

New Year Resolved: *More Love!*

Jesus
Others
Yourself

In God's only begotten Son, named "Jesus" on the 8th day after His birth, dearly redeemed:

One thing about God's Word, the Bible, that always amazes me is how similar their situation was to ours. "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,*" is writing "*to God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia....*" That's where Paul tried to go up near the Black Sea on his Second Missionary journey, but was not permitted by the Holy Spirit. God sent Peter there to folks like us who heard and believed the Word. That's how Peter knew that they had "*been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit....*" God sends the messengers, but He also gives the faith to believe the message. It's what they call, "*obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.*" There's no greater way to begin a New Year than this familiar blessing: "*Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*" (1 Peter 1:1f NIV84)

But what do you want to do with God's *grace* and its resulting *peace* in the New Year? Maybe you're like the Psalmist: "*I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest..."*" (Psalm 55:6 NIV84) Sometimes feel like the movie *Top Gun* when you just want to disengage from the fight? Yet your Commanding Officer says, "Engage!" Through Peter God commands: "*Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.*" (1:13-15 NIV84) By faith in Jesus you are bound for glory, but you're not there yet. You're still in the battle for souls and always in danger of losing your own. Suit up. Let this be yours. **New Year Resolved: *More Love!***

Jesus

You'd have to be a Christian to get that, *More Love!* Just look at the way Hollywood keeps hacking at "love" and realize there must be something better. When you've heard the angels singing, "*Glory to God in the highest!*" and you've followed the shepherds to the manger bed of God's own Son, you have seen *Love* in its sweetest, highest form. That Baby was born to shed innocent blood to wash your sins away. His bloodshed began His eighth day when mother Mary and stepfather Joseph obeyed the Law of God through Moses. When Jesus was circumcised, He was keeping God's Law perfectly in your place and mine, just as He did throughout His life. **Jesus** is God's cover for every sin of your past **Year** and His promise of grace in the **New**. Need *More Love*? Don't we all! We all need more **Jesus!**

Jesus is Good News. Everything about Him is Good News for now. His command is simple: Believe! In guilt-free gratitude, "*Be holy, for I the LORD your God, am holy.*" (Leviticus 19:2) You start to obey God's truth when you believe it. "*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*" (1:8f NIV84)

There is no greater New Year's resolution than to "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" (2 Peter 3:18 NIV84) Resolve to be faithful in worship, eager in Bible study on your own and together with likeminded believers. Look forward to Lent when we follow the Passion of the One whose Name means *Savior* through His sufferings, past the cross, to His glorious resurrection.

O thers

What is it about war movies and battle scenes that so captures the hearts of men and boys? Is it just violence as some of our sweeter sisters suggest? When *“the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’”* (Genesis 2:18 NIV84), right from the beginning God was talking about relationships. And that’s what comes up again and again in conversations with combat veterans. They weren’t fighting so much for their country, their honor or themselves. They were fighting to keep each other alive. There’s a camaraderie that’s rarely matched anywhere else for men. “Rarely,” I say, because there is one place that fully surpasses earthly warfare.

Peter knew all about this. An officer tells his men: “Keep a sharp eye,” or “Put your head on a swivel.” Likewise Peter was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to warn God’s combat troops in this battle for souls: *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”* (5:8–11 NIV84)

Whether you’re retired or just starting out to begin a career and raise a family, God wants you always engaged, heart and soul, in this battle to bring Christ to **Others**. As one brother of mine likes to point out with our family so scattered, “We’ll have plenty of time to enjoy each other’s company in heaven.” Let your work and your leisure always belong to God. Always engage in His plan to bring the same *“living and enduring word of God”* that got you *“born again”* to **Others**. A New Year reminds us that we’re running out of time. *“For, ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.’ And this is the word that was preached to you.”* (1 Peter 1:24f NIV84) **New Year Resolved: More Love!** – for **Others**.

Y ourself

Does anyone have to tell you to love **Yourself**? *“Love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matthew 22:39 NIV84), is not a command to love **Yourself**; it just acknowledges the fact. First, **Jesus**, then **Others**, then **Yourself**. That’s **J-O-Y**. But here’s the question: Do you love your Old Self or your New Self? Your Old Self hates God, could care less about others and always wants to be first. His way always ends in death, physical and eternal death for the soul in hell. Love that old guy and you’re a goner. The only thing to do with the Old Self is to make sure he drowns and dies by daily contrition and repentance.

But the New Self, the New You, came to life in Baptism. Your New Man loves God most of all and passionately loves your neighbor. God’s power that gives new life to the New Man is what makes Christian men and women so powerful in their spirit. In 1 Peter 3:1-6, the holy Apostle applies this to a believing woman winning her unbelieving husband to faith – *“without words”* by her *“behavior”* in the *“purity and reverence of your lives.”* It’s the beauty of your *“inner self,”* your New Self, *“the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.”* Be patient with **Yourself** as you grow up in the Lord. We’re not grownups in heaven yet, but *strangers* here below growing to glory.

See the progression here? It’s from sincere brotherly love to *“[agape] love one another deeply, from the heart.”* That’s **More Love!** that came down from God through **Jesus**, and keeps coming through us to **Others**. Tough circumstances can be devastating, yet our God of love can give a blessing. Years ago a Lutheran Pastor Hermann Gockel found out he could not preach because of esophageal cancer. So he spent his life writing some of the sweetest devotion books like *My Hand in His*. The theme devotion was about a little boy walking with his dad and slipping on the ice. He gets up and tries to grab his father’s hand – all grown up, you know. Down he goes again. This time, “Here, Daddy, you take my hand. I’m too small.” “Father, let me dedicate all this year to you.” (CW 75) From God above, through **Jesus to Others** and then to **Yourself** – that’s **J-O-Y**. **More Love!** to you in the New Year. Amen.

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