

This is the end of the first week of a new year. How is it going so far? On the first day the words were "It's not about existence but persistence!" In the Christian journey there are days we do well in the goals we have for God's way of life, other days we do poorly. The secret is just beginning again each day, not raising the white flag because of past failures, but moving forward because of God's great grace. If we don't give up, we change, life changes and the words of Corinthians come to life, "Run in such a way that you may win."

The Christian life is equated here with running a race, fighting a boxing match and completion in the Olympic Games. What might be the prize? Why is self-control so important? Why do you think God lets us "aim" our own lives?

GPS for Families

GrowPrayStudy.org/family

This new year, set some family goals with your kids. These do not have to be big, audacious goals that are sure to fail but rather a few simple ideas that will make your family stronger this year. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Pray each morning in the car or before you all leave for school, work, etc. You can create a poem prayer or a quick one-line prayer that is easy to remember. This will make it seem less formal and intimidating.
- Plan one day/evening a week that will be for family stuff only. Games, movies, sports, whatever sounds fun to you.
- Dedicate yourselves to a real Sabbath each week. Plan downtime as a family. Reading, napping, lounging around, whatever de-stresses your clan.
- Keep the Christmas cards you received and plan to pray each week for one of the families.
- Make health your theme this year. Talk about physical, mental, and spiritual health and ways to improve on all three. Don't make a goal that you can't achieve, but commit to reminding each other to be healthy in all of your choices.
- Put a limit on time in front of a screen (computers, TV, video games, etc.). Screen time is not bad for you in small doses, but it takes away from relationships and physical health when used in excess.
- Plan a mission project to work on all year long. Raise money, save your change, collect items or adopt an agency or family in need. Create a project your family will enjoy doing, and you will benefit from working together and loving others.



MESSAGE

"In the Beginning: Creating Something New!"

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:1-3

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"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."

2 Corinthians 5:17

When it comes to setting goals, consider:

1. Keep new goals to a manageable number.
2. Be specific in goals — what, how, when.
3. Be clear on biblical, spiritual and community support.
4. Name what needs to be given up to create the new.
5. It's not existence, it's persistence that makes the difference.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

God, I thank you for life in this new year. I know it is your gift to me. I don't want to take it for granted. Help me to change what needs to change, to do what needs to be done and to be who you want me to be. May my new year not be defined by the past year but by your will and promises for my life. I ask for your blessings for 2012 and offer to return those blessings to you and the people you have given me to serve.

The Bible teaches again and again that life is more than existence, it is persistence. Certainly these words penned by the Apostle Paul from a prison cell say this. The knowledge that we know what we are doing and why we are doing it is a powerful way to live one's life. The serious follower of Christ knows what they are doing and why they are doing it.

As we begin a new year together, it is a great time to seize the future. There is little doubt that our present was decided by choices we made in the past. What choices will we make today that will decide our future, life defined by a high calling in Christ?

As we set goals for a new year, what are the things we want to change?

1. *To give up, quit or stop . . .*
2. *To begin, add or start . . .*

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The Bible often speaks about rivers and streams, but here it speaks about a channel of water, one dug and aimed to its best advantage to bring water to a crop or a community. It is likened to the heart that belongs to God, a heart that is turned by love for God, and the wisdom a relationship with God builds. In light of this analogy, verse 5 speaks about the importance of planning for the future, that doing so with diligence leads to an advantage, and the failure to do so leads to poverty.

Why is a relationship with God a critical part of building a new year? Do we love God enough to turn our heart in His direction?

Partner with God and family, and plan a new year built upon a core value of loving God, financially, spiritually and physically.

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It was difficult to be a Christian during the season of Hebrew's writing, and in many ways it is always difficult. Following Christ has the highest of rewards but often calls for the greatest of sacrifices. In this passage it seems to begin with discipline, someone who learns from the past and how God has worked in that past.

What are the lessons God has taught you so far in the ups and downs of life, the successes and failures? What really matters? What is of value? In these verses we learn that the evidence of faith is strength and courage.

What in your life needs to be strengthened? What paths need to be built or straightened out? Is peace with God one of the things you pursue?

As we begin a new year, it is important that we focus on God, what matters and peace!

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Jesus is not only Lord, Savior and God, but He knew what He was talking about. Jesus wants each of us to experience an abundant, rich, make-an-impact life. Here He teaches us how, knowing that the abundant life is not one He gives us but one we choose by His power and grace to live. Too many choose to live another kind of life. The analogy He uses is of a builder. When someone built a tower in those days, they made sure they had the wood, nails, stone, craftsmen, etc., to ensure they had what it took. It would be foolish to begin and not finish, a lot of work for nothing.

To live an abundant life, how can we be proactive in selecting the tools, laying aside the materials that make up the abundant life and preparing for the necessary sacrifices?

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