

Encountering God, Others and the World

Digging in



 **CanyonView**
Vineyard Church
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COMPANY'S COMIN'!

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BY CATHIE LAMBERT

A daily devotional helping you
prepare for the coming message.



Monday:

So this is about the time that we're finally knuckling down to serious business for the New Year . . . It's time to choose among all those "I should's" and "I shouldn't's" as far as New Years resolutions go. Yep, we need to pick two or three . . . well, let's not go tooooooo far, now . . . we need to pick *one or two* resolutions and actually follow through with them!

What kind of resolutions might appeal to us *this* year? I did a little on-line research to see if I could find out which resolutions the "experts" are pushing. Here are a few:

One website on relationships advises:

- Learn something new
- Date outside your "type"
- Support the arts
- Make more phone calls
- Keep a gratitude journal
- End toxic relationships

These seem like a weird combination of the common and the ridiculous.

Another website with more general interest appeal says we should:

- Start your own blog
- Swap CDs with your teen
- Surround yourself with color
- Explore your hometown
- Start a potluck ritual
- Do something that scares you silly
- Take a "me" day

I just don't know. At least *some* of these would have appealed to me not so long ago, but for the most part, they just seem silly and short-sighted. (Maybe I'm getting grouchy in my old age?)

I did like these, though:

- Aim low
- Don't overload yourself
- Tell everyone you know
- Reward yourself
- Wait until Spring

These *really* appeal to the I'd-rather-not part of me! I mean, if just about all the New Year's resolutions I've made in the past only lasted a few weeks, why should I *stress* about it?

Even as Christians, we can get caught up in the rush to self-improve: "I'm *definitely* going to read the *whole* Bible *this* year! Well, at least the New Testament . . . and maybe the Psalms . . . and Proverbs – well, maybe not Proverbs. But *I am* going to read the Bible *more!*"

- ◇ Have you ever *kept* a New Year's resolution – to the point where it is now a part of your life? Have you come close? Write about it.
- ◇ Have you already made a resolution or two? Write about it/them.



Tuesday:

Have you ever heard of The Christian World View? Probably you have . . . If you are trying to live a Christian life it can't have escaped your notice that how the Bible tells us to live is significantly different than how our non-Christian "peers" think we should live.

Abba and I have been working on switching from a Secular (non-religious) World View to a Christian World View for quite awhile now. And, I guess we're finally making some headway. When I was researching the New Year's resolutions on the Internet for yesterday's reading, my main reaction was, "How *silly!*" Well, to be honest, some of them really were silly. But the rest of them aren't significantly different from resolution suggestions that I'd taken seriously before.

And I don't think they *are* different. I think I'm different. For maybe the first time in my life, I feel like a "stranger in a strange land" not because I'm an introvert in an extrovert world, but because I see *things differently* than a lot of people seem to be seeing them. It's a very weird feeling!

Really, though, I don't know why I should be surprised. The apostle Paul has been telling us all along that *this* is not our Home . . . that we *are* foreigners here. It's been telling us that when we became Christians – when we accepted Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we would be putting off the "old self" and putting on the "new self".

READ: EPHESIANS 4:22-24

This sounds something like a New Year's resolution on the surface of it, doesn't it?

- ◇ How is Ephesians 4:22-24 like a New Year's resolution?
- ◇ In what way(s) are those verses not like a New Year's resolution?



Wednesday:

To start this reading selection, I'd like to suggest an answer to the second question from *yesterday's* selection. Remember, the question was:

- ◇ In what way(s) are those verses (Ephesians 4:22-24) not like a New Year's resolution?

Go ahead and read those verses again . . .

Verse 23 says: “. . . to be made new in the attitude of your minds;” I think this is a very significant difference from the standard New Year's resolution, don't you? The standard resolutions advise you to change *your behavior* and then, once the behavioral change has stuck, you will have changed *yourself*. So . . . the secular way – the popular way to become a “new and improved person” is to change what you do.

The Christian way works from the *inside* out. First the heart is changed . . . then changes in behavior will almost automatically come about.

Someone once said, “You can't legislate change.” This is the ever-present problem with The Law. As soon as you make a law, you must create an infrastructure (like the police) to enforce it. That's because people are not always . . . sometimes not even often, willing to change their behavior because they still feel the same old way on the inside!

That's why deciding to live a Christian life is a “heart” decision . . . not a “head” decision. Logic can only take you so far. Determination can only take you so far. A heart-felt yearning, backed by reinforcing experience can take you all . . . the . . . way. And then, your mind, your attitudes, your outlook on life in general does a one-eighty and – you're a different person than you were.

Verse 24 says that the “new self” which we are to put on was created to be like God in true righteousness (alignment with God's way) and holiness (being set apart for God). So, we don't decide which New Year's resolution to try *this* year. God decides. That's better anyway, don't you think? After all, He is all-knowing, all-wise, and He loves us beyond all our expectations. Father really *does* know best.

- ◇ Most of the rest of Ephesians is a list of what we – as Christians – *should no longer do*. This is putting off the “old self”. And a list of what we – as Christians – *should now be doing*. This is putting on the “new self”. Skim through these verses – just a page or so – and jot down two or three of the “should-nots” and two or three of the “shoulds” that seem to *really* make sense to you and your present life.



Thursday:

So, it seems that in order to change for the better – in the Christian sense – the first thing to do is to “put off the old self”. As you saw yesterday, examples of what this means abounds in Ephesians. Think of it as a sort of “house cleaning”. If we’re going to “put on the new self” . . . that’s sort of like knowing we’re going to have company. Don’t we always straighten things up in preparation for company? Take out the trash, do a little dusting, put a new roll of TP in the guest bathroom. It’s not just to impress our company – it’s more that we want them to feel comfortable and welcome.

Next week’s devotion will take a closer look at “putting on the new self”, but, for now, let’s have a peek at some of the details of this “putting off” part:

READ: 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18

The “Christian way” often has a bad rep with non-Christians. They see our life as an unending list of can’t-do-this and can’t-do-that. They see it as being very restrictive. In a way, it is. Let me put it this way: If you were with a group of kids up on the Monument at one of the look-out points, wouldn’t you make sure they didn’t get too close to the edge? That they didn’t get to chasing around to the point that they were running out into the road? That they didn’t decide to finish off the dried up remains of an old sandwich that they discovered on one of the big, flat rocks? Pretty restrictive, huh? Or is it? Aren’t you *really* trying to make sure they have the luxury of still being alive and healthy the next day?

“Putting off the old self” is like that. It’s taking those old, self-destructive, bad habits and putting them aside – hopefully (with the Lord’s help) never to pick them up again. That way, we’ll not only have the luxury of being alive and healthy tomorrow, but for a *much longer time* – eternity . . . but that’s for *another* devotional.

When I was raising my kids, they would sometimes spout out some unsavory – bad – word they’d picked up somewhere. I could have just told them, “Don’t say that!” Many of my young-mother friends were handling it that way. Instead – and more wisely, I think – I would tell them, “Don’t say that! Say *this* instead!” When you put aside a habit, there is a big hole left. Easier by far to fill the hole with something good than to just continually try not to fall into it!

Yep, “putting off the old self” is only half the story!

- ◇ What are some of the things that you actually do in your own house to get ready for company?
- ◇ What are a few things you might do to get ready for your “new self”?



Friday:

Do you remember reading when Paul called himself a “slave to Christ”? That’s sort of an odd way to put it, don’t you think? When we think of slavery, we probably think in terms of the black slaves of the Old South before the Civil War. Certainly, at that time, no one was *voluntarily* a slave! They were all *forced* to that condition.

But in New Testament times, slavery was a bit different. Sure, most slaves would rather have been free, but *sometimes*, when a slave was offered his freedom, he would ask to stay in service to the family that he’d been serving most of his life. If the master agreed, then he would take the slave to the front doorway and pierce one of his ears with a nail through the lobe into the doorpost. An earring would then be put in – signifying that this person was a *voluntary* slave to the household. That’s what Paul was talking about. No one forced him to be a slave to Christ – it was an honor to Paul that The Master had accepted him as a life-long servant. It was just about the only source of pride that Paul allowed himself.

There was an old, at-the-time Contemporary Christian song once that went like this: I’m a Jesus freak – whose freak are you? Translation: If you’re not serving Jesus – just who *are* you serving? Are you serving yourself? Your family? Your employer? Your possessions? Whoever . . . whatever you serve – controls you . . . by your own willingness to serve them or it. Does that make sense?

If you work for a certain company – and no one forces you to – you do what they say, don’t you? If you don’t want to do what they say, you either quit to work somewhere else or they fire you, right? If you are part of a family – you do pretty much what the family agrees is good – or you leave the family or get kicked out. You get the point . . .

Jesus, though . . . Man, oh man! This is a whole different level! If you aren’t in service to Jesus – who are you in service to? Jesus . . . God . . . has our best interests at heart! Can we say the same about anyone else? God *knows* what’s best for us? Can we say the same for ourselves? I mean, we *try* to pick what’s best for us . . . we *do* try. But somehow it doesn’t often work out. And sometimes even when we think it’s working out, we end up hurting someone else – not intentionally, of course – but there it is.

The New Testament slave who chose to stay with his master was not the common run of slave – it wasn’t *usual* for slaves to make that choice when offered their freedom. It’s not so common for people today to choose to be a “slave to Christ” either. It’s not the *usual* thing to do. But it *is* the *smart* thing to do!

And if that’s what we’ve decided to do – we better start “cleaning house” – company’s comin’!

◇ Not much follow-up for today. Jot down any thoughts that are rattling around.