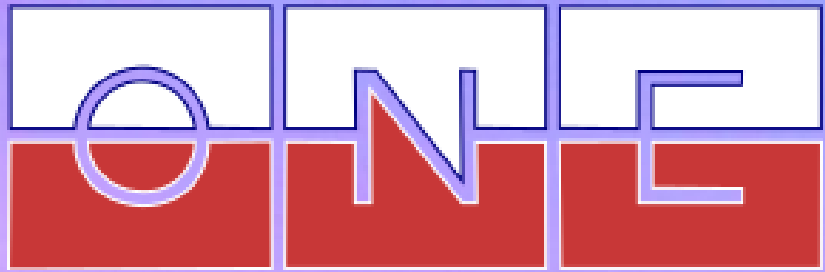


INSIDE:

+ **Lessons from Past
New Year's
Resolutions**



A Publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance
January 2024

**“BEHOLD, ALL THINGS
ARE BECOME NEW”
— 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17B**





Ellis County Ministerial Alliance

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Editor's Note:

This month we asked our writers, "What have you learned from your failed/successful New Year's Resolutions?"

Timeline of Faith

Written by:

Cheryl Glassman

"As sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives." If any of you are soap opera fans, you will know this is the theme of the show, "Days of Our Lives." It is a true statement, is it not? Days slip past us. We wake up, and the next thing we know, it is dark and time to go to bed to get ready for the next day. It seems like yesterday we began 2023 – and now it is almost 2024!

I remember when I was attending FHSU and was in a creative writing class. I wrote a little poem that I remember well: "Our lives pass by so quickly now, not stopping but turning to snow; like a boat on a sea of glass, waiting to taste the final blow." Strange how at

age 20 I was already thinking about the passage of time and yet not realizing the full extent of how time and our use of time evolves.

When I taught at TMP-Marian, I used the concept of time to illustrate the growth (or stagnancy) of our faith lives. Faith and our understanding of the presence of God, for most of us, began when we were children. As time passed, we formulated our own idea about God and who God is. Some people got to a certain point on the faith timeline and didn't go much further. They were content to attend church as a duty of sorts and that was about it. It is not my place at all to judge people and what they do and/or how they live their lives.

Something I do know, however, is how not staying put in one place on my own timeline of faith has given true renewal to me. Being a shy introvert at heart (it is true), some things within the church are difficult for my personal comfort zone. But if I feel a tug, or my mind urges me to do something new, I have learned not to just let that feeling or thought fade into obscurity!

With each passing year, many people make resolutions. Some resolutions are to stop doing something or change a habit. I have learned resolutions are something I must be conscious of daily! The definition of resolve is "firm determination to do something," or "decided firmly on a course of action." The word determination has

Timeline of Faith (Continued)

a definition of "finding purpose." One resolution I have stuck with is praying every morning, even if it is as simple as thanking God for another day or the beauty of a sunrise. Then, what happens with the rest of the day is "decided firmly on a course of action." For me, it is not a concrete source of action, but rather a course determined upon what lies in front of me. Sometimes it is structured, sometimes not;

but it always has one firm root, and that is the realization that my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ walks with me every step of the journey.

It says in Proverbs 16:9 (NIV), *"In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord established their steps."* He gives me nudges and opportunities to share His message and learn more about Him. And like sands in an hourglass, many pass me

by; but I hope I can reach into the sand from time to time and use the gifts and messages to further create a better place for myself and others. Have a blessed 2024 and may we all know the wonder of the gift of time.



Cheryl Glassman is the Director of Music at St. Nicholas of Myra Catholic Church in Hays.

New Year's Resolutions: Too Simple, Ridiculously Hard, or Comfortably Difficult?

Written by:
Cody Marintzer

There have been many years that I had great thoughts of doing grand things for New Year's resolutions. What I have found is very often I bite off more than I can chew and end up quitting quite early. I am not saying New Year's resolutions should be something so easy it really doesn't take any effort to accomplish; however, if we take up something so difficult we can't reasonably fulfill it, it is a given we will fail. The trick may just be to do

something that is comfortably difficult and then build on it throughout the year.

I am a huge fan of running. I suppose part of this is because I coach cross country. It is very unrealistic and dangerous to have someone who has never run before to decide they will run a marathon at the end of January. A better goal for someone who hasn't exercised in years may simply be to set a goal to be able to walk three miles every day by having a starting point and building up. Start where you are and

then increase it every other day until you reach a mile for the next four weeks. After that, move up to two miles every other day for the next four weeks. Finally, increase it to three miles and keep it there until you can gradually make it every day.

At that time, the goal has been reached and you can re-evaluate for another goal if you desire. This is an achievable goal that takes steps to get there. However, if someone puts on some running gear, heads out the door and attempts to go for

New Year's Resolutions (Continued)

a three mile run without any prior exercise, they probably won't make it. They will be wheezing and coughing everywhere, will walk most of it after running about 400 meters, and that will be the end of that goal.

So, I would say the first thing to do is know yourself. And as I said earlier, don't take it easy, but don't set the bar so high you can't or won't reach it. This very much applies to our faith life also. We should all want to have a better prayer life as the more we pray as we ought, the closer our relationship is to God. For someone to decide they are going to start praying a Rosary every day when they barely even say hi to God in the morning, is bound to fail. If someone has never dusted off the cover of their Bible, or doesn't even have one, they should probably not decide to read the entire

Bible by the end of the month.

A better goal for someone wanting to pray the Rosary would be to start by saying one decade of the Rosary every day and then working up from there every month. A better goal for reading the Bible would be to start by reading the Gospels over the next four months, then break into reading more of God's Word. You could also download the Bible in a Year podcast and listen to a couple of episodes per week, then slowly work up. It is okay if it takes you longer than a year. The important thing with prayer and reading God's Word is to do it with the right heart, and not just making it a checklist.

If we set realistic goals that do challenge us and we exceed them, then so much the better. There is nothing wrong with setting those goals you know are not easy

(but also not climbing Mt. Everest) and finding out you have more in you than you thought. No matter what we reach for, if the devil knows it will better us, he wants us to fail and will try to make us stumble and fall. We also don't help ourselves as we have an annoying part of us where we tell ourselves we fell, so all is lost. The more we get discouraged, the more likely we are to give up.

Christ didn't leave us lost in our sin, and we shouldn't accept defeat because we sometimes stumble. Set those realistic goals and stick to them. Don't give yourself excuses to quit. If you fail one day, then with the help of Christ, win the next one!



Cody Marintzer is the parish life coordinator at St. Nicholas of Myra Church.

One Chapter Each Day

Written by:
Father Damian Richards

On January 1, 1998, six years after I was ordained a priest, I started to read a

chapter out of the Bible every day. I did this because I hadn't read through the entire Bible. I had read it in bits and pieces. My time in

seminary was marked with classes on different Books of the Bible, but I had never read it straight through. So, I made a New Year's

One Chapter Each Day (Continued)

Resolution to read a chapter of the Bible every day for the rest of my life.

I started with Genesis 1:1 on January 1, 1998. I've been reading a chapter a day ever since. It takes me three-and-a-half years to read the entire Bible. When I finish the Book of Revelation, I move my book marker back to Genesis 1:1 and start again the next day. It turns out this was the hardest way to start reading the Bible.

Fr. Mike Schmitz has a "Read the Bible in a Year" app. There are many other such apps and study guides designed to help you read the Bible. None of them have you start with Genesis 1. There's a reason for that, and it lies in the later books of the Torah. The books of Deuteronomy, Numbers and Leviticus in the Bible can be very dry. They are important because they contain directions for building and furnishing the Temple and the directions for Temple rituals.

But they are not very compelling passages. You don't look forward to reading them.

In fact, all I could think of the first time I read the descriptions of building a

Temple was "We don't have a Temple. I don't really need to read this." I was severely tempted to skip a bit. But the problem with "just skipping a bit" in a New Year's Resolution is eventually you skip so much you're not reading it anymore.

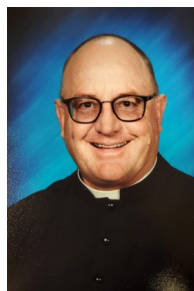
I'm not Volga German, but I do have a stubborn side. So, I brute forced my way through those dry passages. This brings me back to Fr. Mike Schmitz and the "Read the Bible in a Year" app. They recommend starting with the Gospels, not with Genesis. Because you may be more familiar with the Gospel stories, you get a thrill of recognition while reading. You may say to yourself, "I know this story!" That thrill encourages you to keep reading.

After the Gospels, you continue through the New Testament. And then, after you've read the New Testament, you go back to the Old Testament. With the story of Christ from the New Testament fresh in your mind, you can read the Old Testament with new eyes. The original prophecies about the Messiah pop out in the Old Testament. I am still reading a chapter of the Bible every

day as part of my daily devotions. But it is a much more comforting reading than when I first started 25 years ago.

We have an icon of Christ in the gathering space at St. Nicholas of Myra. Christ is looking out at us. He is blessing us with one hand and holding a Bible in the other. The Bible, though, looks funny. It is in reverse perspective. In most pictures, an object will be drawn so that it gets smaller as it goes farther away from you. In reverse perspective, it gets bigger the farther away it is.

Why would they draw a Bible that gets bigger the farther away it is from you? Because the more you read the Bible, the more you discover in it. You will never be able to plumb the depths of the Bible's Wisdom. There is always one more aspect of God you will discover. That is something I'm reminded of every day when I read a chapter out of the Bible.



Fr. Damian Richards, Pastor of St. Nicholas of Myra in Hays & St. Francis of Assisi in Munjor.

Out With the Old

Written by:

Rev. Jonathan E. McCottry Sr.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new," 2 Corinthians 5:17 (KJV).

"And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful," Revelation 21:5 (KJV).

At the beginning of a New Year, a high school principal decided to post his teachers' New Year's resolutions on the bulletin board. As the teachers gathered around the bulletin board, a great commotion started. One of the teachers was complaining, "Why weren't my resolutions posted?" She was throwing such a temper tantrum that the principal hurried to his office to see if he had overlooked her resolutions. Sure enough, he had mislaid them on his desk. As he read her resolutions he was astounded. This teacher's first resolution was not to let petty things upset her in the New Year. I do not know how you are

doing on your New Year's resolutions. I do know something that is more important than resolutions, though. How do you see this New Year? Is it one that you approach with anxiety or anticipation?

At issue here is not the idea that a person ought to be a new creature, but that he is in fact new and there has been a transformation in their life and a rejuvenation of spirit. There has been an overcoming of past issues, past problems, and past circumstances. Now, one is in a new life experience, not partially, but totally and completely. In this way, we now manifest the characteristics of the new creation.

Ephesians 4:24 (KJV) says, *"the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."* This means that there is a change produced in the renewed heart of man. There is a change, so to speak, as if the man was made over again, and has become new. Although it does not tell use the mode in which it is done, the phrase implies the following things: old things have

passed away and all things have become new.

First, old things have passed away. The old views of past life experiences regard people in general, and old things in general have passed away, referring to everything (2 Corinthians 5:16). It is true of all who are converted that our former prejudices, opinions, habits, and attachments have been replaced by spiritual joy. Our supreme love of self has been substituted by a newfound sense of the acceptance of Christ. Our former love of sins has passed away.

Our love of the world has been eclipsed with New Life in following Jesus. Our supreme attachment to former earthly friends rather than God is now gone. Our love of sin has been exchanged. The old sensuality, pride, vanity, levity, and ambition have been buried with the former love of pleasure. There is a deep and radical change in all these subjects - a change which commences at the new birth. This is continued by progressive sanctification which is consummated at

Out With the Old (Continued)

the feet of Jesus and in heaven.

Second, behold all things have become new which implies a total mind transplant. The purpose of life has changed. The feelings of the heart and the principles of action all have become new. There is a re-focus of our understanding that is consecrated upon new objects. The body is employed in a new service, and the heart has now formed brand new attachments.

Nothing can be more striking in conversion than the reality of God's change in both body and soul. Nothing more entirely bestows the feelings of the newborn soul. Everything is new. There are new views of God, and of Jesus Christ; new views of this world and of the world to come; new views of truth and of responsibility; and everything is seen in a new aspect and with new feelings. Nothing is more common in young converts than such feelings.

The Bible becomes a new book. Though we may have often read it before, there is now a beauty about it which we never saw before, and we wonder why we have not before perceived its true and genuine feeling. The whole face of nature seems to have changed, and we are in a new world. The hills, dales, streams, sun, stars, plantations, and forests seem to be new. A new beauty is spread over us; and we now see our life to be the work of God. His glory is spread over us all, and we can now say, "In Christ, I am a new creature."

May what we see in the mirror delight others, and what others see in us delight them. For we are not to judge each other by what we see, but may we be compelled to follow Christ. May we remember to say, "I love you" at least once a day to our spouse, our children, and our parent (s), especially if living, because it cannot be said after they have left this life.

May we live as God

intended, in a world at peace with the awareness of the beauty in every sunset, every flower's unfolding petal, in every baby's smile and every wonderful, astonishing, miraculous beat of our hearts. May God bless us with happiness, great health, peace, and much love during 2024 and every year that follows.

To the list above I add one thing: *"I pray also that you will have greater understanding in your heart so you will know the hope to which he has called us and that you will know how rich and glorious are the blessings God has promised his holy people. And you will know that God's power is very great for us who believe,"* Ephesians 1:18-19 (NCV).



Rev. Jonathan E. McCottry, Sr., of Hays is Pastor Emeritus of the Southwest Region Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists.



What we do today is more important than what we plan to do in the future. - Jack Hyles