teenagers who are in love can sit in a car talking and an hour only seems like a minute to them. However, that same hour seems like an eternity to their parents.

We have such a short time here in this life, but it is on that short time that all of our eternity will depend. Therefore, I think any sane person would choose to take personal analysis of themselves and figure out what areas of their lives do them more harm than good; make a choice to leave them behind as they step forward into a new year of opportunities the Lord has given us; and to grab hold of this future with all the gusto we have, knowing it, too, shall pass and come to a "quicker than we are ready for" end.

3. KNOW WHAT THE LORD'S WILL IS FOR US

Again, quoting the Apostle Paul, he says for us "...to not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."

I am assuming that since you are in church today, you realize that you need the Lord in your life. And I am hoping that you really believe that your relationship with Jesus is more important than anything else in your life.

I am also in prayer that this knowledge you have will mean that you will be in church even if there is a kickoff or faceoff at 10:00 am on Sundays, or even if you did make a bad choice and stay out really late on Saturday night.

Know that the Lord never says for you to be comfortable. He does, however, expect you to focus on Him and not things of this world. To do this, you must be F.A.T. Let me explain.

You must be **FAITHFUL**. How faithful are you to Jesus Christ? Are you faithful just when it is convenient to do so, or are you faithful even when it isn't? I have talked about giving your offering from a sacrificial standpoint. If I have a lot of money and give it from comfort, it doesn't mean as much as if somebody else can barely afford to give, but gives as much as they can plus a little extra. Why? Because they had to sacrifice something for the Lord when they gave, and I didn't.

That is being faithful to Jesus. You focus on Him and do things for His glory, even when it is an inconvenience to you to do so.

You must be **AVAILABLE**. How available are you? Do you go to church when it is convenient to do so or just when you aren't tired? Or, do you go to church even when you are tired and would rather be doing something else? Do you reach out to others only if you know them, or even when you don't know them? In other words, are you really available to do what God wants you to do?

And you must be **TEACHABLE**. Are you willing to listen to me or some other person in authority tell you what you should be doing for Jesus, or do you get irritated and quit listening? I can tell you that for most of my adult life, I took offense when a preacher or teacher tried to tell me I was not doing what I should have been doing for God's glory.

But that is Satan using your self-will and pride to keep you away from the Lord. My dad used to say it like this: Listen to all advice you can get. Then, analyze it and study it. Discard what will not help you and hang on to dear life to that which will help you.

To be a Christian who is walking forward for the Lord and not just sitting in one spot, claiming the miracles of Christ, we need to be F.A.T. (Faithful, Available, and Teachable.) Are you?

Life is what happens to you as you are focused on your dreams. Dreams are fine, but don't let them rob you of your life. And keep your life in Christ, so that you truly can be – all you were meant to be.

If I can close with just one thought, let me read to you what Paul said in –

Romans 13:11-14 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, then be about His work while you can!

You now have a choice. You can go into the New Year, taking everything with you, being dulled to the need of changing some things, or you can go into the New Year trying your best to make sure the past is the past and the future is for God.

But to do so requires some very honest thinking on your part. You can no longer ignore things because you have now been made aware. And when you are aware of what God wants, you become accountable for doing them.

I want to help you go into your year of new beginnings, using it as that – a year of brand new beginnings, of having new opportunities, and a year of new hope. Will you let me do that by coming forward this morning?

God wants to give you a “do-over” for 2012. Will you accept it?