

Equipped to make a fresh start

Have you made any New Year resolutions yet? I heard about a woman who made a new year's resolution to eat more chocolate while her husband resolved to watch more football. Needless to say, they didn't have any trouble keeping to their resolutions! But for many of us, it's often easier to make a resolution than to turn it into reality. This is probably because resolutions tend to focus on changes we *need* to make rather than changes we *want* to make. But, despite the difficulty many of us have in staying with New Year resolutions, the beginning of a new year is a good time to take stock of our lives and assess whether or not we need to make any changes. Here are three areas where some of us could benefit from a fresh start.

1. A fresh start in spiritual disciplines. When you read the word "discipline", what sort of thoughts come to mind? Many of us don't like this word because it conjures up ideas of self-denial or unrelenting rule-following. But discipline really means "training" and is an essential part of our spiritual development. No athlete reaches his full potential without consistent training and no student achieves academic success without training herself to be disciplined in study.

The Old Testament book of Proverbs has quite a lot to say about this and one verse talks about dying for lack of discipline.¹ For some of us, has our prayer life died for lack of discipline? Or our study of the bible? Maybe our personal worship of God is pretty much dead, and our fellowship with other Christians has become rather lifeless? Are Christian ministries starving because our giving to them has dried up? It's so easy to let things slide, even a little, and before we know it, our spiritual lives are dying for lack of discipline. So why not make a fresh start? If you think you could use some help with prayer and bible reading, our "**31 Days of Praise**" and our "core and options" **bible reading plan** are available on our website for you to download free of charge and begin using right away.

2. A fresh start in lifestyle habits. If we were to objectively evaluate the way we live from day to day, what changes might we need to make? That's the easy part. Now for the more difficult part... Are we prepared to actually make these changes? For example, are we inclined to be lazy? And, if we are, does it even matter? The bible warns of the dangers of laziness.² Might this be an area where we need to stop making excuses and start making a fresh start? How about our eating habits? This is an area where I particularly need the spiritual fruit of self-control³ because it's just so easy for me to eat too much of the wrong kind of food! Could this be an issue requiring your attention, too? Do we need to make a change in what we allow into our minds? Perhaps our reading and viewing material falls short of God's standard of purity⁴ and, as such, we need to take corrective action. The battle is lost or won in our minds, so it makes sense to guard what goes in.

3. A fresh start in relationships. Relationships are such an important part of our lives but they can be very fragile - it doesn't take much to damage or break them. Perhaps some of our relationships are in need of a fresh start. Maybe we need to extend forgiveness to someone who has offended us. This will involve giving up our right to pay back or 'get even' with someone who has wronged us, even if that person hasn't asked for our forgiveness. Or it could be that we need to admit our own shortcomings. It's not easy to face up to our own failings and the part they might have played in relationship breakdown but, in some cases, a genuine "I'm sorry" might go a long way in repairing a damaged relationship, especially if it's backed up by appropriate action. A fresh start in relationships also requires truth-telling, but in a spirit of love.⁵ Telling people the truth about themselves when we're in a fit of anger might be temporarily satisfying for us, but it's unlikely to achieve a positive outcome.

How is it with you? Will this be the year when you become equipped to make a fresh start?

¹ Proverbs 5:23

² Proverbs 19:15; Ecclesiastes 10:18

³ Galatians 5:23

⁴ Philippians 4:8

⁵ Ephesians 4:15