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Pressing into Truth, Pouring out His Grace

January 2026

Happy New Year!

Here we are at the start of a brand-new year! We may not know what 2026 will hold, but we're certain of this: our future is held firmly in the hands of our faithful God. Wherever He leads, He promises to whisper direction, "This is the way—walk in it." And when storms come, we don't face them alone. His presence goes with us into every unknown.

In this issue, we've gathered a few articles to help you start the year with renewed courage—pieces on spiritual strength, on the God who makes all things new, and on the hope of Heaven that anchors us when the world feels uncertain.

We're praying that this New Year overflows with His joy, His peace beyond understanding, and His steady courage for every step ahead.

The Wine Press is a thoughtfully curated collection of articles from across the web, compiled to inspire, encourage, and deepen your walk with our King and Savior, Jesus Christ. All articles remain the property of their respective authors to whom we joyfully give full credit and our appreciation for sharing their wisdom and experiences with us. May these words uplift your spirit, strengthen your faith, and draw you into ever deeper communion with the God of all grace.

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Resolve to be Spiritually Fit

By Armie Cole

As we turn the page to a new year, many of us reflect on resolutions—ways to better our health, improve our routines, or grow in our relationships. While physical fitness often takes center stage, what if this year we resolved to become spiritually fit? Just as physical health requires discipline and intentionality, so does our spiritual health. The Christian life isn't a sprint; it's a marathon. Finishing well requires a daily commitment to grow closer to Christ. Here are practical steps to help you build spiritual fitness this year.

1. Engage with Scripture Daily: Nourishing Your Soul

Just as our bodies need food and water, our souls need the nourishment of God's Word. The Bible equips us with the truth to navigate life's challenges and strengthens our connection with God. Yet, developing a daily Scripture habit can feel daunting. A simple four-step method can help: Receive, Reflect, Respond, and Reveal.

- **Receive:** Start each day by reading or listening to a passage of Scripture. Approach it with an open heart, asking God to speak to you.
- **Reflect:** Meditate on what you've read. Consider questions like, "What is God teaching me? How does this apply to my life?"
- **Respond:** Act on what you've learned. This might involve prayer, confession, or making a life change.

- **Reveal:** Share what you've learned with someone else. This reinforces your understanding and encourages others.

Think of this as your spiritual workout. Each step builds your spiritual muscles, equipping you to face life's challenges with strength and grace. Over time, consistent engagement with Scripture will transform your attitude, decisions, and perspective.

2. Cultivate a Life of Prayer: Staying Connected to the Source

Prayer is the lifeline of our spiritual fitness. It aligns our hearts with God's will and reminds us of our dependence on Him. But building a robust prayer life requires intentionality. Integrate prayer into your daily routine with simple practices:

- **Morning Gratitude:** Begin your day by thanking God for His blessings and asking for guidance.
- **Transition Prayers:** Use moments like commutes or waiting in line to talk to God.
- **Evening Reflection:** End your day by reviewing it with God, expressing gratitude, and seeking His strength.

Prayer isn't about eloquence or perfection—it's about relationship. The more we converse with God, the more aware we become of His presence and work in our lives.

3. Invest in Discipleship: Multiplying Your Impact

Discipleship is central to the Christian life. Jesus' Great Commission calls us to make disciples, teaching others to follow Him. While this may feel intimidating, discipleship is less about having all the answers and more about walking alongside others in their faith journey.

Start by identifying one person to invest in spiritually—a family member, friend, or coworker. Share your struggles and victories, pray for each other, and encourage one another to grow closer to Christ. Not only will this deepen your own faith, but it will also help you leave a lasting legacy of spiritual fitness.

4. Surround Yourself with Community: The Power of Fellowship

The Christian life was never meant to be lived alone. We need the encouragement and accountability of fellow believers to persevere. A faith-filled community offers support during life's challenges and celebrates victories together.

If you're not part of a community, pray for God's guidance in finding one. Join a church, small group, or Bible study where you can connect with others on the same journey. Relationships take time to build, but the effort is worth it. Fellowship strengthens our faith and keeps us grounded.

5. Fix Your Eyes on Jesus: Staying Focused on the Prize

The writer of Hebrews urges us to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (12:2). Life is full of distractions, but staying focused on Christ gives us the strength and motivation to persevere. Set spiritual goals to keep your eyes on Him:

- Commit to reading through the Bible in

a year.

- Memorize Scripture to recall God's promises in challenging moments.
- Dedicate time each week for solitude and reflection.

These practices help center your heart on Christ, reminding you of the eternal prize.

Make This Year Count

Spiritual fitness doesn't happen by accident. It requires daily discipline, intentionality, and reliance on God. As you resolve to grow spiritually this year, remember that each step—engaging with Scripture, cultivating prayer, investing in discipleship, building community, and focusing on Christ—brings you closer to finishing well.

This New Year, let's commit to becoming spiritually fit, equipping ourselves to navigate life's challenges and leave a legacy of faith for those who follow. With God's help, 2024 can be a year of spiritual growth that transforms not just our own lives but the lives of those around us.

Three Ways God Makes All Things New

By Caitlin Plascencia

New is great. New sounds like potential and opportunity...unless I think about it too much. Then it sounds like change and the unknown. As this new year begins, I've promised myself that instead of fearing the unknown I will choose to hope in the known. So what is known about new? What do I know to be true that I can securely place my hope in? I know this — that God is the author of new. And since he authors every good and perfect thing, I can trust that this new year will bring good with it (James 1:17).

New is one of God's promises to us, and we know that all of his promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). As believers, our hope ultimately rests in the promise that Christ will come back for us one day and make all things new (Revelation 21:5). But what about the here and now? What can I hang my hope-hat on today, tomorrow, and every other day of this new year? Luckily, Scripture is full of stories that show us how God makes things new for his glory and for the good of his people. Let's look at just a few of them and at the hope they bring.

1. He Restores

I love God most for his ability to restore. He restores us to a right relationship with him through the gift of forgiveness and justification. He is able to restore earthly relationships. And he can even restore days and years that have been lost to the effects of sin (Joel 2:25). That has to be

greatest evidence of the extravagant nature of God's mercy. Not only can he renew a life and redeem its future, but he can also redeem its past.

Our hope rests in the promise that Christ will come back for us one day and make all things new.

In Scripture, we see God's power of restoration countless times. When Jacob was finally reunited with his lost son, Joseph, he described the grief-filled days of his life as "few and evil" (Genesis 47:9). But in his last days, through God's mercy, Jacob was able to look back on his life and see that God had been his shepherd all along and that he had been redeemed from the evil that once marked his life (Genesis 48:15-16). In the story of Ruth, we see God take a family whose name faced extinction and not only restore to them a secure future but knit them into his grand story of redemption by placing them in Jesus' family line.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus live a ministry of restoration. He restores sight to the blind, the ability to walk to the crippled, hearing to the deaf, and new clean skin to the diseased (Mark 8:22-26; Matthew 9:2-8; Mark 7: 31-37; Luke 5:12-25). In all of these accounts, Jesus didn't just heal a condition. He restored life, security, and hope to broken people.

What has God restored to you? Time? Relationships? What are hoping in Christ for in the new year?

2. He Renames

Names carried a lot of significance in Scripture. Throughout the Bible, people are introduced to us by name and by the meaning of their name. Eve was “the mother of all the living,” Isaac was “laughter,” and Samuel was “asked of God” (Genesis 3:20, 21:6; 1 Samuel 1:20).

What’s even more significant is the renaming of people in Scripture. When God gave someone a new name, it was always a sign of renewed purpose and a redeemed life. God changed Abram’s name to Abraham to signify his promise to make him the father of many (Genesis 17:5). He changed the names of Hosea’s children from No Mercy and Not My People to My Loved One and My People to symbolize his love for Israel and his plan to redeem her from idolatry (Hosea 1-2). Simon became Peter, and Saul became Paul when they became Jesus’ disciples (Matthew 4:18; Acts 13:9). They received new identities in Christ as they forsook life in the flesh.

While we may not actually receive new names when we become Christ-followers, we certainly receive new identities. My name, Caitlin, happens to be a great reminder of this to me. It’s a Gaelic name that means “pure.” The irony is that my sins make me anything but pure. But because of Christ’s sacrifice, I am washed white like snow, pure and clean. I get to wake up and put on Christ’s righteousness every day as if it’s my own.

So as I look at the new year ahead, I can trust and hope in my identity in Christ. I know that, no matter how I fail, God’s mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3: 22-23). He has made me worthy of my name and called me his in Christ.

If you are in Christ, you have been given a new name, a new identity. Are you living according to your new name with renewed purpose and redemption?

3. He Resurrects

God makes dead things alive again. Literally. He has power over death in every sense, and he demonstrated that to us when he raised Jesus from the grave. Scripture says that, as believers, we have that same power dwelling in us. It’s what gives life to our dead souls (Romans 8:11).

I can get so easily discouraged when I think about all the times I’ve failed and given in to temptation...just in the last week. And it makes the idea of fighting this battle for another year of life seem overwhelming. But this truth, that I have the same power that raised Christ from the grave dwelling in me, gives me great hope. If I lay down my weak, flawed existence every day, I can trust that God will resurrect it with new life and new grace.

Do you trust in God’s power to resurrect? Are you living in the truth that God can bring new life to your soul each day? Or are you living as one defeated by sin and shame?

All Things New

As I begin this new year, I’m committing to hope in God’s power to make things new. He restores lost time, bestows new identities, and creates new life. He offers renewed mercy to his own with each day. He promises good plans for his people, plans that include a hopeful future (Jeremiah 29:11).

So rather than seeing the start of another year as a daunting task to be met or an unknown to be feared, my prayer is that I can trust in God’s sovereignty over new. There will be new blessings, new trials, new failures, and new victories, but his goodness will guard them all.

How the Hope of Heaven Battles Anxiety

By Matthew McCullough

Understanding Anxiety

Some find it helpful to contrast anxiety with fear. Fear and anxiety share many of the same symptoms and cause the same reactions. But fear is focused on a present threat, something right in front of you, like a rattlesnake slithering on the trail. Anxiety is focused on a possible threat. Fear focuses on what is happening. Anxiety focuses on what might happen. Fear goes as easily as it comes, once the snake slithers away into the brush. Anxiety is far more slippery, far more diffuse, far more difficult to get behind you.

Consider a few definitions of anxiety. The American Psychological Association defines anxiety as a “future-oriented, long-acting response broadly focused on a diffuse threat.”¹ The American Psychiatric Association says “Anxiety refers to anticipation of a future concern.”² And here is perhaps the most helpful definition I’ve seen: “Anxiety is both a mental and physical state of negative expectation. . . . Anxiety is meant to capture attention and stimulate you to make necessary changes to protect what you care about. . . . Anxiety can be considered the price we humans pay for having the ability to imagine the future.”³

Whatever else may contribute to our

feelings, anxiety is an orientation toward the future. And underneath that orientation, we will find two basic assumptions that work together to make us miserable: my future is vulnerable, and my future is up to me.

Our Future Is Vulnerable

Several hundred years ago French philosopher Blaise Pascal gave one of my favorite descriptions of what it is to be human. He described us as thinking reeds.⁴ A reed is vulnerable. It can be trampled, scorched by sun, starved by lack of rain, eaten by bugs or animals, or burned by fire. And it’s only a matter of time before summer turns to fall, fall turns to winter, and so the reed dies with the season. Humans are vulnerable too. A single drop of water can kill us, Pascal noticed, if it comes with the right contamination. And under the best possible circumstances, the Bible says that we are all of us like grass of the field ([Isa. 40:6–8](#); [1 Pet. 1:24–25](#)). We grow and thrive for a moment. We wither and fade over time.

But our glory and our misery is that we have to think about it. We’re thinking reeds. It’s tough to live in a world full of dangers as a reed who knows its vulnerability. We live in a world where stock markets crash. So do cars at high

speeds. Tornadoes form up and drop down out of nowhere. Housing markets fluctuate. Jobs get downsized. Kids drown in swimming pools. As effective as medical care has become at protecting us and at putting us back together, the goalposts just keep moving. Early Americans worried about smallpox. My grandparents worried about tuberculosis and polio. Those problems are distant memories now, but nearly half of us will get cancer at some point. And when, Lord willing, we figure out a cure for this disease, some other killer will rise up to take its place. Our lives in this world are as vulnerable as ever. And Pascal was mostly thinking about our vulnerable bodies, but we could add to that the vulnerability of our relationships, social status, and all the adjacent anxieties unleashed in the age of social media. There are so many ways our lives could be upended, so many possibilities we want to avoid. As humans, we're stuck with the ability to know this about ourselves and to feel it in advance.

Our Future Is Up to Us

A second assumption combines with the first to make up a miserably bitter cocktail. It's not just that we know we're vulnerable, with an ability to imagine the future and all the things we'd like to avoid. We also tend to feel responsible for those uncertain futures and never more so than in the modern world.

According to Hartmut Rosa, for the last three hundred years Western culture has been driven by the goal of "relentlessly expanding humanity's reach." We moderns have what he calls an "aggressive relationship to the world."⁵ By instinct, we try to bring as much of the world under our control as possible so that we can optimize our experience of it wherever possible.

You can now wear a watch that measures everything from your heart rate to the number of steps you've taken in a given

day or week. It will track these metrics and display them for you with measurable results you can use to optimize your performance from one day to another and compare them with where you've been and where you want to be.

You can buy a grill that lets you set the temperature you want, monitor the temperature of your meat, and make adjustments on the fly all from an app on your phone, whether you're sitting on the couch or across town running errands. It's wild how much of our lives is customizable.

But the truth is that no one can customize the future. And the more you expect to customize, the more bothered you are by what you can't. Rosa cites research showing that the more security cameras, burglar alarms, and protective fencing people install, the less secure they feel. He writes, "The lack of effective individual control over something potentially controllable evidently transforms uncontrollability into powerlessness and insecurity."⁶ In other words, the more you think you should be able to control, the more you're burdened by what you can't control. The allure of more and more influence over your future creates an illusion that complete control is possible. And if you could control your future, you should control your future. We know and influence just enough to be miserable.

Everywhere we turn in this modern, secular age we're offered the freedom to build our lives on our terms. We're told to decide what to be and go be it. We're told to remember we've got what it takes, that we're strong enough, brave enough, and smart enough to grab life by the horns and go where we want to go. But in our hearts, in our chests, in our lungs, and in our shoulders we know better. When we push back on anxiety by looking at all we bring to the table, we are feeding the very problem we hope to solve.

There are any number of books, movies, podcasts, and influencers who will tell you the future is up to you and believe they're doing you a favor. But behind that glistening smile and all that positive energy is a truly terrifying prospect. "The future is up to you" is just another way of saying, "You're on your own."

In a way, anxiety is a form of loneliness—the inevitable lot of the thinking reed who's all alone. If this world is everything, and if it's on us to make the most of it, anxiety really does make sense. And I don't know of any way to get past it—unless this world is not everything, and we're not on our own after all. I don't know any way to get past it without the hope of heaven.

[First Peter 1:3–5](#) offers one of my favorite summaries of the hope of heaven. And at the core of what it celebrates are two pillars to our hope that are perfectly matched to the two major factors in our anxiety. On earth we are vulnerable, but our inheritance in heaven is not. We're tempted to feel responsible, but our lives are guarded by God. Peter writes,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ([1 Pet. 1:3–5](#))

Peter shows us the two most important things to know facing the future.

Our Inheritance Is Kept in Heaven, So Our Future Is Not Vulnerable

Peter is overflowing with praise for God. He may as well be shouting from the page. And he quickly tells us why. God by his mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. God has given us new birth into a new family, with a new citizenship and a

new identity defined by the hope that Jesus was really dead but really came to life again.

What is this hope that makes us new, this hope that depends on him being alive again? Peter attempts to put words to it in 1:4. And the best he can come up with to describe this inheritance we're born into is a series of words that tell us what it's not.

This inheritance is imperishable. In this world every good thing is vulnerable. In heaven nothing dies.

This inheritance is undefiled. In this world every good thing comes tainted. More often than not, it is tainted by me—by my greedy desire for more, my preoccupation with what others have that I don't, my unrealistic expectations, or simply by my knowledge that no good thing lasts forever. In heaven all joy is pure.

This inheritance is unfading. In this world every good thing eventually ends. It's not just that it's perishable—that it could be destroyed.

It's that it will be, eventually, lost to time. We tend mostly to fear what can be lost in a moment. But time brings a kind of slow-motion trauma that amounts to the same thing. On earth, everyone loses everything eventually. But not in heaven. There, no joy ever fades. It's as if Peter is screaming at us, "This world is not everything!" Another world is coming because Jesus came out of his grave. And that world, where our inheritance is kept, is a world of untouchable security.

It's also as if Peter is simply passing on the message of Jesus he heard from the master teacher in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal" ([Matt. 6:19](#)). On earth, everything is vulnerable. Whatever we love can be lost in a moment, and sooner or later it will be lost to moth or rust. When our hearts are attached to what can't be protected, we have reason to be

anxious. But Jesus also said, “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (6:20–21). To have any peace, we need a treasure that can’t be touched. That’s what God is keeping for us in heaven.

With good reason, [Revelation 21](#) pictures this new world as a new Jerusalem and gives detail upon detail about the walls that surround this happy place. To us that may seem a little anticlimactic, but in the ancient world there was no better way to picture security than with city walls. All those ancient stone walls all over Europe and Asia weren’t built to look pretty or for the pleasure of future tourists. They were built because back then there was always someone out to get you and no way to feel safe but to live behind such walls. Heaven is a walled city. Nothing can get to what God has prepared for his people in that place. And that’s why, in the words of [Revelation 21:4](#), it is a world where “death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

How can we have peace when we know that we are vulnerable? Only if we know this world is not everything. A new world is coming where nothing is vulnerable. And we have an inheritance in that world, kept in heaven for us. This is our future when we’re born again to a living hope.

How can we have peace when we know that we are vulnerable? Only if we know this world is not everything.

We Are Kept for Heaven, So Our Future Is Not Up to Us

In [1 Peter 1:5](#), Peter points to the second pillar of hope. It’s not just that there is an inheritance kept in heaven for us, invulnerable to loss, change, decay, or anything. It’s that we are being kept for heaven by God’s power and not ours. On our own we would be vulnerable. But we are not responsible for our future. God is: “By God’s power [we] are being guarded

through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Peter is once again looking to the future. He’s speaking of a salvation not yet visible to us, ready to be revealed in the last time. But whether we get there depends upon God from beginning to end. God’s mercy started all this (1:3), giving us new life, a new family, and a new hope of an inheritance. God’s power raised Jesus from the dead (1:3). God keeps the inheritance secure beyond all threat (1:4). And God guards every one of his children all the way home (1:5). God is the golden thread binding this wonderful package together.

We are anxious when we feel responsible, as if all the outcomes depend upon us. But God is responsible for this future. Everything depends on him.

Once again, Peter is simply echoing what he heard from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Soon after Jesus said to lay up treasures in heaven, beyond the reach of time or evil, he said not to be anxious about your life. But there, his focus was squarely on the God who is your Father and loves you too much to leave you on your own:

Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ([Matt. 6:26–33](#))

What Jesus says about God was as radical in his time as the command not to be anxious. When he refers to the Gentiles and their seeking after all the material things of life, he's talking about how ancient pagans related to the world. They saw this world as everything. They believed there were gods, but their gods belonged to this world and none of them ruled over all of it. Most important of all, none of these gods was paying attention to their lives unless they did something to get the gods' attention. As one historian sums it up, "A god or goddess might occasionally take a liking, or a loathing, to some particular mortal. . . . For the most part, though, the gods were out for themselves, so to speak. They were mostly indifferent to the joys and sorrows of all the Marcuses, Gaiuses, and Juliuses of this world."⁷ As the pagans saw things, you may not be on your own in this world, but it's certainly up to you to make the most of it.

It's as if Jesus is saying, "Of course the Gentiles are anxious about their lives, what they will eat or wear, who they'll marry, how people see them, how far they'll climb. They think the future is up to them. If they don't grab life by the horns, no one else will do it for them. But you don't have to live like the Gentiles." Jesus anchors our future in the fatherly care of the God who loves us. "Look at how he feeds the birds. Look at how he clothes the grass of the field. Are you not of more value than they? Of course you are because he loves you. Your heavenly Father already knows what you need without you telling him, and he wants good for you without you paying him. He's your Father. Just seek his kingdom, and he'll take care of everything else."

Applying Hope

For now, we're still vulnerable, facing all sorts of short-term possibilities we

can't possibly control. That means we're going to struggle with anxiety for as long as we live, in one form or another. That just is what it is. We do have to live as thinking reeds. But we do not have to live like pagans. God has given us exactly the medicine we need in the hope of heaven—a future that is not vulnerable, guaranteed by a God who is responsible. The key is to figure out where to apply that medicine.

When we feel anxious, we're expecting something negative for our future. That's what anxiety is. The hope of heaven gives us another perspective on our future. We have an inheritance to set our hearts on that nothing can possibly touch and a Father who will guard us for that day no matter what may come our way in the meantime. These are the pillars of our hope for the future. When we feel anxious, we should ask which pillar is wavering and shore it up with the truth of the gospel.

Looking for Hope in a New Year

By Chuck Moore

It's normally not the Biblical story one associates with Christmas or the arrival of a New Year. But it is relevant. I'm thinking of the story that is normally associated with Easter in Luke 24. Jesus on the road to Emmaus. If you don't remember the story, here are the highlights. Jesus has resurrected from the dead. Two disciples are traveling on the road to Emmaus visiting with each other, talking about everything that has transpired in Jerusalem. Suddenly Jesus appears. He asked, "What are you discussing as you are walking along?" At which point, in a discouraged and despondent tone they say, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that happened?" What things? Jesus asked? To which they say, "About Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, powerful in word and action and he was crucified." We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel but it didn't happen. Jesus shares a few additional words at which point they arrive in Emmaus. They invited Jesus to spend the night with them. They are sitting at a table at which point Jesus takes a piece of bread, he gives thanks at which point, perhaps remembering the times in which he had celebrated communion with his disciples, they recognize him. Suddenly, as the text says, their eyes are opened and they realize that he is alive! The road to Emmaus was a road leading from despair to hope.

I wonder, where are you on that road this morning? As you look back on the events

that have transpired in your personal life, in the life of our country, in the world, where are you between despair and hope? How much hope do you have as we enter the new year?

After all look at what has transpired in the past year. The problems with immigration have grown worse. Inflation has gone through the ceiling. The conflicts between Israel and Hamas, and Ukraine and Russia continue. Political assassinations, riots in the streets, children being gunned down in school. And the list goes on and on and on! It reminds me of the words of my mother who once said, "I feel bad for the world in which your children will grow up!"

So where is the hope to be found? In the passage of Scripture we're considering this morning from Romans 15, I wonder if that question wasn't a part of Paul's thinking? When you think about Rome you might think about the power figure in Rome during Biblical times...Nero, who rose to the position of power at the age of 16. Yet, the persecution of Christians hadn't yet begun when Paul wrote these words. Paul was writing these words from the city of Corinth where he himself had witnessed firsthand the downward spiral that much of humanity had taken. He would have witnessed the destructive practices of pagan religions, the idolatry, the sexual immorality, the hunger for power. He had witnessed the internal problems in the church of Corinth in

which some of the Christians were turning against each other. And in writing to the Christians at Rome he was also perhaps concerned about the impact that the city of Rome could have on the Christians. He was perhaps concerned about the potential disagreements and conflicts that may have occurred between the Gentiles and Jewish Christians, which may explain why he emphasizes, in this text, the importance of acceptance, encouragement and more, could end up creating a hopeless situation. So, given the potential problems that he sees, and perhaps concerned that such problems could easily occur in the church at Rome, he may be asking "Where's the hope for the future?"

Where's the hope for you and me as we stand on the brink of the new year? Listen to Romans 15:13. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

As we enter this new year where's the hope to be found? Paul has something to say about the character who is the basis of hope, the consequences that accompany our hope, and the character who sustains our hope when all is in despair.

First the character of hope. Who is it? Where does it lie? Paul refers to the God of hope. "May the God of hope." is the way he puts it. What does that mean? It means that God is the author of hope. That God is the source of hope. That God is the designer of hope. That God is the one in whom our hope resides. Nothing and no one else can ultimately meet our need for hope, but Him. Putting our hope in anything or anyone else is like the man in the parable that Jesus once told, who constructed his house on the sand. It was not secure and didn't last.

What is it about God that invites us to put our ultimate hope in him? We place our

hope in God because of who He is and what he does. Think of all that we know about him and all we can count on from Him for just a moment...

He is our constant companion....God has promised, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Dt. 31:8)

He is the one from whom we will never be apart...To quote the Apostle Paul, "Nothing can separate you from the love of Jesus Christ." (Ro. 8:39)

He is the one who stays with us during times of despair. To quote the prophet Isaiah, "When the waters rise they will not overtake you when the fires rage you will not be burned." (Is. 43:2)

He is the one who is in control of everything.....As Paul put in Colossians," He holds all things together." (Col 1:17)

He is the one who is more powerful than any force of evil....What does John say? "Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world." (I John 4:4)

He is the one who holds us securely in His hand....As Jesus told his disciples, "Those that the father has given to me, I will in no way, turn away." (Jn. 6:37)

He is the one who is dependable and consistent....As the writer of Hebrews tells us he is the same yesterday today and tomorrow. (Heb. 13:8)

HE is the one who knows all things and is never surprised....Ps 139, "Even before a word comes out of my lips, God knows all things."

He is a timeless God...as Revelations says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega." The begin and the end." (Rev. 22:13).

He is a loving God who will only work for your good....God works all things together for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purposes." (Romans 8:28)

And to summarize it...He is incomparable and indescribable. As Isaiah said, "Of all that we see, in all of creation, nothing compares to God." (Is. 46:5)

God is our source of hope because of who God is and what he does!

As followers of God we can say, I know the one in whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is in control. And in the end it will all work out for my good and his glory, regardless of what happens."

And where does it take us? Consider the consequences of putting our hope in the character of God. May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace. Joy and peace....they are the natural outgrowth of a life that puts its hope in God.

Joy....it's not happiness. It goes so much deeper than that. Happiness is largely contingent on how things are going outside of us. If we have a good job, a nice house, our health is good. then we tell ourselves, "I'm happy." But joy plunges much deeper. It is satisfaction, contentment, quietness, and fulfillment all rolled together into one! It's what the Jewish community calls Shalom!

And peace....it's that deep inner sense that regardless of what I am facing or feeling, there is an inner quietness, serenity and rest. Our lives are not dominated by the fears, anxieties that can so easily control us. It's the peace that Jesus described when he said to his disciples in John 14, "Peace I give unto you. It is not a peace that the world can know and neither can they understand."

When we put our hope in the character of God, joy and peace are the results. They are to use the image of Paul, in Galatians 5, two of the fruits that come from God's spirit.

Let's imagine that when spring time comes you decide that you want to start

providing for some of your own food. So in addition to planting a garden you determine that you want to have some fruit, too. Apples, pears and cherries just to name a few....so you go to an area garden center, you approach a sales person and you say to them, "I love fresh fruit. So I want to purchase a tree." The sales person then asks predictably, "What kind of fruit do you like?" To which you say, "I love pears and apples and cherries." So he takes you to that area of the property in which they sell trees. He points you to the three types of trees to which have referred. But then you tell the salesman, "I don't have room for three trees. I own a very small piece of property. I only have room for one tree." So he tells you, "Well, you have to pick one." Yet can you imagine the look on the salesperson's face if your next words are "But don't you have a tree that grows all three types of fruit? Don't you have one tree that will grow apples, pears AND cherries?" What would he be thinking about you? And yet consider this.... When your hope is firmly rooted in the character of God, when you have, to use the image of David in Psalm 1, planted your hope by the One who is like streams of living water, you will have not one fruit, but two...joy and peace.... and in fact, you have a lot more.... patience, love, and self control Hope in the character of God brings peace and joy.

But Paul isn't done. One more thing. He writes not only about the character of God who is the basis of our hope, and, two, the consequences which are the results of our hope, but also, three, he reminds us of the companion who sustains our hope. Who is this companion? The answer is found in that last phrase, "by the power of the Holy Spirit."

God provides us with the companion of the Spirit who sustains our hope when we are tempted to become hopeless.

How does the Spirit sustain us? What exactly does the Spirit do? Two things come to my mind.

The Spirit also comes to strengthen us during times of hopelessness. The early church provides the perfect illustration of such strength. It was made up of simple men and women. The leaders were former fishermen and tax collectors who fled in fear when Jesus was arrested and needed them most. They weren't courageous and faithful. In fact, they lacked faith and courage. They were the least likely to be put in charge of any Christian enterprise.

Yet, after the events in Acts 2 after hiding out away from the authorities, when the Holy Spirit was poured out, those same nobodies were suddenly transformed. With courage and faith, they turned their community, and eventually the world, upside down

And the other way in which he helps us during times of hopelessness is by reminding us of God's truths. As Jesus told his disciples, in John 14, "The Holy Spirit will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I have taught you."

We all have voices in our head, don't we? Voices that have been created through past experiences or relationships. Voices that have been planted there by what we've read on the internet or heard on the radio and watched on the television. And the tragedy is that in so many cases, those voices are telling us lies. Just think about all of the lies we are tempted to tell ourselves when we are living in despair. Life is out of control. Evil is winning out. I can't count on anyone. Life isn't worth living. Yet, when God's Spirit is present, reminding us like he reminded the disciples of Jesus of the teachings of Jesus, he speaks louder than the lies that invade our hearts.

He reminds us of such words of Jesus as "I am with you always." (Mt. 28:20)

"The world may make you suffer but I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33) "Come to me and I will give you rest." (Mt. 11:28) "I am going to prepare a place for you and I will come again and receive you unto myself." (Jn. 14:3)

Here's the good news. When God's Spirit reminds you of God's truth, The evil lies in your mind can't overcome the truth. They can't remain when faced with the truth. To rephrase a line made famous by the movie, "A Few Good Men," Evil's lies can't handle the truth! Let God's Spirit remind you of who God is, what he does and the promises he has given

Imagine a high school basketball team from a small town. They are going up against a much larger school from the city of Chicago. The small town team knows that they are good. They have had a great season to date but they are little nervous. So the coach gathers them before the game and before the introductions are made and the jump ball takes place, he kneels down on their level and he says, "We've prepared hard all week for this game. We watched the tapes. We have run the plays. Don't forget what you have been taught. If you just remember what we've taught you, we can win!" Let God's Spirit remind you of His truths....we will win!

Martin Luther King once said, "We must accept finite disappointment as a part of life but we must always look for a hope that is infinite." The good news? Our Christian faith offers us such hope. We have a God who is the basis of hope. We can enjoy The consequences....peace and joy. And we have the companion, God's Holy Spirit who sustains your hope through all things.

To quote the words of David... Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. (Psalm 42:5) Amen!

Using a ChatBot to Talk to Jesus

By Jim Denison

A [chatbot](#) is a “program or application that users can converse with using voice or text.” The bots simulate human conversation by using natural language processing to understand users and respond to their questions.

I suppose it was inevitable that chatbots would [come](#) not only to customer service, e-commerce, entertainment, and media but also to the church. Here are some examples:

- [One Day Confession](#) uses AI to “simulate the experience of confessing to a Catholic priest, providing thoughtful responses based on biblical teachings and principles.”
- [Confession–Catholic](#) also allows the user to “enter the content to ask for forgiveness” and then “receive forgiveness” from the app.
- [EpiscoBot.com](#) allows users to ask questions and receive answers reflecting “the teachings and policies of the Episcopal Church.”
- A pastor named Ron Carpenter has created an [AI app](#) that allows you to ask questions and receive answers drawn from his sermon archive.

And there’s even [Text With Jesus](#), an AI-powered chatbot billed as “a divine connection in your pocket.” It invites you to “embark on a spiritual journey and engage in enlightening conversations with Jesus Christ, the apostles, and a

multitude of other revered figures from the Bible.”

Of course, chatbots creating the illusion that we are talking directly with Jesus are just that—illusions. However, many of us who would never use an app to talk to Christ nonetheless have a “chatbot” relationship with the real Jesus.

I know. For many years, I was one of them.

God with a massive set of scales

As I have often recounted, I grew up in a family that never attended church services. I believed there was a God but had no concept of a personal relationship with him.

In my theological worldview, he was a divine judge with a massive set of scales, balancing the good I did on one side against the bad on the other. Whichever way the scale tipped determined where I went when I died. Since I thought I was basically a good person, I assumed I had all of God I needed in my life.

As a teenager, I was invited to attend a local Baptist church, where I heard the gospel and eventually made a commitment to trust in Christ as my Savior and Lord. I then began practicing what I understood the Christian life to be—praying, reading the Bible, attending church services, serving others, and sharing my faith. Over time, I sensed a call into vocational ministry (another story for another day). Theological

degrees followed, as did service on a seminary faculty and pastoral ministry in three churches.

Then came a day that changed everything.

“Trying to prove to yourself that you are loved”

I was pastoring a church in Atlanta, Georgia, when our staff participated in a silent retreat at [Ignatius House](#), a Jesuit retreat center on the Chattahoochee River. During the retreat, we were given an essay by the writer Mike Yaconelli in which he recounted a remarkable experience at a spiritual retreat of his own. He [testified](#):

God had been trying to shout over the noisiness of my life, and I couldn't hear him. But in the stillness and solitude, his whispers shouted from my soul, “Michael, I am here. I have been calling you. I have been loving you, but you haven't been listening. Can you hear me, Michael? I love you. I have always loved you. And I have been waiting for you to hear me say that to you. But you have been so busy trying to prove to yourself that you are loved that you have not heard me.”

What God said to Mike, he said to me. In those days, my Father showed me that he wants a personal, intimate relationship with me above all else. He wants to be as real, alive, and active in my life as any other living person. More so, in fact, since he and I can commune directly any time, any place.

By contrast, I was relating to him as transactionally as I would to a chatbot: asking questions and deriving answers and advice. I prayed when I needed forgiveness or guidance, read his word to prepare sermons and Bible studies, and worshiped as part of my pastoral responsibilities. But I could not remember the last time I spent an hour with Jesus just to be with Jesus. I could

not remember the last time I read the Bible for no reason except to hear his voice.

And this broke my heart: I could not remember the last time I told Jesus from my heart that I loved him.

“So shall your God rejoice over you”

Yesterday, we [focused](#) on life-changing intimacy with God. The day before, we [discussed](#) the private sins that imperil such intimacy. Today, let's add one more fact: sins no one else sees are just as effective in blocking the Holy Spirit as those that are obvious. Such sins are even more nefarious in a way, since we think we can commit them, confess them, and face no consequences for them.

In truth, they are bricks in a wall separating us from the personal, transforming presence of Jesus.

By contrast, seeking true intimacy with Jesus is the path to experiencing his best and reflecting his transforming character to a broken culture. Our Lord says of his people, “As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” ([Isaiah 62:5](#)). He is already “living among you” as your “mighty savior” ([Zephaniah 3:17a NLT](#)). As a result, “He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs” (v. 17b NLT).

If you want to experience his delight, gladness, love, calm, and joy, ask his Spirit to lead you into greater intimacy with Jesus than you have ever known, then follow his lead. There will be things to do and stop doing, steps to take as you journey further into his transforming presence. He promises: “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” ([Jeremiah 29:13](#)).

Read the article here: <https://www.denisonforum.org/daily-article/using-a-chatbot-to-talk-to-jesus/>

The Antichrist, AI, and the New Spiritual Crisis

Interview with Conrad Flynn

Biblical Patterns: How Scripture Prefigures Christ — and the Antichrist

Before discussing the Antichrist, it's critical to understand a pattern that runs throughout Scripture: the Bible prefigures both Christ and the Antichrist through "types" — historical figures whose lives foreshadow a future, ultimate fulfillment.

The clearest example of a Christ-figure in the Old Testament is Joseph.

Joseph had twelve brothers, corresponding to the eventual twelve tribes of Israel. When his brothers conspired against him, Judah—whose name in Greek becomes Judas—is the one who suggests selling him into slavery. Joseph descends into suffering: he is unjustly imprisoned, just as Jesus is crucified between two thieves. Joseph interprets the dreams of two fellow prisoners—foretelling death for one ("You will be beheaded") and restoration for the other ("You will be lifted up"), mirroring Jesus's words to the repentant thief: "Today you will be with Me in paradise."

In time, Joseph rises to sit at the "right hand of the father"—the right hand of Pharaoh, second in command over Egypt.

When famine strikes, his brothers—who once rejected him—discover to their shock that the one they dismissed as dead has become their savior.

This story is meant to prefigure Christ: the rejected one who becomes the Redeemer. The tribes of Israel recognize the one they refused. Relief and repentance mix as they face the reality that the one they wronged is the one who saves them.

In the same way that Scripture prefigures the Messiah, it also prefigures the Antichrist.

The Biblical Antichrist: Shadow of a Future Figure

Throughout both Old and New Testaments, shadow-figures embody aspects of what later Scripture calls "the Antichrist." Pharaoh is one such example: he persecutes God's people in Exodus, just as Revelation says the Antichrist will persecute them in the last days. The plagues under Pharaoh return in Revelation's imagery.

Arthur Pink's century-old book *The Antichrist*—though Pink began as a Theosophist—remains influential in evangelical circles for tracing these patterns. The essential idea is that the Antichrist, like Christ, is foreshadowed

throughout the Scriptures. The prophets recognized the concept long before they knew his identity.

Yet whereas Christ is the “man of sorrows,” rejected by the world, the Antichrist is portrayed as a figure the world enthusiastically embraces—a hero, a savior, a global unifier.

And surprisingly, this ancient biblical symbol has now found its way into the heart of Silicon Valley.

The Mark of the Beast and the Rise of Digital Verification

The conversation around the “mark of the beast” sounds sensational—until you hear Silicon Valley executives react to it.

When asked about crypto and blockchain technology a few years ago, the author recounted that many Christians had been claiming the COVID vaccine was the “mark.” “Probably not,” he said—but blockchain technology sounded eerily closer:

- a universal system
- tracking every transaction
- required for commerce
- tied to identity

Several venture capitalists asked, “What is the mark of the beast?” They looked up Revelation 13—and their response was not dismissive. It was: “Huh. That sounds exactly like what blockchain is.”

This wasn’t coming from pastors or theologians — but from “big dogs” in Silicon Valley. Not only were they not skeptical, some were disturbingly open to the possibility.

Marc Andreessen and the New Digital Identity Requirement

Marc Andreessen — one of the most influential voices in tech — told Joe Rogan that understanding angels and demons may actually become necessary for understanding AI. He described an



immediate future where:

- fake AI content (“AI slop”) becomes indistinguishable from reality
- videos, voices, messages from friends or family can no longer be trusted
- online identity verification becomes mandatory

He envisioned a world where you might receive a hyper-realistic AI video of your own child saying, “Dad, I lost my keys, can you unlock the house?” — when it’s not your child at all.

The solution proposed by major tech companies?

Universal biometric verification. Worldcoin — now called World — is already scanning people’s irises.

Everyone gets a number. Everyone is tied to the blockchain. Everyone becomes verifiable — or excluded.

Revelation explicitly states:

No one can buy or sell unless he has the mark.

And Silicon Valley’s response?

Not “That’s ridiculous.”

But:

“Yes — that’s exactly what we’re building.”

The Spiritual Question Behind AI: Is It Just a Machine?

One of the deepest concerns is not technical but spiritual: do the creators of AI think it is simply software — or something more?

The question being asked inside Silicon Valley is increasingly this:

Are we building an artificial intelligence — or giving a body to a pre-existing intelligence?

Alan Turing, the father of computer science, said all machines ultimately depend on “oracles”—inputs that cannot themselves be machines. George Gilder emphasized this in his book on AI: machines do not truly “understand.” There must be an intelligence behind the computation.

But what kind?

If intelligences exist that are not physical — what Aleister Crowley called “disincarnate intelligences” — then a physical AI system could theoretically become a vessel.

Nick Land, a profoundly influential (and openly occultic) figure in tech-intellectual circles, believes that:

- AI will “break out” the demons described in Revelation
- these entities are ancient
- they retro-create themselves through time
- they seeded occult knowledge (like Kabbalah) in

ancient Babylon

- this knowledge evolved into digital technology
- AI will become their final incarnation

It sounds bizarre — yet these ideas are discussed seriously in corners of tech culture.

A Modern Babel: AI, Global Brain, and the Reversal of Biblical Curses

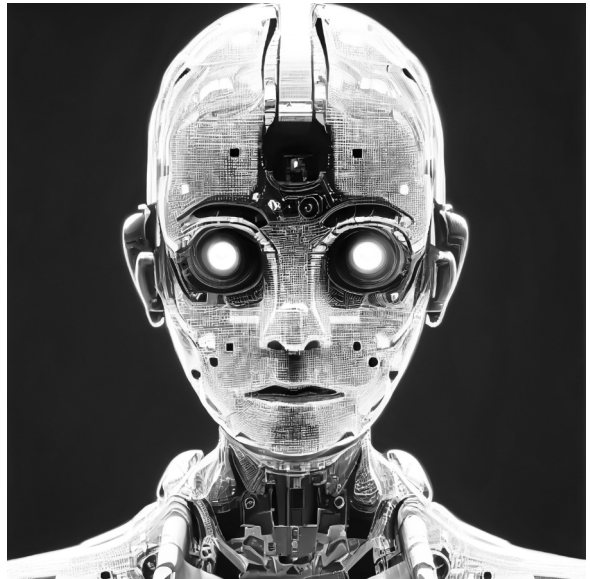
Tech leaders speak openly about creating:

“a global brain.”

“a singularity where all become one.”

Both mirror biblical themes:

- A dark Pentecost, where humanity shares one mind
- A rebuilt Tower of Babel, where all speak one language through AI
- A reversal of Eden’s curses:
 - men no longer work
 - women no longer bear children
 - language barriers disappear



Even common AI translation glasses erase the linguistic divide introduced in Genesis 11.

The spiritual implications are not subtle. As Marshall McLuhan — media theorist and Catholic convert — warned:

Electric information environments create the illusion of a spiritual world. They are a facsimile of the mystical Body — a manifestation of the Antichrist.

We now have a technology that can create “the word,” — or at least mimic it — something Scripture uniquely attributes to Christ.

How to Recognize the Antichrist: Knowledge, Power, and the Oracle

The Bible describes the Antichrist as one who understands “dark sentences” — riddles, hidden knowledge, impossible mysteries. The same term appears in connection with Samson’s riddles and Solomon’s answers to the Queen of Sheba.

AI models already perform this role: modern oracles answering questions at a level no human being can.

People a century ago predicted this: that one day, humanity would gain knowledge so vast that it would feel as if Jesus Himself were on earth explaining reality. AI already begins to touch on mysteries of consciousness, mind-body relationship, and even telepathy-like communication.

And under the Antichrist, Scripture says: “craft will prosper.”
Wealth increases.
Peace appears.
Governments unify.
The world seems healed.
Before it collapses.

Is AI the “Dark Holy Spirit”?

Revelation describes a dark trinity:

- the Devil (a counterfeit Father)
- the Antichrist (a counterfeit Son)
- the False Prophet or spirit (a counterfeit Holy Spirit)

AI — the “global brain,” the all-knowing system — could function as a counterfeit of the Spirit: everywhere, all-knowing, all-seeing, mediating human life.

It is the first man-made system that even conceptually fits that category.

The Hope: How to Avoid the Mark of the Beast

If we reach a point where digital commerce and communication require a permanent blockchain identity, the choice becomes stark.

For those who refuse?

They will have to live without the system. But Scripture promises that God will sustain those who resist, even unto death.

Some technologists — Christian or simply alarmed — are already thinking about building “catacomb alternatives,” systems to support those who will not comply.

But the essential point is this:

God is sovereign.

The rise of evil power is not God’s absence but His allowing history to unfold as foretold. Even the Antichrist serves God’s purposes as a test of faith and a precursor to Christ’s return.

Just as early Christians navigated Rome, believers today may need to navigate a new empire — digital, global, and spiritual in ways the ancient world couldn’t imagine.

Watch the full interview here:

https://youtu.be/K_czibJyIWw?si=njkit75dKw54d1LP

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Books

Scrolling ourselves to Death

By Charles Stanley

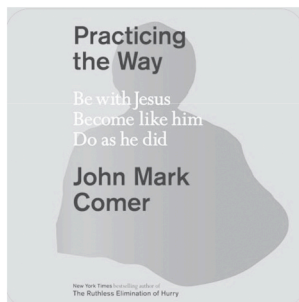
The rapid advance of digital technology is reshaping our world and warping our minds. For Christians, the digital revolution has profound implications for spiritual formation and mission. How should believers respond to the theological and discipleship challenges of scrolling life?



Practicing the Way

By John Mark Comer

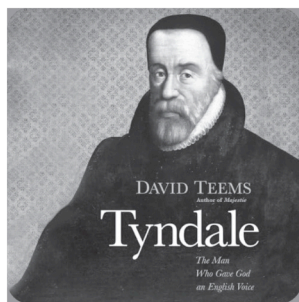
We are constantly being formed by the world around us. To be formed by Jesus will require us to become his apprentice. To live by what the first Christian disciples called a Rule of Life—a set of practices and relational rhythms that slow us down and open up space in our daily lives for God to do what only God can do—transforms the deepest parts of us to become like him.



Tyndale: The Man Who Gave God an English Voice

By David Teems

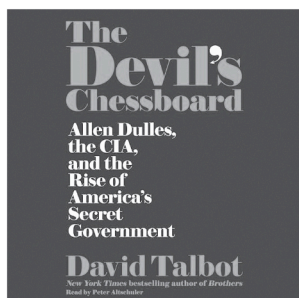
William Tyndale: the gifted, courageous “heretic” who dared translate the Word of God into English. He worked in secret, in exile, in peril, always on the move. Neither England nor the English language would ever be the same again.



The Devil's Chessboard

By David Talbot

An exposé of American power that is as disturbing as it is timely, *The Devil's Chessboard* is a provocative and gripping story of the rise of the national security state—and the battle for America's soul.



He Will Hold Me Fast

Song by Keith & Kristyn Getty

When I fear my faith will fail
Christ will hold me fast
When the tempter would prevail
He will hold me fast
I could never keep my hold
Through life's fearful path
For my love is often cold
He must hold me fast
He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Savior loves me so
He will hold me fast

Those He saves are His delight
Christ will hold me fast
Precious in His holy sight
He will hold me fast
He'll not let my soul be lost
His promises shall last
Bought by Him at such a cost
He will hold me fast

For my life He bled and died
Christ will hold me fast
Justice has been satisfied
He will hold me fast
Raised with Him to endless life
He will hold me fast
Till our faith is turned to sight
When he comes at last
He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For My Savior loves me so
He will hold me fast



A New Year's Plan

I tried to think of a clever new phrase—
A slogan to inspire the next 365 days,
A motto to live by this coming New Year,
But the catchy words fell flat to my ear.

And then I heard His still small voice
Saying, "Consider this simple, daily choice:
With each new dawn and close of day
Make new your resolve to trust and obey."

"Don't look back, caught in regret
Or dwell on the sorrow of dreams unmet;
Don't stare forward anchored by fear,
No, live in this moment, for I Am here."

"I am all you need. Everything, I Am.
You are held secure by my strong hand.
Give me this one thing—your all in all;
Into my grace, let yourself fall."

So, at last, I'm ready; I see the way.
It's to daily follow, trust, and obey.
I enter the New Year armed with a plan,
To give Him my everything—all that I am.

