

#183 “Advice for a New Year”

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A new year provides us with a chance to be introspective, to reflect on what was, to consider what is, and to think about what we want to become. It is a mileage marker, a point of no return, a chance to draw a line in the sand. Of course, any day we have the chance to change, but there is something about a new year that beckons us with new opportunity. Yet Satan will use this new opportunity to remind us of our old failures, our old defeats, and our hopeless future. This is why we need real change, change that can only be wrought in the power of Jesus Christ. This new year can start differently if we will act differently by believing the truth and doing the good we already know that we should be doing.

James 4:17 says, “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” Some fritter away their lives chasing the next dollar. Others let the years pass by them by failing to humble themselves and be what they know they should be. Others choose to drown their sorrows in various passions, coping mechanisms, or addictions. How can we make a break and truly change? How can we escape a bad habit? How can we be free? The fact is that there is much good that we know in our hearts that we should be doing that we are not doing. We might wonder why God does not use us or give us something “bigger” to do, yet we do not do what He already has asked us to do. Do we love our wives and treat them properly, or do we yell at them, demean them, and fail to show them proper attention and affection? Do wives respect their husbands and give them the admiration and trust that they need? Do children obey their parents and treat their siblings kindly? Do we honor our superiors at our workplace? Do we evangelize? Do we read our Bibles? Do we pray? Do we beg and plead with God for change? Do we take backward steps when we should be taking baby steps forward? Progress is made step by step by doing the little things right. We can’t grow until we are willing to be brutally honest with ourselves about the true state of our hearts. It is so easy to self-justify, and it is also easy to beat ourselves up when we fail. We are easily deceived, but when we let God’s Word objectively evaluate our hearts and minds, we can see where we need to change. We can stop glossing over sin and stop excusing failure as personality issues or “that’s just the way we are.” It is time to do a serious examination in the mirror of God’s Word if we want this next year to be different than the last. As James 1:25 says, “But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”

Let us not fall for the trap of evaluating our spiritual state based solely upon whether or not we read God’s Word every day as if sanctification is a checklist of accomplishments. We should be in God’s Word a great deal, and being in it every day would be wonderful. But growth is not a three step program or a seven step plan for spiritual success. It is being constantly humble to the Spirit’s leading as He applies God’s Word to our hearts and convicts us of sin. Until we are willing to give certain things up and turn them over to the Lord, we can’t grow. We must deal with what God has already shown us, doing

the good that He has asked us to do. If we need to ask forgiveness, we need to do that. If we need to start treating someone better, we need to do that. Satan will fight us every step of the way, saying that it is too hard and that it is not worth it. He will remind us of our past failures, but we must remember God's forgiveness and power. God can do what we cannot, and our hope is in Him.

Let us also not fall for the trap of thinking that if we just slap a Bible verse on everything that we will be sanctified. Rather, we must be willing to open up the deepest recesses of our hearts to God. We must tell Him what we really think about Him and what we really want from Him. He will show us what is right and what is wrong according to His Word. Only from a place of total honesty and humility can true change take place. As we run toward our Lord in total vulnerability and openness, our marriages and families can be strengthened as well. So many marriages could be so much better if husband and wife could just really honestly talk instead of dancing around issues or heading the other partner off at the pass. We need to be willing to listen to one another, even if we don't like what we hear. Honesty and humility between two people who love Jesus totally can do wonderful things.

Real life change is possible. Addictions can be laid aside, relationships can be restored, families can be strengthened, marriages can be healed, and past failures can be overcome. It can be done, but we must be willing to open up the inner chambers of our hearts to God. We must let Him dissect us and reshape our desires and needs. God will help us want to change and then to want what He wants. He will help us so that we go beyond just not liking the consequences of sin to not liking the sin itself. He will help us eradicate the mental and emotional blocks that sin has created so that we can enjoy life the way He wants us to live. Today is the day for change (Hebrews 3:13).