

Moving Forward in 2023

Matthew 7:24 - 27

Introduction: New Year's Resolutions Kids Edition – Video 1:21

The week between Christmas and New Years is always an unusual week. For some, Christmas celebrations are going on due to families' schedules, others, like ourselves this year, finished Christmas by Christmas Eve morning or Christmas Eve night. There are the after Christmas sales and returns going on, the Christmas music is winding down and people are trying to decide what to do with all the leftover Christmas cookies and candy.

Then, as you approach the last couple days of the year heading into the New Year, there are bowl games to watch, for some decorations to put away, (if you don't wait until after January 1st?), and parties to prepare to host or go to.

The week in between Christmas or New Year is also a time of reflection and evaluation as we review the past year. As Christ followers, this week and into early January should be a time to take stock of where we have been in the last year, what we can learn and take away from the previous year to build on our walk with Jesus into the New Year. I hope you are or have already been thinking that way.

I want to be very practical this morning. I may share less scripture than usual because to me, it is important that we understand the scriptures we are reading (What is God saying in this passage?) and applying it to our everyday life (What is God saying to me through this passage today?).

I want to give you some practical tools to help you get started or enhance what you have already been thinking about for new habits or changes in the year 2023.

Let's start with our scripture reading found in Matthew 7, a parable as Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7

Scripture Reading

Matthew 7: 24 - 27

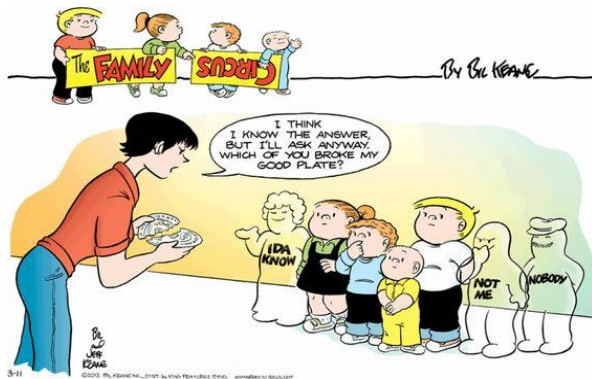
24 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

Purpose: Every Christ follower must plan how they are going to enjoy the overflow of God's grace and mercy found in salvation in their practical daily walk with Christ.

Transition: We will look at six things that should be effective in helping you move forward in 2023.

1. **Take an honest look at the highlights of 2022 through God's perspective – The good, the bad and the ugly - Psalm 139:1; 23; Ephesians 5:15-17**

- What are the things from last year that you can be thankful for. Even if they were difficulties, trials and tribulations.
- What things occurred that were good or bad that you didn't have control of?
- How did it affect your spiritual growth for the good or bad?
- How have you grown in the last year and what can you learn from that growth that applies to 2023?
- Have I sought and accepted God's forgiveness of my past year's sins?
 - Have I let go, put them in the rear-view mirror?
- What can you do to avoid dwelling on the past failures, sins, mistakes of the past year and move on from where you are right now to where God wants you to go?
 - Own your sin and the consequences of your sin. Accept responsibility and don't blame shift. If you did the crime, you have to do the time. Accept your consequences and make the best of the situation as painful as it may be.



- Repent
- Ask for forgiveness from God and others
- Forget those things that are behind you, your past sin and shame and move into the new year with God's grace, mercy, and acceptance

Quote: Karl Menninger, psychiatrist who wrote the famous book back in “Whatever Happened to Sin” as he was dealing with mental illness. Menninger was convinced that if people could find a way to relieve their guilt, they could get out of mental health facilities and live a better life. In 1973, Menninger made a call for churches to talk about sin and let people know how to deal with sin in their life.

“Clergymen have a golden opportunity to prevent some of the accumulated misapprehensions, guilt, aggressive actions, and other roots of later mental suffering and mental disease.” In discussing the way in which clergymen can best achieve this, he says, **“Preach! Tell it like it is. Say it from the pulpit. Cry it from the housetops! What shall we cry? Cry comfort, cry repentance, cry hope!”**

- Find a quiet place that you can be uninterrupted for a period of time to reflect, review, evaluate and write down what God prompts you to do in the new year ahead. Do it this week

Psalm 139:1

O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me

Psalm 139:23

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts

Application: Make getting alone with God a priority as you begin 2023.

Transition: Solitude is hard to come by these days. Turn off your devices and get alone with God, His Word, and a blank journal to hear from Him.

2. Seek God to understand His purpose in your life in the year to come—

Psalm 25:4; 27:11; 119:105; Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 51:1; 55:6

- Think God’s thoughts after Him by being in the Word?
 - Claim those thoughts as your own
 - Stand on them when life doesn’t make sense and does make sense
 - Remember always and remind yourself often who you are in Christ positionally and right now.
 - Pray God’s promises and psalms back to God and obey what the Word says even when you don’t feel like it
 - Psalms are our emotions. David was angry with God at times, other times, filled with a heart of gratitude, sometimes questioning God. We see in the psalms a whole range of human emotion. God can take it and will respond to it.

Illustration: 1 Peter 5:7 says, **“Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you.”** It does not say, **you will never feel any anxieties.** It says, **when you have them, cast them on God. When the mud splatters your windshield and you temporarily lose sight of the road and start to swerve in anxiety, turn on your**

wipers and squirt your windshield washer. So, my response to the person who has to deal with feelings of anxiety every day is to say: that's more or less normal. At least it is for me, ever since my teenage years. The issue is: How do we fight them? **The answer** to that question is: we fight anxieties by fighting against unbelief and fighting for faith in future grace. And the way you fight this "good fight" is by meditating on God's assurances of future grace and by asking for the help of his Spirit.

The windshield wipers are the promises of God that clear away the mud of unbelief, and the windshield washer fluid is the help of the Holy Spirit. The battle to be freed from sin . . . is "by the Spirit and faith in the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). The work of the Spirit and the Word of truth. These are the great faith-builders. Without the softening work of the Holy Spirit, the wipers of the Word just scrape over the blinding clumps of unbelief.

When the mud splatters your windshield and you temporarily lose sight of the road and start to swerve in anxiety, turn on your wipers and squirt your windshield washer. – John Piper

- Ask God to show you what your priorities and focus should be in the New Year
- Wake up every morning with the purpose of glorifying God – I Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17

I Corinthians 10:31

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Colossians 3:17

17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

- Examine your motives? Why do I do what I do?

Proverbs 16:2

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

- Where do you find your identity?

Illustration: Jim Powell's brother-in-law, worked for UPS for decades, retired, had a great pension, great 401K plan, found his identity in his work and ended up committing suicide in November.

- **Two great books to read – Search for Significance by Robert McGee**
- **Christ Esteemed by Don Matzat**
- Focusing on who we are in Christ will help us stay grounded and when the storms of life that will surely come, we will have an unmovable anchor of hope as we go through the storm.

Hebrews 6:12

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain

Illustration of Ulysses / Odysseus – Sirens – beautiful maidens – singing from an island a beautiful song.

“First you will come to the Sirens who enchant all who come near them. If anyone unwarily draws in too close and hears the singing of the Sirens, his wife and children will never welcome him home again, for they sit in a green field and warble him to death with the sweetness of their song.

There is a great heap of dead men's bones lying all around, with the flesh still rotting off them. Therefore, pass these Sirens by, and stop your men's ears with bees wax that none of them may hear; but if you like you can listen yourself, for you may get the men to bind you as you stand upright on a cross-piece half way up the mast, and they must lash the rope's ends to the mast itself, that you may have the pleasure of listening. If you beg and pray the men to unloose you, then they must bind you faster. By heeding the advice of the goddess Circe, Odysseus has avoided a catastrophe. He will face many more trials and temptations before he reaches his home and family. - (See Samuel Butler's translation of The Odyssey, Book XII, online via MIT.)

- Avoid the tempting sirens of our culture
 - Pornography
 - Materialism
 - Isolation
 - Looking at substance abuse for escape, comfort and false security.
- Always remember, that you can't control your circumstances but you can control how you respond. Go back to the first bullet point to think and act as God would.

Illustration: WWJD bracelet

- We need to look intently into the Word of God this year. We need to fear it, revere it, obey it no matter how we feel or how it affects

others lives. We have to think and act as God would want us to in these difficult days of spiritual darkness and lack of morality.

Illustration: Edge of My Seat by Toby Mac

(Chorus)

You got me on the edge

Got me on the edge of my seat

I can feel it rushin' over me

I can feel it rushin' over me

You are openin' my eyes

You're openin' my eyes, Lord

To brand new possibilities

Application: May you be found sitting on the edge of your seat when you encounter God's Word in 2023

Transition: We need to record what God is saying to us and review it daily or weekly.

3. **Develop a written plan for the year based on God's promptings** – Luke 14:27-33; Psalm 37:5-6; Proverbs 16:3; Ephesians 6:5 - 7

"He who fails to plan, plans to fail" – Winston Churchill

- Keep your expectations realistic. You may not reach your goals or maybe you will but the important thing is that you are becoming more like Jesus in areas of your life. You are making progress by moving forward in your walk with Christ.
- The Journey is the Destiny
 - Remember that you are not indispensable
 - Enjoy the ride because you will leave behind a lot of unfinished things from a human perspective

Quote: "We have the idea that God is leading us toward a particular end or a desired goal, but He is not. The question of whether or not we arrive at a particular goal is of little importance, and reaching it becomes merely an episode along the way. What we see as only the process of reaching a particular end, God sees as the goal itself. What people call preparation; God sees as the goal itself. God's purpose is to enable me to see that He can walk on the storms of my life right now. If we have a further goal in mind, we are not paying enough attention to the present time. However, if we realize that moment-by-moment obedience is the goal, then each moment as it comes is precious." – July 18th – My Utmost for His Highest – Oswald Chambers

- You move toward your goals but you hold those goals loosely because God will change your plans. Count on it. He may take a different road to the goal He may have prompted you to seek

Psalm 37:5-6

Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. 6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.

Ephesians 5:15 - 18

15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

Application: May you have realistic expectations for all areas of your life in 2023 knowing it is God who establishes the plans and make allowances for His divine interruptions.

Transition: How patient will you be in 2023 with God's leading in your life beyond what you can control?

4. **Make serving God and people the priority because that is what brings joy – Mark 12:29 – 31; Revelation 2:4 – 5**

Mark 12:29 – 31

29 Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

- Love God more in 2023. How will you do that? What is God prompting you to do to learn how to love Him more.

Illustration – When Love Lets You Down by Ron Hutchcraft. The Bible says, "Rachel he loved. Leah was unloved by him." But Leah, like every woman, had a very deep love hunger. Genesis 29:31. "When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, He opened her womb. But Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, 'It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.'" Interesting isn't it? She's looking to this man for the love and the identity she needs and she's coming up empty. Well, then, she finally has another baby. And it says in verse 34, "Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, 'Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have born him three sons.' So he was named Levi. Again, the man does not give her what she needs. Finally in

verse 35, "She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, 'This time I will praise the Lord.'" See, Leah had hoped to find her identity in Jacob's love. She didn't get it. But finally, after three times of counting on a baby to secure her man's attention, she refocuses her love hunger from Jacob to Jehovah; from her husband to her Heavenly Father.

- Love and serve people more
- That is where you find JOY – Jesus first, others second, and yourself last

Illustration: In 1524, Martin Luther observed: “Among themselves the merchants have a common rule which is their chief maxim. . . . I care nothing about my neighbor; so long as I have my profit and satisfy my greed.” More than two hundred years later, John Woolman, from Mount Holly, New Jersey, let his commitment to Jesus influence his tailor shop dealings. Out of support for the freeing of slaves, he refused to purchase any cotton or dye supplies from companies that used forced labor. With a clear conscience, he loved his neighbor and lived according to integrity and sincerity in all his dealings.

Revelation 2:4 – 5

4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

- We have to constantly work at keeping our spiritual zeal and fervor going by being focused on the goals God has in mind for us daily / weekly.

Application: May we return to the passionate love we had for the Lord when we first came to faith in Him.

Transition: Our next to last but very important fifth tool we can use to move forward effectively for God in 2023 is;

5. Execute what God has prompted you to do

James 1:22 – 25

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

- We have to move from commitment to action

- What small adjustments do you need to make to make to reach the goals you have in your life
 - Couch to 5K / Marathon
- Figure out the goal and then work backward to schedule ways each day or week, you can spend some time working toward that goal.
- If it means going to bed earlier and getting up earlier to accomplish what God is prompting you to do, do it
- It will take discipline, intentionality and self-control.
- Whatever changes you want to make, write them down, share with those around you. We all need to have commitment with some sort of accountability.

Application: May we take the small steps of daily change to reach the higher goal.

Transition: This last point is so important. Without Christ and the Holy Spirit, we cannot do anything spiritually speaking to reach these goals. We need the power of the resurrection which abides in us through the Holy Spirit.

6. **Be fully dependent on Christ for help** – I John 3:7-8; 2:1 – 3; 4:4; I Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6; Psalm 20:7; Matthew 10:16-20

I John 3:7-8

7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

- The fact that Christ came to destroy our sinning and to forgive our sins is this: Christ will really help us in our fight. He really will help you. He is on your side. He didn't come to destroy sin because sin is fun. He came to destroy sin because sin is fatal. It is a deceptive work of the devil, and it will destroy us if we don't fight it. He came to help us, not hurt us.
- Christ will help overcome sin in you. First John 4:4 says, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Jesus is alive, Jesus is almighty, Jesus lives in us by faith. And Jesus is for us, not against us. He will help you in your fight with sin in the new year. Trust him. – John Piper
- Do you trust God with your time, your decisions, your money, what you do with your entertainment time, your relationships?
- Picture and Quote from Corrie Ten Boom



- Trust is placing all of your weight and burden on something strong that will hold you up.

Proverbs 3:5-6

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.

- **Bāṭaḥ - to have confidence, be confident, to be bold, to be secure, to cause to trust, to feel safe, be careless, lie extended on the ground**
 - When was the last time you felt like that with God?
 - It has been a while for me. To fully trust and rest in Him.
- We have a whole new year in front of us beginning today. We are only 10 hours into this new year. What do you need to let go and trust Him with?

Application: May you learn more deeply what it is to lay ourselves and our burdens completely on the Lord by trusting Him more.

Transition: What will you build on, add onto what you have already built on your spiritual journey with Jesus Christ?

I Corinthians 3:10 – 15

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Key Thought: What will you build on the foundation of Jesus Christ in 2023?

- Let this video put this in perspective as you consider your plans and the uncertain twists and turns 2023 will make but that you have sure and steady foundation in the rock of Jesus Christ.

Video – The Field of Eternity – 3:20 minutes

Questions to Ponder this Week

1. Will I take time in the next few days or weeks to get alone with God to hear what He wants you to do in 2023?
2. How will you serve God and people differently in 2023?
3. What will your new additions to the foundation of Christ look like at the end of 2023?

Let's pray