

The last day of the year is always a little bittersweet for me. My mind tends to dwell on the passage of time, the passing of one era into another. Although the demarcation of years is simply a human construct, I tend to focus on the impermanence of things..after all, when the clock strikes 12 tonight, the year 2023 will never occur in human history again. It is over, the slate is clean and everything I experienced in 2023 is now properly called history. Done...finished.

People have even sung a song every New Year's eve for centuries...the Scottish Auld Lang Syne when translated is "Times long past". Its haunting and somewhat melancholy melody invites reflection and remembrance.

The prospect of a new year is exciting, a chance to remedy the wrongs of the past, and to do better in a fresh, spotless 12 months. We speak of resolutions where we promise to try and end bad

habits or situations, and even live a healthier life. We can see this by visiting a gym on January 2nd...you will experience the parking lot full, and pretty much every machine and weight station occupied. But go ahead and visit that same gym on February 2nd. You will have no trouble finding a parking space, and you may very well be able to fire a cannon ball from one end of the workout room to the other without hitting anyone. I believe the Bible said something about the "spirit being willing, but the flesh being weak...."

**Gilbert Keith Chesterton** was an early 20th century English writer, philosopher, Christian apologist, and literary and art critic. He stated that....

*"The object of a new year is not that we should have a new year, but rather that we should have a new soul."*

So, I propose that 2024 is a chance to refresh our soul and renew our relationship

to God. It's a great time to reflect on the things we did well in the previous year, and how we can continue to be better disciples of Christ in the new year.

In order to do this we need to rethink where our hearts and minds stand. And January is the perfect time to pause and make this consideration. What needs to change in our lives? How can we renew our souls for Christ?

The New Testament sentence for today suggests exactly this.

**2 Corinthians 5:17**

***“So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!”***

There is Good News here: Out with the old, in with the new. Christ is here to lead us into a brand new year, where we can start fresh with a brand new, positive mindset.

**So, let's talk about the old, first.**

In 1978 a British recording artist named Al Stewart had a hit song entitled "Time Passages". I lifted the title of my message today from that song. One of the verses states: (and you may very well hear the tune in your heads...)

*Well I'm not the kind to live in the past*

*The years run too short and the days too fast*

*The things you lean on are the things that don't last*

*Well it's just now and then my line gets cast into these Time passages*

In 2023 have we been leaning on things that don't last? Things like money, power, fame, or material possessions?

*Tim Tebow, the athlete once said "Trophies don't last. Awards come and go. Impressive titles move from one person to the next. But fighting for those who can't fight for themselves can make an eternal impact."*

I suspect most of us deep down know what is temporary and ultimately meaningless versus what is eternal. But the problem is putting that knowledge into action, and overcoming our human desires. Those desires are not necessarily based upon greed. They can also be based on a need for security. We believe that money and possessions will somehow protect us and

perhaps even make us more able to combat the effects of aging.

**Our first reading today was from Psalms 65, verse 11:**

**"You crown the year with your goodness; your paths overflow with rich food."**

Another words, God always wants our future to be bright, and His intention is to surround us with abundance and blessing. We need to have faith in that intention as we go forth into this new year.

Greg Laurie is an Evangelistic Preacher in the mold of Billy Graham. At one of his crusades he made an interesting comment:

*“As you get older, however, you become more seasoned and experienced, more careful and cautious. You’re less willing to take risks. That can be good, because you’ve learned from experience. But that also can be bad, because you’re not willing to let the Lord do something fresh and new in your life.”*

There is an important reality here: With age comes cautiousness, but we might, at times, want to be sure we are relying on God and leaving the space for fresh, new experiences that He wants for us. Perhaps 2024 is that space for freshness.

So, let's finish today's message with the NEW. Rather than the usual tired, unfilled resolutions for 2024, there 6 questions you could ask yourself:

1. How have I grown in the past year?  
What led me to experiencing this type of growth?
2. What risks have I taken that I'm glad I took?
3. What beliefs do I hold now that I didn't hold a year ago?
4. How can I be kinder, and more compassionate to both myself, and others over the next year?
5. How can I cultivate more gratitude and appreciation in my daily life?

And lastly:



6. What guiding principles, truths and values will guide my journey over the next 12 months?

This last question is perhaps the most important. 2024 is going to be a difficult, messy year. A number of important countries, including ours, will be holding elections. There is war in several regions, with the threat of war in even more.

Technological advances in the wrong hands will challenge our very perception of truth and decency. Each of us needs to answer question 6 against this backdrop.

As for me, my answer to this final question is this....Whenever possible, I intend to try and

practice the words of the ancient prophet by  
“doing justice, loving mercy and walking  
humbly with my God”.

What are you going to do?

Amen

