

New Year Strategy
December 28, 2014

We're getting ready to face a new year. Are you ready? Are you prepared? You may be physically prepared and economically prepared. But more important, are you spiritually prepared to face the new year? Are you spiritually prepared to face whatever will come at you in the new year? We know from experience that life is full of unexpected things.

None of us knows what we will face this year. Last year at this time it was the same thing. We did not know what we would face. As we think back on this past year, collectively, we remember many unexpected things that popped up in our lives. There were small things like minor scrapes and bruises, flat tires, auto repairs, home repairs and such. These are common enough, but still unwelcome when they occur. This still surprise us and interfere with our plans.

We had weather incidents again this year. We suffered through the cold of last winter, frozen pipes, dead batteries, downed trees and limbs, and power outages. There were illnesses like a cold or the flu that set back our plans or changed them altogether. Some of us were injured at work, in sports, or at home. While these were not too serious, they still affected the plans we had made.

And then there were some really big things. Several of us lost parents this last year. Some were diagnosed with pretty severe medical problems. Some faced surgery.

As we live this new year these same kinds of things will occur. Many of us older folks will continue to slow down. We will likely develop new aches and pains, some temporary, others permanent. We will be challenged to adapt to the fast-changing high tech world we now live in.

For all of us there will be setbacks this year. Whatever plans or hopes you have for this year, you will see roadblocks develop to interfere with them. Accidents will happen, whether your fault or someone else's. Sins against you will be committed. Storms will threaten our comfort.

There will be health issues, economic issues, lifestyle issues, car issues, home issues, and relationship issues. Likely you won't face all of these different kinds of issues, but which ones will you face? If you knew, you could prepare for them. You could save money for them, save vacation days or sick leave to deal with them. You could clean your house ahead of time.

This morning, I want to help you prepare for them spiritually. I don't want any of these things to hurt your relationship with God. I don't want any of whatever will happen to lessen your faith in God, your love for God, or your hope in God's promises. Instead I want to help you today to prepare yourself, spiritually, for whatever will happen this year.

For myself, I have found God to be faithful to me in all the promises that He has made to me, to us, in the Bible. Consequently, every year my faith in those promises grows. I have reached the point that I do not doubt my relationship with God. I do not doubt His love. I do not doubt His faithfulness. I do not doubt His forgiveness. His forgiveness is complete in Jesus. My every sin has been forgiven, not because I am good, or try hard, or go to church,

but because Jesus died for my sin, ALL of my sin. I do not doubt the good news of Jesus Christ. So as I go into this new year, I am spiritually ready. I have prepared my heart, and mind, and spirit to face whatever comes at me this next year.

My plan,... when something goes wrong, when I get disappointed, when bad things happen, when the devil tries to whisper doubts to me,... **my plan is to fall back upon God's promises.** Let me give you an example of one of these promises.

Romans 3:21 (NIV) But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and Prophets testify.

Now a righteousness (a right relationship with God) from God (that comes from God) apart from law (not a right relationship I worked for or earned) has been made known (revealed by God) to which the Law and Prophets testify. (This new righteousness was foretold by God centuries ago.) *"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and Prophets testify."*

It is possible for me to have a right relationship, a righteousness, with God that God gives me. It comes as a gift, not something deserved or owed. I love how it is expressed in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus took upon Himself our sin, and God placed upon us the righteousness of Jesus. That is a firm promise from God to stand on.

So if the devil hits you with doubts sometime this year about whether salvation is real, come back with this. This is a solid promise from God.

Let us look at another. If the devil tries to get you to doubt your salvation, and you come back at him with Romans 3.21, the devil may come back with accusations about your current sins. He will say that your relationship with God is still messed up. He will say that God is still angry at you. If he does that then you come back at him with Romans 5:1-2.

Romans 5:1-2 (NIV) Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

Because of your trust in God's promise of forgiveness in Jesus, you are at peace with God and God is at peace with you. There is no more conflict between you and God from a judicial point of view. That word justification is a legal term. When a judge says the defendant is innocent, free to go, and the case is dismissed, the judge means that society is at peace with the defendant and the defendant is at peace with society. In the eyes of justice all is well. In that same way, all is well between you and God by your faith in Jesus. Stand solidly on that truth and throw it back in the devil's face.

The devil will use anything he can to get you doubting God. He will use your sin if he can, those sins that you keep slipping on even though you try hard to obey God. The devil will try to use those against you. He will try to convince you that you can't be saved if you keep

sinning. You must remember that sin is a deep part of you that it will take a long time to dig out. The Holy Spirit could do it instantly upon your faith in Jesus. But in God's plan the Spirit works on your sin a little at a time. So keep trusting that process of God and push back at the devil.

Now when you throw Biblical truth back at the devil, what you are doing is resisting the devil,... WITH the word of God. And God promises that when you do this, the devil will leave you alone, at least for awhile.

James 4:7 (NIV) Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Your defense against attacks of the devil are the truths from the Bible. Don't listen to the devil's lies. Instead, focus yourself on trusting in God's promises.

The devil will also try to get you doubting God's love when bad things happen to you this year. When you don't get that job or that promotion, the devil will try to convince you that God doesn't love you. When your health takes a turn for the worst and you take a long time getting well, or you don't get well at all, the devil will try to convince you that God doesn't care. When lots of little things start going wrong, those flat tires, broken appliances, minor illnesses, and people disappointing you, you may be tempted to doubt God's love. That's what the devil wants you to do.

When those thoughts come into your mind, you come back to John 3:16.

John 3:16 (NIV) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God SOOOOO loved the world. That means me. God so loved every person on this planet and all who ever would live on this planet, SOOOOO much that He sent us the Savior we needed.

Remind yourself of this truth, "The God who loves me, who loves me that much, would never cease loving me." And then you throw that back at those doubts the devil is whispering to you.

This is spiritual warfare. This is the normal life for the Christian. You have sided with God, in Jesus Christ, and the devil is now against you too. He is out to defeat your faith this year. You must resist him. Paul writes of this in his letter to the church at Ephesus.

Ephesians 6:10-17 (NIV) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all

this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

There is a strategy for how to face this new year. There is a battle plan for this coming year. There is an approach to take to life. This is it.

Remind yourself of God's promises and choose to trust in them no matter what comes up this next year.

This strategy is not just for doubts about your salvation, but for any obstacle you run into this year. It is for any disappointment with yourself or others. It is for any setback, any hindrance, any roadblock to your hopes and plans. Go into this year prepared for spiritual battle. Go into this new year ready to react with faith to whatever comes up. Go into this year standing firm on the promises of God.

But what if you do not have a long history with God? What if you are not yet as sure as I am of Jesus' love and power for you?

Take a chance. Make the decision that you WILL trust in the promises of God, in the stated truths of the Bible. Make up your mind ahead of time that you will face life this year with faith in God, even if you don't yet feel it in your soul. Give God a chance to prove His faithfulness.

If this is a new experience for you, you know how it turns out the other way. You know what it is like to live without faith in God. You know how fears and uncertainty worked on your spirit this last year. There was uncertainty. There was disappointment. There were fears. There was heartache, worry, and stress. It was not a good place to be.

So now try it the other way, even if you are not yet sure that these promises are true. Let God prove Himself to you. You can't set the terms of God proving Himself. You can't say to God, "Well if you do such and such a miracle, then I'll believe in you." That's the wrong approach. It puts you ahead of God. It puts you in the position of authority. That will never work with God. That is like the child saying to the parent, "I will only believe you love me if you buy me a pony." That is all wrong. There is nothing right or good about such an approach to God.

No, but if you say to God, "I will live this year trusting Your promises and see if You will keep them," then God will show Himself real, and loving, and powerful in your life. This is how God wants to prove Himself to you, by you taking a step of faith in God and finding that He is real. Take Him at His word. What have you got to lose? Nothing.

This is how you learn about anyone's character. You watch and see how they behave. Do they do what they say they will do? Do they keep promises? Do they really live the things they say they believe?

I have learned that God is fully trustworthy. What He has said in the Bible is fully trustworthy. The things that are stated as facts, I choose to believe are true. I have not yet found one not to be true. And God has kept all the promises He has made to me in the Bible. I have a long history with God. And based on that history I will face this new year prepared for whatever life throws at me. I will stand on the Word of God.

How about you? Prepare yourself for with a new year strategy.