

# What is Jesus Doing?

## NEW YEAR, NEW YOU

Today I'd like to start with a simple scripture that sums up our relationship with God in Christ Jesus.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

- 2 Corinthians 5:17

We're going to come back to this scripture again a little later...

This time of year, we often hear people say, "New year, new me." It's a catchy phrase that reflects our inner desire to break bad habits and to make resolutions to become better people. But, for many people, becoming a "new me" is hard.

In the 21st Century, and especially in this country, we like to claim we are self-made and self-sufficient. Everything from online college degrees to bathroom renovations is DIY... do it yourself.

For most of us, when we say, "New year, new me," we mean that we will pursue self-improvement via self-direction and self-help. Pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps is as American as apple pie. But when our New Year's resolutions are rooted only in ourselves, we discover some tough truths about our human condition.

**For one, we find that our human reserve tank is finite.**

Humans are limited creatures. We don't have endless motivation, energy, and resolve. Everyone who has ever made a resolution has hit a limit. In our own strength, we simply cannot go on forever. It takes more than sheer force of will to make a real change.

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**For another, we find we need constant affirmation.**

When you determine your own identity, your own goals, your own purpose... when your values are self-made and not rooted in something outside of yourself, you must hold yourself up and convince yourself that you are enough.

When we insist on being self-made, the source and supply of our motivation must also be self-made. We depend on endless self-affirmation to know we are doing it right.

This self-help cycle of self-empowerment fueled by self-praise ultimately proves self-defeating. The primary reason people give for failing in their New Year's resolutions is losing motivation.

To be self-dependent is just too much. We are finite and fallen and fragile. While it may feel like we have what it takes on January 1st, we all know from personal experience that our own determination runs out.

**Self-help ultimately leads to self-defeat.**

Breaking old habits and adopting new ones is, as one might expect, incredibly challenging and, at times, downright disheartening. What can we do then, when we feel like giving up on a goal that we've set for ourselves? What tools are there that will give us the wisdom, insight, and courage to stay the course?

Oh... there are lots of authors to turn to who have written self-help books. There are plenty of blogs available by social media stars, sports heroes, movie stars, television actors, and billionaires who write biographies for you to emulate; as well as gurus of every religion and pseudo religion promising sure-fire solutions to all your life problems, but there is only one book that was written as a blueprint for your life by the One who designed you specifically and knows you and loves you intimately.

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God is the one who desires you most specifically to come to, Him not only for the wisdom and strength to stay the course, but invites you to come to Him for the Holy Spirit-led insight to know what the course is to begin with.

He is the One who deserves your closest attention. Jesus is the One through whom you are already made new and in Whom you are becoming complete.

*looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

- Hebrews 12:2

I love how God's word tells us that Jesus is the author as well as finisher of our faith. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, we see that we are God's workmanship, His Opus Magnus, the great work that He is still writing.

The prophet Jeremiah told the people who were going into captivity what it would be like when Messiah had come.

*But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

- Jeremiah 31:33

Remembering that Jesus came to free the captives and to unite both Jew and gentile as one people in Christ Jesus, we are the new House of Israel... those who have circumcised their hearts to make Jesus Lord and follow Him.

- In Christ, God's law is written in your mind and on your heart.
- Jesus is the author of your faith and has drawn you to Himself.
- Jesus is finishing and perfecting what is already new in Him.

I love this scripture that apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church...

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*You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*

- 2 Corinthians 3:2-3

As your pastor I deeply resonate with these words of Paul's. As we do life together, seeking God's word and God's will in everything that we do, we are living out the novel that God is writing and He Himself is fleshing out the glorious character that he is fulfilling inside of us, His beloved children.

But back to the popular phrase "New Year, New Me".

Desiring to become a new version of ourselves is not a twenty-first century idea but a timeless biblical reality. It's precisely what happens when we embrace the gospel. When we become "born again".

The apostle Paul says in Galatians...

*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

- Galatians 2:20

Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us so that we might become new creations, reconciled to our Father in heaven. We are not supposed to make ourselves better people, but allow ourselves to become completely new.

To become the new creatures created by God and for God, it is His Grace, kindness and mercy alone that make us new from the inside out. The process of being made new is initiated and completed by our Creator and Savior.

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He is the Author. God. Not you or me. God is at work within us, and He is arranging the circumstances of our lives in such a way as to give us opportunities to become more like Him.

*27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

*28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

*29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

- Romans 8:27-29

## **The Lord is growing us and changing us.**

By providing trials that challenge us and strengthening us as we go through them, He is making us more like Jesus every single day. Jesus is what the character that you are playing in this great novel that God is writing really looks like. Jesus was the first of many brethren and he is the template and the goal for what this new creation that we are supposed to be is all about.

If you remember last week, I referenced a scripture from Colossians wherein Paul exhorts us to put on the new person.

Here is that scripture again with the scripture that precedes it, for clarity...

*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*

- Colossians 3:9-10

## **What is Jesus Doing?**

Paul is clearly alluding to Genesis 1:27, which says that the Triune God created man in His own image. Nevertheless, now, the first man, Adam, is regarded as the old man who should be put off and discarded, because now we are re-created after the image of the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

You might wonder why Paul specifically mentions for us not to lie to one another seeing as we have put off the old self. After all, there are many other characteristics of the old person that we must put off that he had mentioned previously.

I believe that the answer is interestingly simple. It is because the enemy to whom you were a slave before you became a new person and a slave of Christ, is called by Jesus the father of lies.

It stands to reason, therefore, that if you can avoid being a liar like your old slave master the Devil, then you can more easily become like Jesus whom you now serve.

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Here is the scripture that follows, which is a masterclass in how to put on the new self...

**12** *Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.*

**14** *But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called In one body; and be thankful.*

**16** *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

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

- Colossians 3:12-17

Note that Paul begins by calling us the elect of God. He is referring to those who are in Christ, new creations.

He then tells us to “put on” tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. And specifically states that if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

Each of the qualities mentioned in this passage expresses themselves in relationships. The most significant measure of our “new” life in Christ is found simply in how we treat other people and the quality of our relationships with them.

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Paul also brings to the forefront, the power and requirement of forgiveness as the premier Kingdom Characteristic of a new creation in Christ. He says to forgive and forgo any complaint against another even as Christ has forgiven you.

No one suffered more at the hands of human beings than Jesus. Think about that.

Yet God holds back His anger a very long time when we sin against Him. He bears with us a long time, even when we sorely provoke Him.

- The old person in us doesn't think that bad people deserve forgiveness. But God reaches out to bad people to bring forgiveness to them.
- The old person will only agree to forgive if the other person makes the first move. But God makes the first move towards us in forgiveness.
- The old person is often unwilling to forgive because they think that this will give the other person license to hurt them again. But God forgives knowing that we will sin again, sometimes in the exact same way.
- Even if the old person that we were, forgives someone who has hurt us, it is very often not in our nature to restore the relationship with them. But God's forgiveness is so complete and glorious that He grants redemption and adoption to those former offenders.

Paul continues by exhorting us to...

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

- Colossians 3:16



## What is Jesus Doing?

I hope that all of you have started the Bible project Bible in one year app called "One Story That Leads to Jesus". The only way to let the word of Christ dwell richly in you is to study and meditate upon His word.

When the Word of God truly dwells in all of us richly, then we will be able to teach and admonish one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord perpetually.

Our entire lives will become a glorious worship service to the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And then we will realize that our purpose is not to become better people this new year, but to realize the new creatures that we already are in Him now.

And to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus to the glory of the Father through Him.

This New Year's Day, let's not settle for "New year, new me." Let's not settle for self-will and self-help and self-control. Let's not settle for quick fixes and superficial changes because New Year's resolutions will not satisfy or sustain us if they are rooted in ourselves .

New Year's Day, and the number of this year, 2025, is really only a way of marking time for us. The first of January is just another day.

It is said that there is no time like the present. While that is a common secular phrase, coined first in the 17th Century, its implications are important to us today and carry much weight from a Biblical standpoint.

If we really reflect on it, there actually is and always will be only an eternal NOW.

Here we are in the NOW of 2025.

As Paul said to the Corinthian believers in their NOW 2000 years ago, and as we began today...

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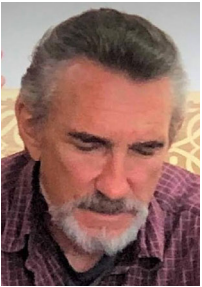
*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

- 2 Corinthians 5:17

In this NOW you are NEW.

So walk in it!

- John Henry Raskin, Roadhouse Rabbi



*Let's Pray,*

- John Henry Raskin, Roadhouse Rabbi