

ONE

A publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance January 2016

INSIDE:

- + Ministers offer tips to ring in the new year
- + Support groups available for those who seek help



Welcome to 2016! The Christmas season is ending, but the promises of God live on, bringing light in the darkness.

Ecclesiastes 3 reminds us that "For everything there is a season..." Many see this season of the changing of the year as one of resolutions, intentions or new beginnings. There is something about this season

that encourages a fresh start for desired habits. Gyms and health clubs have learned to expect New Year's crowds, as well as the rapid drop off after a few weeks. For others there is the rueful recognition that most resolutions tend to be soon forgotten.

While we often focus on resolutions

around physical improvement like diet and exercise, resolutions and intentions can also include a spiritual focus such as prayer, study and practicing care and compassion on behalf of those whom

Jesus favored.

Does the new year inspire you to make resolutions or commitments?

As you look back on 2015, what gave you joy, peace and hope?

How might you

develop and share those good things with others? Are there parts of 2015 which perhaps need to be left behind so that you are able to live more fully through 2016 and beyond?

In this issue you will find reflections and practices about resolutions from a variety of faithful Christians. Ellis

The Rev.
Celeste Lasich



RECIPE

3 PACKET ROAST IN A CROCK POT

Ingredients:

1 package (dry) Ranch dressing mix
1 package (dry) Italian dressing mix
1 package (dry) brown gravy mix
1 cup water (To increase flavor, substitute 1 cup chicken OR beef broth)

Directions:

Put 3 lb roast in crock pot. Add ingredients of the 3 packages. Add 1 cup of water or broth. Cook on low for 6 to 8 hours.

*Submitted by Rev. Karen Harvester,
Chaplain at Hays Medical Center*

HOLY HUMOR

"What's wrong, Bubba?" asked the pastor.

"I need you to pray for my hearing," said Bubba.

The pastor put his

hands on Bubba's ears and prayed. When he was done, he asked, "So how's your hearing?"

"I don't know," said

Bubba. "It isn't until next Tuesday."

*Submitted by Ashley
Allen of the Salvation
Army*

SIGN OF THE TIMES



County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) includes pastors, chaplains, ministry leaders, staff of helping agencies and churches. We are committed to working together on things that unite us as followers of Jesus Christ, while holding lightly those things about which we may disagree. Our views on New Year's resolutions may well be one of those things. And yet, we are always striving to lead a faithful life that is pleasing to God.

On behalf of the ECMA Executive Board and ONE Advisory Committee, we hope that you will enjoy these diverse reflections on resolutions. May they shine a bit of light and even inspire a new way to walk into the mystery of 2016, trusting in the promises of God who comes to us in Jesus.

May you experience and share the blessing of God's Light and Love in this New Year.

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SUBMISSIONS

ONE and the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to one@dailynews.net.

The ECMA advisory board will choose appropriate and timely submissions for publication.

The columns in ONE represent the views of the author.

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On the cover: In recognition of the Christmas season, a nativity scene was placed on a table at Holy Cross Church in Pfeifer.

In the background is the church's pulpit.
Photo by Mike Corn, Hays Daily News

Resolutions for new year comparable to Season of Lent

New Year's Resolutions. I have never been one to make New Year's Resolutions. However when we were first talking about this theme at the ECMA meetings, I was reminded of Lent. Now you might be thinking to yourself, what does Lent and making New Year's Resolutions have in common? Well, I believe a lot actually.

During the Season of Lent in many Christian denominations, people give things up. We give things up to remember how much Jesus Christ gave up for us. Some people give up sweets, or alcohol, or red meat. I have even given up a few things over the years. One year I even gave up eating french fries, and it was harder than I thought it would be. However, the last few years, instead of giving something up, I have added something to my life for

the Season of Lent. Kind of like how we add things to our lives at the beginning of each new year.

A few years ago I read a blog post by Nadia Bolz-Weber, the pastor of House For All Saints and Sinners in Denver, Colo. The blog was about 40 ideas for keeping a holy Lent (<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadia-bolzweber/2012/02/house-for-all-sinners-and-saints-40-ideas-for-keeping-a-holy-lent/>).

I really enjoyed her ideas and have even added a few of them to my daily life, not just during Lent. So as we all enter into the new year, 2016, I wonder what it would be like for the community of Hays, along with our individual selves, if we each added a few of these things to our lives. How would our lives change? How would

we be living hands, hearts, and feet of God?

The following is an edited version of Bolz-Weber's list of ideas. I hope some of these ideas will inspire you in this new year, either for a resolution, a Lenten discipline, or a life addition. 1. Pray for your enemies; 2. Walk, carpool, bike or bus it; 3. Don't turn on the car radio; 4. Give \$20 to a non-profit of your choosing; 5. Take 5 minutes of silence at noon; 6. Look out the window until you find something of beauty you had not noticed before; 7. Give 5 items of clothing away; 8. Have a "no complaining" day; 9. Do someone else's chore; 10. Buy a few \$5 fast food gift cards to give to homeless people you encounter; 11. Call an old friend; 12. Pray the Paper - pray for people and situations in today's news; 13. Read Psalm 139; 14. Pay a few sincere compliments; 15. Bring your own mug; 16. Educate yourself about human trafficking; 17. Forgive someone; 18. Internet diet; 19. Change one light in your house to a compact

florescent; 20. Check out morning and evening prayer at <http://dailyoffice.wordpress.com/>; 21. Ask for help; 22. Tell someone what you are grateful for; 23. Introduce yourself to a neighbor; 24. Read Psalm 121; 25. Bake a cake; 26. No shopping day; 27. Light a virtual candle http://rejesus.co.uk/spirituality/post_prayer/; 28. Light an actual candle; 29. Write a thank you note to your favorite teacher; 30. Invest in canvas shopping bags; 31. Use Freecycle www.freecycle.org; 32. Donate art supplies to your local elementary school; 33. Read John 8:1-11; 34. Worship at a friend's mosque, synagogue or church and look for the beauty; 35. Confess a secret; 36. No sugar day — where else is there sweetness in your life; 37. Give \$20 to a local non-profit; 38. Educate yourself about a saint www.catholic.org/saints; 39. Pray for peace; and 40. Pray for your enemies (you probably have new ones by now., then decide which of these exercises you'll keep for good.



Pastor
Marie Sager

Trinity
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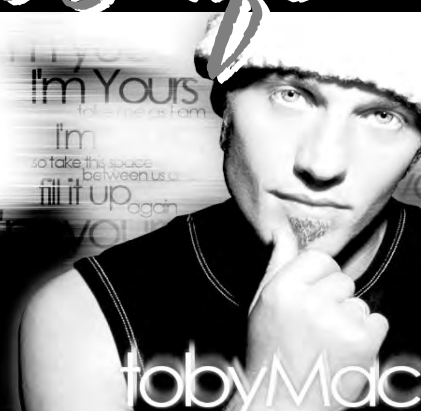
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TobyMac

New Year's Resolutions in Faith, with Prayer

As we near the end of 2016, many people will participate in the tradition of making New Year's Resolutions. Aside from the question of whether or not to do it again this year, the biggest question people struggle with seems to be, "What do I resolve this year?"

Of course that question can be answered in many different ways. Common answers are around the themes of health and fitness, work and time balance, and finances. And usually, most people fall off the wagon by February (if they even make it that long).

I'm not here to shame you or to tell you that you shouldn't even try. On the contrary, I would encourage you to go for it! But I'd like to add two considerations to the conversation.

First, if you're struggling to figure out what that resolution should be, don't make it too difficult for yourself. I'm not talking about setting an easy

goal; rather, I'm talking about the decision making process. Many people get stuck trying to figure out the "perfect" resolution (as if there was such a thing). I would encourage you to start with what you know to be true, good, godly goals.

For example, look at the things Scripture tells us to do. Things such as taking care of the poor and the helpless, supporting your local church and the universal Church, being kind to others, loving your family, and serving God with your whole heart. Those are things that all Christ-followers are called to. You don't need a special revelation from God to tell you to do those things. If you're struggling in areas such as praying or reading your Bible, or attending a local Bible-believing church, then that's where I'd start. You can't be a growing Christ-follower when you're not connected to the Church or God, through prayer, Bible study, and local fellowship participation. God has designed

us to be in community — community with family, friends, our church family, and most importantly with Him. If you're missing any aspect of that community connection, then make that your resolution. Get connected with God. Get connected with a local community of faith. Pray regularly. Read your Bible. Love your neighbor. If we don't have these basic things right, then our foundation is shaky.

Once you determine what your resolution should be — no matter what you may choose — it needs to be more than just a simple determination of the will. It needs to become a matter of prayer. Pray that the Lord will give you the strength and encouragement to make the changes in your life. Pray that God will bring people in your life who can help you attain the goal. And pray that God will bless your new commitment by His hand.

If we don't make our resolutions a matter of serious prayer, then we are leaving our best chance for success untapped. God has promised to hear and

answer our prayers. He never misses a prayer — he's ready and waiting for you to pray. He may not always answer the way we would like, but we have to trust that he has things under control, even when we don't see it.

Remember that when we pray, we need to also be willing to put in the work. God is usually not going to magically answer a prayer that you're not willing to work for.

So as you make your resolutions this year, don't forget to start with the basics of the faith: faith, hope, love, prayer, Bible reading, and faith community participation.

Then offer those resolutions up as prayers, asking God to work through His Spirit to bless, encourage, and motivate you as you take steps toward becoming more like Jesus.

Kevin Daniels is pastor of Hays Christian Church, located at 22nd and Marshall Road. If you'd like to connect or share your resolution as a prayer request, contact kevin@hayschristianchurch.org.

Pastor
Kevin Daniels



Remember to keep the Lord in your heart

January 1, the beginning of a new year, 2016; time to make resolutions. According to the dictionary, a resolution is to come to a firm decision, to be determined to follow the resolution you make the entire year.

Wanting to make a special resolution this year, I have decided to keep my promises. Many times, I have told someone, "I will keep you in my prayers." I had planned to pray for God's continued blessing for this person. Honestly, many times I let my promise to pray escape me. So I plan to make a prayer list. I'll write their name in a little notebook I have and I'll add more names as time passes.

I'll review this list often, remem-

bering why they needed my prayers and will note if my prayers change to prayers of Thanksgiving. Thanking the Lord for His answers.

The thought of an hourglass came to mind. Can you imagine a large hourglass filled with 366 grains of sand (this year there are 366 days because it's a leap year)? At the beginning of the year when you turned the calendar page, you would have turned over the hourglass and time began. One grain trickled down each day. Don't procrastinate. Make the most of every day.

I have made three resolutions. First is my prayer list, keeping track of my prayers for family, friends, and all that

need the Lord's hand upon them. The second one is a thankful jar, which I will drop in a note about the things I'm thankful for during the year. My third resolution is to learn how to pray aloud.

I can talk to the Lord in private, but when I'm asked to pray aloud, my prayers are so short and to the point. They just state what I'm asking for or what I'm thankful for. Others can pray with ease beautiful prayers talking to the Heavenly Father.

As a child, I remember saying the "Now I lay me down to sleep" prayer. As I grew up, the main prayer I said was the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) Jesus gave the disciples as a pattern for praying.

God keeps His promises. We know He promised Mary she would be the

mother of His son Jesus. God has promised that we who believe that His son Jesus took our sins to the cross with Him and that He was risen again. will be forgiven. Thanks.

So when you make a resolution, be determined to follow the resolution you made at the beginning of the year. Keep this promise to yourself as God keeps His promises to us. If you have resolved something simple, maybe you decide to brush your teeth everyday or to hang up the wet towel, remember that it was a promise you made. Be determined to keep it. Good luck.

We have a wonderful new year ahead of us. Let's keep the Lord in our hearts each day.

Submitted by Opal Flinn, representative of St. John Lutheran, Ellis (785) 726-4432

Opal
Flinn



IN THE HAND OF GOD IN THE NEW YEAR

The Gate of the Year

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light, that I may tread safely into the unknown!"

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

So, I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night and He led me toward the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

- Minnie Louise Haskins 1876 - 1957. This poem was quoted by King George 6th, Christmas 1939

While on pilgrimage in Scotland in 2015, I must have taken hundreds of pictures of gates and doors. Brightly painted doors framed by flowering vines, ingenious animal gates, ancient stone wall openings, rusted metal, I was constantly drawn to symbols of thresholds and thin places. When I see those images I imagine what adventures might be on the other side. What might it take for me to walk through such a gate into new and unexplored territory?



I have never been big on resolutions. I know myself too well. I do find myself reflecting on the high points and learnings of the year that has past, and pondering what new adventures might be waiting beyond the next gate.

MaryAnn McKibben Dana is Presbyterian pastor, author of "Sabbath in The Suburbs" and blog-

ger at theblueroomblog.org. This year she is offering an intriguing yearly review called The Gate of the Year: 2015, 2016 and Beyond.

As she described it "There's fun stuff, though provoking questions, a little fill in the blank, places to doodle... it's like a Choose Your Own Adventure of yearly review. You can sign up at theblueroomblog.org between now and December 31, 2015 to receive "The Gate of the Year: 2015, 2016 and Beyond." It's a free workbook (PDF form) that's chock full of fun and thoughtful questions to help you review 2015 and dream about 2016."

MaryAnn told me the PDF will be released Dec 28.

I am signed up and hope you will as well. In the New Year to come, put your hand in the hand of God. May you find hope and courage to go gladly into that great unknown.



St. Nicholas of Myra Catholic Church

2901 E. 13th, Hays, Kansas, Parish Offices:
(785) 628-1446

Fax: (785) 623-4207, website: www.heartlandparishes.org
Fr. Jarett Konrade

Mass Schedule:

Saturday at 5 PM

Sunday at 9:30 AM and 11:00 AM

Daily Mass - Wednesday, and Friday at 7:30 AM

Reconciliation: Saturday at 4:00 PM

Immaculate Heart of Mary Church



1805 Vine Street - Hays, Kansas

Fr. Barry Brinkman, Pastor

Parish Office: 785-685-7339

Website: www.ihm-church.com

Weekend Mass Schedule:

Saturday 5 PM - Sunday 8 AM - 10 AM - 6 PM

Sunday Spanish Mass - 12 PM

Weekday Mass Schedule:

MWF 6:45 AM - TTh 8 AM Wednesday Spanish 6:30 PM

Reconciliation: Saturday 4 PM and Thursday 5 PM

Help is here

Area services available to help
kick habits, change your life



FROM LEFT: Celebrate Recovery leaders Jeremy Stahl, Kathleen Spears, Randy Staab, Jezariah Rush, Mary Laflamme, Desi Klug and Terri Hilton

COURTESY PHOTO

“WE’RE GROWING, BUT WE’RE GROWING AT A PACE WE KIND OF LIKE, BECAUSE WE HAVE TO CONTINUE TO DEVELOP LEADERS.”
RANDY STAAB, CELEBRATE RECOVERY

By **MIKE KESSINGER**
 newsroom@dailynews.net

Addiction and the support that comes from trying to overcome it, is done in many ways.

It’s about the person and how they want to go about doing the treatment. It’s also about the support organization and how they want to run their program with their beliefs. For Celebrate Recovery, the idea for their program has always been to be just one way, and that is Christ-centered.

“The biggest thing about Celebrate Recovery is we specifically say ‘our power, is only one power and only one God, and that’s Jesus Christ,’” Ministry leader Randy Staab said.

Staab has been with Celebrate Recovery since it’s inception into the area approximately five years ago. Founded in Hays by Dan and Evelyn Kough, of Scott City, the rehabilitation organization is run out of Celebration Community Church on the Northwest corner of Hays, north of Interstate 70. The recovery organization and the

church are separate in origin, but the church is the largest supporter to the program. The Koughs started the program in Hays with the intent of getting it off the ground then moving on and allowing it to flourish from there with a leader, such as Staab to guide the way.

The rehabilitation teaching of their program is to work with people not just on addictions to drugs and alcohol, but other personal fights people go through, such as just control in general. Staab refers to what they do as working with people through their hurts, habits and hangups. The group uses a four-member group known as T.E.A.M (Training, Encouragement, Assimilation and Advertising, Ministry).

Each of the four team leaders is an apprentice. Each were brought through the recovery program and have to go through the Celebrate Recovery’s 12-step program of rehabilitation before becoming a TEAM leader.

“(The Koughs) did such a fantastic job of training us and established it so they could

leave,” Staab said. “The organization has just kept going.

“We’re growing, but we’re growing at a pace we kind of like, because we have to continue to develop leaders.”

Celebrate Recovery has two programs. One is on Monday, which is used as an invitation to people to come learn about the program and start the process. On Thursdays, the group meets for the 12-step program, which is done for 52 weeks.

“We’re there to continue to encourage (group members to work on their rehabilitation),” Staab said. “We’re there to love and support them and never condemn them. They’ll recover from falling much, much quicker if that’s our attitude toward them.”

As the organization has grown and Celebrate Recovery has been able to find ways to get their word out, the group is looking toward more ways to help people. One way is with a program they are looking to start soon that will be about helping teenagers of addictive families. They are also looking for ways of having transportation for group members.

Dream Inc. hosts summer camps

By **MIKE KESSINGER**
 newsroom@dailynews.net

Dreams start somewhere.

For Sheryl Butler and Glenda Kramer it started in 1990, when the two, who work in addiction care, opened DREAM Inc. From there, it was just about getting their non-profit organization going that dealt, at that time, with children in addictive families. Part of that dream, was having summer camps for children of these families, something they still run today. The camps are at Cedar Bluff Lake each summer.

“I love camps,” Butler said. “If we had the funding and everything I would almost do that — strictly that. We get kids from all over.”

One of the main benefits of starting DREAM has been the camps — educational outings for children of families that deal with addiction. The funding the organization receives each year depends

on the number of camps, which is at least one a summer and is for children ages 7 to 11. The kids come from all over Kansas, with the highest percentage being from the northwest part of the state.

The camps focus on a basis of education on addiction, skill-building and companionship. It’s a five-day camp that Butler says is a highlight of what they’ve done with the program. Seeing the kids start to understand for the first time that they are not alone in what they’ve been through has been one thing that has made Butler grateful they started the camps.

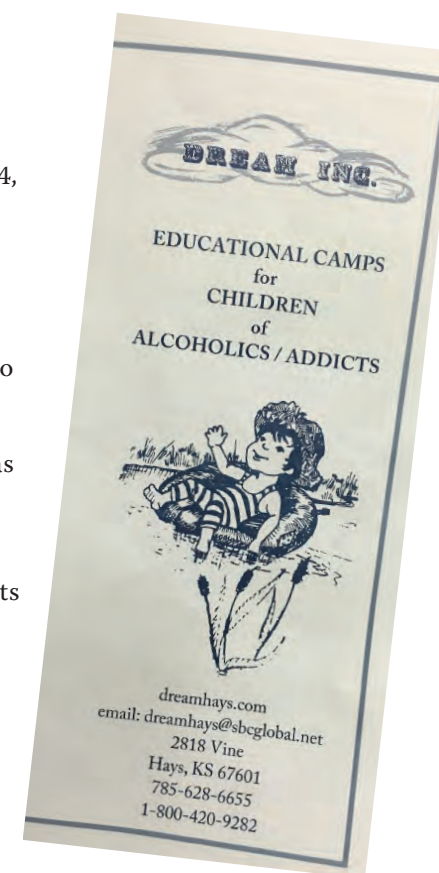
“One of our oldest campers that went through our very first pilot camp back in 1990, I see her from time to time,” Butler said. “She still, and we’ve had several that say, they still use what they learned. That’s gratifying when you see that it changes their lives. It’s like ‘Wow!’”

DREAM, which in 1996 added an adult component to its organization

for treatment services in Hays, opened outreach facilities in Great Bend in 1994, then in Russell in 1996. Along with DREAM, Alcoholics Anonymous and the Smoky Hill Foundation are some of the other treatment and group organizations prominent in Hays. The Kelly Center at Fort Hays State University also provides help for students.

For an organization such as DREAM, one of its main attributes has been working with children raised in addictive families. The purpose when Butler and Kramer opened DREAM was to focus on children or adolescents who grew up with addiction around them.

“Addiction and treatment is one of those things you don’t know a whole lot about what’s out there until all of a sudden your family is dealing with it,” Butler said. “Until your family is hit with it, I don’t know that it’s something you seek out.”

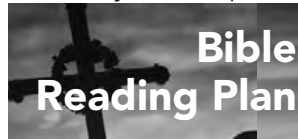


A new year, a new look at the Bible

Welcome to the 2016 ONE Bible Reading Plan. I would like to invite you to make a New Year's resolution to join our ONE Bible readers for a year of great reading. Don't fret; it will be a doable resolution. Each month will have a 5-day a week plan that will lead you through one-third of the Old Testament, and the entire New Testament. If you fall behind, you have the weekends to review and catch up.

From the beginning God made it clear that he intends us to be significant participants in His story. The Bible isn't a story of men and women and their pursuit of God; it is the story of God's pursuit and interac-

Pastor Steve Dinkel,
Liberty Foursquare



tion with us. He invites us to participate with Him. We can do that in three steps.

1. Read and study the Bible. Rather than passively reading through it, identify and meditate on a principle or idea from the Bible each day. Do word studies, check cross-references, and discuss it with your friends. 2. Commit to follow Christ Jesus. He has an awesome life for you. 3. Find your place in His community. As a

Believer, Jesus has deposited gifts and abilities within you. They are expressed best in community, so find a gathering of Believers and serve.

We will be using the "Books of the Bible" text resource from the International Bible

JANUARY		
1.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 1-2	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 1
2 & 3.....	Weekend Review	
4.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 3-4	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 2
5.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 5-6	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 3
6.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 7-8	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 4
7.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 9-10	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 5
8.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 11-12	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 6
9 & 10.....	Weekend Review	
11.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 13-14	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 7
12.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 15-16	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 8
13.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 17-18	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 9
14.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 19-20	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 9
15.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 21-22	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 11
16 & 17.....	Weekend Review	
18.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 23-24	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 12
19.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 25-26	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 13
20.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 27-28	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 14
21.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 29-30	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 15
22.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 31-32	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 16
23 & 24.....	Weekend Review	
25.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 33-34	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 17
26.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 35-36	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 18
27.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 37-38	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 19
28.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 39-40	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 20
29.....	<input type="checkbox"/> Genesis 41-42	<input type="checkbox"/> Luke 21
30 & 31.....	Weekend Review	

Society (Biblica) again this year. This is a strategic arrangement of the books of the Bible. I have found that this arrangement brings unexpected context to my Bible study experience. I hope it does the same for you.

For the Old Testament, Biblica arranged the books by style and chronology. We will begin in Genesis. For me, Genesis is one of the most engaging books of the Old

Testament. I promise, this book will hold your interest.

For the New Testament, the books are arranged by author and audience. Joins us, as we will begin reading the first in a two-part volume about the life of Jesus and the establishment of His Church; recorded in Luke and Acts.

Again, welcome, may God richly bless you in this New Year. Let's begin!

A new, helpful perspective on God's story

Note from Pastor Steve Dinkel: *As a special New Year's treat, we have received permission from the International Bible Society (Biblica.org) to print one of the best articles I've read on the message and purpose of the Bible; "The Drama of the Bible in Six Acts". This article will give you a broad perspective of God's story, and should help you understand the importance of each person in God's plan, especially you!*

The Bible is a collection of letters, poems, stories, visions, prophetic oracles, wisdom and other kinds of writing. The first step to good Bible reading and understanding is to engage these collected works as the different kinds of writing that they are, and to read them as whole books. We encourage you to read big, to not merely take in little fragments of the Bible. The introductions at the start of each book will help you to do this.

But it is also important not to view the Bible as a gathering of unrelated writings. Overall, the Bible is a narrative. These books come together to tell God's true story and his plan to set the world right again. This story of the Bible falls naturally into six key major acts, which are briefly summarized below.

But even more precisely, we can say the story of the Bible is a drama. The key to a drama is that it has to be acted out, performed, lived. It can't remain as only words on a page. A drama is an activated story. The Bible was written so we could enter into its story. It is meant to be lived.

All of us, without exception, live our lives as a drama. We are on stage every single day. What will we say? What will we do? According to which story will we live? If we

are not answering these questions with the biblical script, we will follow another. We can't avoid living by someone's stage instructions, even if merely our own.

This is why another key to engaging the Bible well is to recognize that its story has not ended. God's saving action continues. We are all invited to take up our own roles in this ongoing story of redemption and new creation. So, welcome to the drama of the Bible. Welcome to the story of how God intends to renew your life, and the life of the world. God himself is calling you to engage with his word.

Act 1: God's intention

The drama begins (in the first pages of the book of Genesis) with God already on the stage creating a world. He makes a man and a woman, Adam and Eve, and places them in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. The earth is created to be their home. God's intention for humanity to be in close, trusting relationship with him and in harmony with the rest of creation that surrounds them.

In a startling passage, the Bible tells us that human beings are God's image-bearers, created to share in the task of bringing God's wise and beneficial rule to the rest of the world. Male and female together, we are significant, decision-making, world-shaping beings. This is our vocation, our purpose as defined in the biblical story.

An equally remarkable part of Act 1 is the description of God as coming into the garden to be with the first human beings. Not only is the earth the God-intended place for humanity, God himself comes to make the beautiful

new creation his home as well.

God then gives his own assessment of the whole creation: God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. Act 1 reveals God's original desire for the world. It shows us that life itself is a gift from the Creator. It tells us what we were made for and provides the setting for all the action that follows.

Act 2: Exile

Tension and conflict are introduced to the story when Adam and Eve decide to go their own way and seek their own wisdom. They listen to the deceptive voice of God's enemy, Satan, and doubt God's trustworthiness. They decide to live apart from the word that God himself has given them. They decide to be a law to themselves.

The disobedience of Adam and Eve — the introduction of sin into our world — is presented in the Bible as having devastating consequences. Humans were created for healthy, life-giving relationship: with God, with each other, and with the rest of creation. But now humanity must live with the fracturing of all these relations and with the resulting shame, brokenness, pain, loneliness — and death.

Heaven and earth — God's realm and our realm — were intended to be united. God's desire from the beginning was clearly to live with us in the world he made. But now God is hidden. Now it is possible to be in our world and not know him, not experience his presence, not follow his ways, not live in gratitude.

As a result of this rebellion, the first exile in this story takes place.

The humans are driven away from God's presence. Their offspring throughout history will seek to find their way back to the source of life. They will devise any number of philosophies and religions, trying to make sense of a fallen, yet haunting world. But death now stalks them, and they will find that they cannot escape it. Having attempted to live apart from God and his good word, humans will find they have neither God nor life.

New questions arise in the drama: Can the curse on creation be overcome and the relationship between God and humanity restored? Can heaven and earth be reunited? Or did God's enemy effectively end the plan and subvert the story?

Act 3: Calling Israel to a mission

We see the direction of God's redemptive plan when he calls Abraham, promising to make him into a great nation. God narrows his focus and concentrates on one group of people. But the ultimate goal remains the same: to bless all the peoples on earth and remove the curse from creation.

When Abraham's descendants are enslaved in Egypt, a central pattern in the story is set: God hears their cries for help and comes to set them free. God makes a covenant with this new nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai. Israel is called by God to be a light to the nations, showing the world what it means to follow God's ways for living. If they will do this, he will bless them in their new land and will come to live with them.

However, God also warns them that if they are not faithful to the covenant, he will send them away, just as he did with Adam and Eve. In spite of God's repeated warnings through his prophets, Israel seems determined to break the covenant. So God abandons the holy temple — the sign of his presence with his people — and it is smashed by pagan invaders. Israel's capital city Jerusalem is sacked and burned.

Abraham's descendants, chosen to reverse the failure of Adam, have now apparently also failed. The problem this poses in the biblical story is profound. Israel, sent as the divine answer to Adam's fall, cannot escape Adam's sin. God, however, remains committed to his people and his plan, so he sows the seed of a different outcome. He promises to send a new king, a descendant of Israel's great King David, who will lead the nation back to its destiny. The very prophets who warned Israel of the dire consequences of its wrongdoing also pledge that the good news of God's victory will be heard in Israel once again.

Act 3 ends tragically, with God apparently absent and the pagan nations ruling over Israel. But the hope of a promise remains. There is one true God. He has chosen Israel. He will return to his people to live with them again. He will bring justice, peace and healing to Israel, and then to the world. He will do this in a final and climactic way. God will send his anointed one — the Messiah. He has given his word on this.

Act 4: The surprising victory of Jesus

"He is the god made manifest ... the universal savior of human life." These words, referring to Caesar Augustus

(found in a Roman inscription from 4 BC in Ephesus), proclaim the gospel of the Roman Empire. This version of the good news announces that Caesar is the lord who brings peace and prosperity to the world.

Into this empire a son of David is born, and he announces the gospel of God's kingdom. Jesus of Nazareth brings the good news of the coming of God's reign. He begins to show what God's new creation looks like. He announces the end of Israel's exile and the forgiveness of sins. He heals the sick and raises the dead. He overcomes the dark spiritual powers. He welcomes sinners and those considered unclean. Jesus renews the nation, rebuilding the twelve tribes of Israel around himself in a symbolic way.

But the established religious leaders are threatened by Jesus and his kingdom, so they have him brought before the Roman governor. During the very week that the Jews were remembering and celebrating Passover — God's ancient rescue of the people from slavery in Egypt — the Romans nail Jesus to a cross and kill him as a false king.

But the Bible claims that this defeat is actually God's greatest victory. How? Jesus willingly gives up his life as a sacrifice on behalf of the nation, on behalf of the world. Jesus takes onto himself the full force of evil and empties it of its power. In this surprising way, Jesus fights and wins Israel's ultimate battle. The real enemy was never Rome, but the spiritual powers that lie behind Rome and every other kingdom whose weapon is death. Through his blood Jesus pays the price and reconciles everything in heaven and on earth to God.

God then publicly declares this victory by reversing Jesus' death sentence and raising him back to life. The resurrection of Israel's king shows that the great enemies of God's creation — sin and death — really have been defeated. The resurrection is the great sign that the new creation has begun.

Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's story and a new start for the entire human race. Death came through the first man, Adam. The resurrection of the dead comes through the new man, Jesus. God's original intention is being reclaimed.

Act 5: The renewed people of God

If the key victory has already been secured, why is there an Act 5? The answer is that God wants the victory of Jesus to spread to all the nations of the world. The risen Jesus says to his disciples, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." So this new act in the drama tells the story of how the earliest followers of Jesus began to spread the good news of God's reign.

According to the New Testament, all those who belong to Israel's Messiah are children of Abraham, heirs of both the ancient promises and the ancient mission. The task of bringing blessing to the peoples of the world has been given again to Abraham's family. Their mission is to live out the liberating message of the good news of God's kingdom.

God is gathering people from all around the world and forming them into assemblies of Jesus-followers — his church. Together they are God's new temple, the place where his Spirit lives. They are the community of those

who have pledged their allegiance to Jesus as the true Lord of the world. They have crossed from death into new life, through the power of God's Spirit. They demonstrate God's love across the usual boundaries of race, class, tribe and nation.

Forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God can now be announced to all. Following in the steps of Jesus, his followers proclaim this gospel in both word and deed. The power of this new, God-given life breaking into the world is meant to be shown by the real-world actions of the Christian community. But the message also has a warning. When the Messiah returns, he will come as the rightful judge of the world.

The Bible is the story of the central struggle weaving its way through the history of the world. And now the story arrives at our own time, enveloping us in its drama.

So the challenge of a decision confronts us. What will we do? How will we fit into this story? What role will we play? God is inviting us to be a part of his mission of re-creation — of bringing restoration, justice and forgiveness. We are to join in the task of making things new, to be a living sign of what is to come when the drama is complete.

Act 6: God comes home

God's future has come into our world through the work of Jesus the Messiah. But for now, the present evil age also continues. Brokenness, wrongdoing, sickness and even death remain. We live in the time of the overlap of ages, the time of in-between. The final Act is coming, but it has not yet arrived.

We live in the time of invitation, when the call of the gospel goes out to every creature. Of course, many still live as though God doesn't exist. They do not acknowledge the rule of the Messiah. But the day is coming when Jesus will return to earth and the reign of God will become an uncontested reality throughout the world.

God's presence will be fully and openly with us once again, as it was at the beginning of the drama. God's plan of redemption will reach its goal. The creation will experience its own Exodus, finding freedom from its bondage to decay. Pain and tears, regret and shame, suffering and death will be no more.

When the day of resurrection arrives God's people will find that their hope has been realized. The dynamic force of an indestructible life will course through their bodies. Empowered by the Spirit, and unhindered by sin and death, we will pursue our original vocation as a renewed humanity. We will be culture makers, under God but over the world. Having been remade in the image of Christ, we will share in bringing his wise, caring rule to the earth.

At the center of it all will be God himself. He will return and make his home with us, this time in a new heavens and a new earth. We, along with the rest of creation, will worship him perfectly and fulfill our true calling. God will be all in all, and the whole world will be full of his glory.

The Drama of the Bible Notes

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Sorrow and Forgiveness

Jesus' parable concerning forgiveness is one of the most powerful teaching stories that he spoke.

Peter...asked Jesus, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.' Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.' Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead he had him put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?' Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart" (Matthew 18:21-35).

The obvious conclusion is that we must forgive others, and if we say that we are sorry for something and receive forgiveness, then we are bound to forgive others when they say that they are sorry. The theological conclusion is that God has forgiven us and will continue to forgive us; it should be a spiritual principle then that we will forgive anyone who asks our forgiveness.

Adele's song "Hello" is about a person asking to be forgiven. She has "gone over everything" in her mind, and her conclusion is that she was wrong and must call to tell her once-upon-a-time boyfriend that she was. He does not seem to respond, and so she seems to make the difficult decision to move on after apologizing.

"Hello, it's me. I was wondering if after all these years you'd like to meet, to go over everything. They say that time's supposed to heal ya, but I ain't done much healing. Hello, can you hear me? I'm in California dreaming about who we used to be when we were younger and free. I've forgotten how it felt before the world fell at our feet. There's such a difference between us and a million miles. Hello from the other side. I must've called a thousand times to tell you I'm sorry for everything that I've done. But when I call you never seem to be home. Hello from the outside. At least I can say that I've tried to tell you I'm sorry for breaking your heart. But it don't matter, it clearly doesn't tear you apart anymore."

It is a wonderful lesson that can lead to better relationships and better moments of understanding our romantic pursuits. In essence, it is what true love is all about — the ability to let the other live his/her own life.

It is not easy, of course. No one likes the feeling of rejection. The natural tendency is to want to retaliate, and unfortunately, many do.

But the Christian way of responding is at least to say that we are sorry, and then move on in life. The person in Adele's song is doing just that. At the same time, Jesus reminds us that we must forgive others if they say that they are sorry.

Seeking sorrow for past actions and forgiveness are two elements of the same action. Christians are called to say sincerely that they are sorry when they realize that they have done something wrong. Once it is said, they hope that forgiveness will be given them, but no matter whether they have received it or not, they must learn at the same time that they will forgive others when forgiveness is asked of them.

Good and gracious God, we know that You forgive us whenever we ask for it sincerely. Give us the grace to forgive others no matter what the circumstances. Be with us, we pray.

THE GOSPELS IN FR. MIKE'S TOP 5 [as of 12/15/15]

- 1 — "Hello" / Adele Matthew 18:21-35
- 2 — "Sorry" / Justin Bieber Luke 6:36-38
- 3 — "Hotline Bling" / Drake Luke 18:1-8
- 4 — "On My Mind" / Ellie Goulding Luke 24:27-30
- 5 — "In the Night" / The Weeknd John 4:16-18

[see www.frmikescully.com]

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