

STEPPING THROUGH THRESHOLDS: LETTING GO AND LOOKING FORWARD

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Christian Fellowship

I. Hope and Heart

My hope and heart this New Year's morning is to encourage, invite and exhort us to step into this new 2023 with renewed trust in Father, Son and Holy Spirit in lieu of simply resolved to fix some defect in our character, life, and relationships. Trust the God of the scriptures, Trust who God says He is, Trust who He says we, Trust that Jesus has done all and has not held anything back from us.

II. Midnight Mantra

A. New Year's Resolutions or Renewed Trust

III. Hook

A. Thresholds - a mark of change and transition -an opening to transition from one space into the next - time, season, location

1. January 1 is always a good place to pause and reflect. What am I leaving and what am I stepping into?
2. Maybe it is who am I leaving in 2022 and who am I coming into 2023 with and who am I going to encounter in 2023?
3. The Pause and the Reflection often bring us to resolutions.
4. I have one new year's resolution - to be ready for the Spartan Race in 10 months. It is a thing I want to do.

B. New Year's resolutions. Why?

1. History.com

<https://www.history.com/news/the-history-of-new-years-resolutions>

a) Babylonians 4000 years ago

The ancient Babylonians are said to have been the first people to make New Year's resolutions, some 4,000 years ago. They were also the first to hold recorded celebrations in honor of the new year—though for them the year began not in January but in mid-March, when the crops were planted. During a massive 12-day religious festival known as Akitu, the Babylonians crowned a new king or reaffirmed their loyalty to the reigning king. They also made promises to the gods to pay their debts and return any objects they had borrowed. These promises could be considered the forerunners of our New Year's resolutions. If the Babylonians kept to their word, their (pagan) gods would bestow favor on them for the coming year. If not, they would fall out of the gods' favor—a place no one wanted to be.

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b) Romans

January named for Janus, the two-faced god whose spirit inhabited doorways and arches, January had special significance for the Romans. Believing that Janus symbolically looked backwards into the previous year and ahead into the future, the Romans offered sacrifices to the deity and made promises of good conduct for the coming year.

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c) Christians

For early Christians, the first day of the new year became the traditional occasion for thinking about one's past mistakes and resolving to do and be better in the future.

In 1740, the English clergyman John Wesley, founder of Methodism, created the Covenant Renewal Service, most commonly held on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day. Also known as watch night services, they included readings from Scriptures and hymn singing, and served as a spiritual alternative...Now popular within evangelical Protestant churches, especially African American denominations and congregations, watch night services held on New Year's Eve are often spent praying and making resolutions for the coming year.

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2. Most of us have made resolutions

- a) I will go to the gym every day
- b) I will say I love you to my kids more often
- c) I will be more disciplined at work
- d) I will stop scrolling on Facebook every day for an hour

3. Thresholds give us a moment to look both backward and forward and consider the past lived and future hoped.

- a) It seems that resolutions are mostly hoped for futures from regrets lived in the past.
- b) Some form of a promise to be better in the hopes to appease our own shame or the gods or even God.

C. Thresholds are all over the scriptures just not always connected to a date on the calendar.

1. Biblical examples

- a) Abraham was called away from his homeland.
- b) Moses was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to a Promise Land
- c) Joshua and Caleb move into the Promise Land of Canaan
- d) Ruth follows her mother-in-law Naomi to a foreign land
- e) The Disciples follow Jesus and leave their lives and livelihoods
- f) Peter moves beyond Jews to Gentiles

2. What I notice is that in these threshold moments or changes there are not really any resolutions to be better.

3. These are moments of renewed trust in the promises of and commitment to God or to another person.

D. What if we could live into becoming what we are?

1. Illustrations:

- a) A baby walking this year
- b) A caterpillar becoming a butterfly

2. What if 2023 each of us and us together could trust more deeply God? Trust that He is working in and through our lives.

E. The Question: New Year's Resolutions (to change me) or Renewed Trust (to trust God's character)

IV. Book

A. Philippians 3:12-16 - Straining Toward the Goal

1. 12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

2. The Passion Translation

a) "I admit that I haven't yet acquired the absolute fullness that I'm pursuing, but I run with passion into his abundance so that I may reach the purpose that Jesus Christ has called me to fulfill and wants me to discover."

b) "I don't depend on my own strength to accomplish this; however, I do have one compelling focus: I forget all the past as I fasten my heart to the future instead."

c) "I run straight for the divine invitation of reaching the heavenly goal and gaining the victory-prize through the anointing of Jesus."

B. Proverbs 3:4-5

1. 5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

- a) This is a heart work not just an intellect of believing.
- b) In every aspect of how you live there is an acknowledgement of Jesus
- c) This is an embodied trust in the Lord for how you do your life, your relationships, your work, your leisure.

C. Philippians 1:6

1. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

a) He who began this work - the work of salvation.

b) Romans 8:29-30 THE GOLDEN CHAIN

(1) 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

V. Look

A. My question this morning for us is what or who are we satisfying with our resolutions?

1. Is it yourself, are you simply reviewing the past year and endeavoring to fix that which you were disappointed in?

2. Is it someone else, do we feel inadequate and we are wanting to be a better person for someone else?

3. Is it for work (a boss), I must be more efficient and more reliable?

4. The point is there is a person and there is a sense of lack, deficiency, something is wrong with me - SHAME!

5. If you have done something wrong - confession and repentance are your gift in the person of Jesus.

6. If it is deeper than that only the CROSS can bring out of SHAME.

B. Three ways to lean into the unknown of 2023

These are not listed in order. They are simply three things in my life that I have found happen when you start trusting God.

1. Trust and Believe

Trust He will order my steps. Believe God will speak and make a way.

2. Trust and Perceive (Discern)

Trust that He is good, and His ways are higher than mine. Perceive (or discern) the next step not more, not less.

3. Trust and Receive

Trust that he is giving at all times what you need. Receive what God has for you.

C. God takes away your shame, he does not use it.

VI. Took

A. I am leaning into what God is doing in me, in us and who HE is saying we are. What if we trusted that we could participate with Him in this work of sanctification?

1. It's not about doing things perfectly, it's about choosing to return when you don't do it perfectly. It's not about not making mistakes, it's about how quickly you can allow yourself to receive a new beginning from God after you make a mistake. Kevin Sweeney

2. "Leap and the net will appear. Take a step and the path will form. The unknown is a bridge to the future. Sacred risks are where your courage and the creativity of God become one." Kevin Sweeney

B. A friend sent me this passage yesterday as an encouragement to me as we step together as a church into this coming year.

C. Colossians 1:9-12

1. 9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

VII. Bellringer

A. John 14:6

1. Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

B. Do not go into this year with a plan to resolve your SHAME and what you do not like about yourself. Do not try to create another you.

C. I encourage us this morning to Trust the Father and His way, truth and life - Jesus.

1. Live 2023 from the truest you that exists - The beloved child of God.

VIII. Dismissal

A. Next week - 3-week series - Why Does IT Matter?

Why does your purpose matter?

Why does the CHURCH matter?

Why does Christian Fellowship matter?