

START THE NEW YEAR RIGHT

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The first study in this two-lesson series focuses on Psalm 23, rest and reflection—taking a spiritual inventory. Psalm 23 is the basis for both of these New Year sermons.

What is the one word you need as you go into this New Year? It is the same word you need to have when you go for a job interview. It is the word you need the day you ask your boss for a raise. It is the word I want to give my kids: CONFIDENCE. In goal setting, confidence is the number one thing needed to make New Year's resolutions become a reality.

Today we focus on confidence; how to gain more of it in the New Year.

I. Confidence begins in spiritual renewal.

"Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps 23:6).

David is rested mentally and spiritually. He remembered how faithful God had been to him and grasped that reality/truth. In v. 4 he writes about the valley of death, in v. 5 his enemies are surrounding him, in v. 6 his confidence returns as he experiences the powerful presence of God.

How does this type of spiritual confidence come, even when David is facing challenging times? The word is renewal. Webster definition: "To restore, to make new again spiritually, to begin again, to put back into a former condition that which has lost its freshness."

The most important action step you can take to end the old year is to spend some time alone with God, to rest your mind in the knowledge of God and reflect and remember how faithful God has been. A time of spiritual rest, reflection and remembrance brings renewal to our lives. It renews and brings our souls to a different place. Spiritual rest and reflection can put back the freshness your soul has lost in the last year. You cannot get it any other way. You cannot be renewed in your spirit by watching TV for an hour, or renting a movie. You cannot be renewed in your spirit by going to another holiday social event or party. You cannot get renewed inside with chocolates or oranges or candy. You cannot be renewed inside by realizing that one week has already lapsed in the New Year so you need to crank it up to catch up. That is not renewal. You cannot manufacture renewal.

Renewal happens when you quiet your mind and your heart for an extended period of time and connect again with the One who can gently nudge you in the direction you need to be going in order to be well, to connect with the only One who can breathe life into a weary soul. Only God can do that.

Isaiah 40:28-31, "Have you never heard or understood? Don't you know that the Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth? He never grows faint or weary. No one can measure the depths of His understanding. He gives power to those who are tired and worn out; He offers strength to the weak. Even youths will become exhausted, and young men will give up. But those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will fly on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint." Ezekiel 11:19, God says, "And I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them. I will take away their hearts of stone and give them tender hearts instead."

Isaiah 41:10,18, "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. I will open up rivers for them on high plateaus. I will give them fountains of water in the valleys. In the deserts they will find pools of water. Rivers fed by springs will flow across the dry, parched ground."

Isaiah 30:21, "whether you turn to the right or to the left - you will hear a voice behind you saying, this is the way, walk in it."

Renewal allows you to soar with confidence into the New Year, confidence that only comes from one place. Renewal cannot be contrived; it cannot be packaged and sold. It comes from one Source--it only comes from the work of God in your life as you quietly listen for His still small voice saying, "Here's the way - walk in it."

II. Confidence comes by reordering and rebalancing our lives.

Ecclesiastes 7:16-18, "Do not be over-righteous, neither be over-wise - why destroy yourself? Do not be over-wicked, and do not be a fool - why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes."

Balance is not easy, how to bend something and not break it. Many, like me, tend to go all out. Sometimes that works but more often it just creates fatigue and frazzled nerves and long hours and a crunched home schedule. There is a massive price to pay for lack of balance in life.

There is a certain confidence that comes from balancing your life, from avoiding extremes; a confidence that comes from knowing what balance means for you, a confidence that comes from clearly knowing where you are headed. We can create balance and avoid extremes by goal setting. "Goals produce a confidence that only comes from knowing where you are going and how you will get there."

As the year ends, I spend time setting goals for the coming year, personally and professionally. This involves quiet and reflection, and then some time crystallizing the goals and clearly defining them. Goal setting is a life-clarifier and a huge confidence builder.

Before I set one goal I try to analyze my balance in life. Where am I weak? Where am I strong? An inventory on what my life has looked like in the past year. How's my balance? It becomes apparent very quickly, what things I need to focus on, when I am honest with myself about the balance in my life.

After the inventory, I am ready to set smart goals, for example, I want to be more involved in effective missions. A smart goal is Specific; Measurable; Attainable; Realistic; Tangible. How does this work in my mission goal?

SMART: "I will make eight mission trips; I will include others; I will choose effective options, I will accomplish defined goals, I will use my skills and talents.

"If you do not consciously decide ahead of time where you are going, you may very easily end up somewhere else." --Paul J. Meyer

Clarity and confidence come to your life when you see your weaknesses and set specific goals and strategies in place to shore up that weakness and restore balance to your life. We should also set goals that play to our strengths. Honestly analyze your balance in life and then set smart goals.

"Do not be over-righteous, neither be over-wise - why destroy yourself? Do not be over-wicked, and do not be a fool - why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes." (Eccl. 7:16-18)

III. Confidence comes through prayer-filled plans.

"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed....In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps" (Prov 16:3,9).

Two God questions about the goals you set: (1) God, what should my goals be? (2) God, will you bless me and guide me and strengthen me to reach these goals?

Often we strive hard to succeed and our intentions are good. We desire to get the most out of life. The trouble is that if we only use our human wisdom and do not rely on God's view of our lives, balance will elude us. We must apply the wisdom of God to any plans or goals we are trying to achieve. Not, "God bless these plans I have made," but ask God before you set goals for your life. "God direct my thoughts. Give me wisdom in this area or that one. I desire to live a balanced life. Help me see what that looks like."

Goal setting must be coupled with spiritual rest and reflection. God is in the business of clarifying and directing our lives in wisdom.

When the goals are set, regularly and consistently ask God to help achieve the goals. "God give me discipline. Give me energy. Change my character; make me more efficient. Please help me to be the person you want me to be. Please give me success in life as I follow you."

We forget how much God wants to bless our lives as we are fully committed to Him.

If you grow your faith to the place where you can pray those prayers over the year to come, then your life will go to a whole new level. And you will have a confidence that is so vital to life, but only available from one place, a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. That's where confidence for the New Year is created, and only in Jesus Christ, will your confidence and goals be maintained and reached throughout the year.