

Looking Forward to the Year Ahead

Do you have plans or goals this year? Are you going to try and make any changes? Today we are discussing looking forward to the year ahead.

Introduction

Happy New Year! This is the first Sunday of the new year.

Last week we reflected on the previous year and talked about the importance of looking back to see all the places where the Lord worked in our lives and to give him the praise and glory for it.

As we look forward let's do so with anticipation of great things yet to come this year. The Bible is filled with promises of God's plans for our lives, and today, we are exploring how we can approach the year ahead with faith and expectation. We are discussing seeking God's will, setting godly goals, and embracing God's promises.

Seeking God's Will

One of the most important things a Christian can do is seek God's will for their life. When we were youth pastors this was a common theme with the teenagers. They often struggled with what God's will was for their lives.

Many people want logical answers to the questions of purpose and plans that God has for them. God does not always answer in a way that is logical to us. Let's read Proverbs 3:5-6.

Proverbs 3:5-6

(5) Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; (6) in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Trust is something you have when you put faith in someone without understanding their plans or knowing their processes. The writer of Proverbs is telling us to trust the Lord with our whole hearts. Do not hold anything back. There is an old saying that says to not put all your eggs in one basket. If you drop one basket and those eggs spill out and break, you still have the other basket of eggs. With God, you can put all your trust in him.

Proverbs goes on saying to not lean on your own understanding. Our understanding and knowledge is very limited. God's knowledge is immeasurable. We have access to the Creator of the universe. The One who designed all of what we see, feel, and hear by speaking creation into existence. Let's read 1 Corinthians 1:25.

1 Corinthians 1:25

(25) For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

As we look forward to the year ahead, let's trust God and allow him to speak to our hearts with his plans. Let's seek God in all we do and trust that his plans and purposes are unfolding before us, even when they do not seem to make sense to us.



Setting Godly Goals

Many people make New Year's resolutions. However, as Christians, we should set goals that line up with God's Word. Philippians 3:14 says:

Philippians 3:14

(14) I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Every successful athlete or business person will tell you they did not reach their level of success without setting attainable goals and working toward those goals every day. Attainable goals that build on themselves are the path to success. As Christians, our goals look different from the goals that an athlete or businessperson sets and works toward.

Philippians 2:5 says:

Philippians 2:5

(5) In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Having the same mindset as Christ means your goals should be kingdom-minded. We should set goals to serve others in the ways God inspires us to. Our goals should include loving others as Christ loves. We also must set goals to draw even closer to God than we have ever been before.

Two practical goals every Christian should have are to increase the time you spend reading the Bible and your time in prayer. Be realistic. A marathon runner does not wake up one day and decide to run a marathon. They train for months and years sometimes to accomplish that. The same holds with our devotional time. If you are only reading and praying for 10 minutes once a week, it is unlikely that you will succeed by setting a goal of reading and praying for an hour daily.

Set attainable goals you can build on over time as you look forward to the year ahead.

Embracing God's Promises

The Bible is full of promises that sustain us and give us hope in times of uncertainty. Entire books have been written just on the promises of God. There is one promise of God that is the pinnacle of godly promises. Let's read Jeremiah 29:11.

Jeremiah 29:11

(11) For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah was speaking for the Lord to God's people in captivity in Babylon. Times were bleak for them. They had been taken captive and forced to leave their homeland and brought to Babylon to serve. Living as slaves in a foreign land is about as bleak as it can get. Yet God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah to his people and promised them that he had plans for them. Plans to prosper them and give them a hope and a future.



We can stand on that very promise too! That promise is for the Israelites as much as it is for Christians today. God has a plan for each one of us. It may not be your plan, but he has a plan for you. That plan he has for you will prosper you and give you hope and a future.

A key point to make here is the word prosper. Many people think the word prosper only means to be financially wealthy; to be rich in money and possessions. God does not measure prosperity in money or wealth.

In God's economy being prosperous means having all you need to be healthy, happy, and to serve others. In some cases that means more finances, in other cases, it can mean you have more wisdom to help others with. Yet, in other situations, you may have more relationships and can connect the right people together to accomplish God's overall plans.

Don't get stuck on the word prosper. The rest of the verse says he will give us a hope and a future. That is every bit as important as the gifts he gives us to use to serve others.

Let's read what Paul says to the church in Philippi in Philippians 1:3-6.

Philippians 1:3-6

(3) I thank my God every time I remember you. (4) In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy (5) because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, (6) being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

As you look forward to the year ahead anchor your faith on these promises, knowing that God is faithful to fulfill every one of them.

Living with Intention

Finally, as we look forward to the year ahead, we must live intentionally. Let's read Ephesians 5:15-16.

Ephesians 5:15-16

(15) Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, (16) making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Be careful how you live and make the most out of every opportunity you are given to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in this lost world. Jesus commissioned each one of us to show the lost the way home to God, through Jesus Christ.

As you look forward to the year ahead let your life be a testimony to God's grace, love, and the power to change people.

Conclusion

As you step into the year ahead, surrender your plans to God. Allow the Holy Spirit to be your guide, and live in a manner that brings glory to God through Jesus. Stand on the promises of God and set godly attainable goals. This way you will be living out God's plans and purposes for your life.

