



THE BEACON BEAM

January 2015

LIGHT FOR THE PATH

GROWING IN GRACE

By Mike Karns

The best metaphor for life as a whole and for the spiritual life in particular is that of a journey. As followers of the Way (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14,22), we are travelers on a quest, a voyage, a pilgrimage. If we are following Christ, we are headed home, but there are stages along the way and lessons to be learned. This is why it is a mistake to view the spiritual life as a static condition or a state of being that can be attained by a combination of technique and information. To follow Christ is to move into territory that is unknown to us and to count on His purposeful guidance, His grace when we go off the path, and His presence when we feel alone. It is to learn to respond to God's providential care in deepening ways and to accept the pilgrim character of earthly existence with its uncertainties, setbacks, disappointments, surprises, and joys. It is to remember that we are in a process of gradual conformity to the image of Christ so that we can love and serve others along the way.

Seen in this light, the primary point of this earthly existence is preparation for our eternal citizenship in heaven. In this life we stumble in many ways (James 3:2) because we are still in process. Our sanctification is not yet complete. Spiritual formation is the lifelong process of becoming in our character and actions the new creations we already are in Christ. It is the working out of what God has already worked in (Philippians 2: 12-13).

Growth in Christ-like virtues such as obedience, patience, courage, wisdom, service,

humility, gentleness, and love is never automatic or easy. Someone has likened the soul to the inside of a castle that we must invite God to occupy room by room. This requires a lengthy series of deaths along the way. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

Our task is to place ourselves under the conditions favorable to growth and look to God for our spiritual growth. He uses different paces and methods with each person. Since the inner life matures and becomes fruitful by the

principle of growth (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18), time is a significant part of the process. As nature teaches us, growth is not uniform like a vine or a tree; there may be more growth in a single month than in all the rest of the year. If we fail to accept this uneven developmental process, we will be impatient with God and with ourselves as we wait for the next growth spurt or special infusion of grace.

In a culture that promotes instant gratification, it can be wearisome for us to wait patiently for God's timing. Many of us are tempted to bypass grace and take matters into our own hands as we seek some method, technique, seminar, or experience that will give us the results we want when we want them. But we are as incapable of changing ourselves through our own efforts as we are of

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Schedule of Services:

Sunday
Morning Worship....9:30 AM
Sunday School.....11:10 AM
Evening Worship.....6:00 PM

Wednesday
Prayer Meeting.....7:00 PM
IMPACT Clubs.....7:00 PM
Teen Ministry.....7:00 PM

Beacon Highlights for January

Special Events for January

01	New Year's Day (Church Office Closed)	21	IMPACT Clubs
04	Lord's Table ESL	22	Silver Saints
07	Teen/Parent Focus IMPACT Clubs	25	Fellowship Hall Dedication ESL
10	Teen Homeplace Ministry	28	IMPACT Clubs
11	ESL	29	Men Sharpening Men
13	Elders/Deacons Meeting		
14	IMPACT Clubs		
18	Members Meeting ESL		
19	Teen Ice Skating		



Welcome New Members!

Mrs. Hazel Garcia
905 Sycamore Road
Graham, NC 27253

Mr. David Rhoades
834 Wiley Lewis Road
Greensboro, NC 27406

Sympathy ~ We express our heartfelt sympathy to the family of:

Millie Atkins
Shelly Ault
Mercedes Ballestero
David Beck
Albert (Sonny) Cobb
Blondie Dix

Mack Edgerton
Joyce Lesh
Ebin Preston
Janie Mae Wells
Tammy Workman

The Beacon Broadcast

Monday thru Friday

WITA 1490 AM (Knoxville, TN) 9:30 a.m.
WKBA 1550 AM (Roanoke, VA) 10:00 a.m.
WKPA 1390 AM (Lynchburg, VA) 10:00 a.m.
WBAG 1150 AM (Burlington, NC) 12:15 p.m.
WTRU 830 AM (Winston-Salem, NC) 2:00 p.m.

Sunday

WPCM 920 AM (Burlington, NC) 9:00 a.m.
WCRU 960 AM (Charlotte, NC) 9:30 a.m.
WBAG 1150 AM (Burlington, NC) 10:30 a.m.
WTRU 830 AM (Winston-Salem, NC) 10:30 a.m.
WDRU 1030 AM (Raleigh, NC) 10:30 a.m.
WSML 1200 AM (Graham, NC) 8:30 p.m.
WLES 560 AM (Richmond, VA) 10:30 a.m.
KUTR 820 AM (Salt Lake City, UT) 11:00 a.m.
Harbour Light of the Windwards 9:30 p.m.
1400 AM/94.5 FM (Caribbean)

January Member Birthdays

03	Gabriel Duncan Jonathan Wright
04	Lib Hedgecock Aaron Lynch Debra McDonald
05	Tony Benesch Amy Oakley
06	Connie Moody
08	Joe Davis
12	Wayne Moody
21	Mason Carpenter LaVerne Waugh
22	Robin Byrd
23	Tracy Arey Andrea Fairchild Greg Phillips Jeremy Verroi
25	Arthur Pope
26	Debbie Redd
28	Bill Brown
31	Melinda Arey Amy Freeman Ellen Guthrie

January Missionary Birthdays

03	Tom Chapman
04	Julie Rudolph
06	Mary Ann Weaver
08	Lynne Champlin
15	Herb Taylor
18	Dave Rudolph
21	Bill Hill
22	LaVerne Waugh Cristy Slawson

Beacon Pastors

Gregory N. Barkman	Senior Pastor
Michael R. Karns	Minister of Christian Education
Robert F. La Tour	Minister of Families
Gerald J. Counts	Minister of Visitation
Gregory L. Phillips	Minister of Music

In the last several articles, I recounted various Calvinistic influences related to church and school, which, though they laid a foundation, did not persuade me to become a Calvinist at the time. It would be several more years before these, as well as other influences, would prevail upon me to change my theological position. I will now list the events which God used to revise my doctrinal position.

Some months ago, I documented the crisis which forced me to evaluate my philosophy of ministry, and eventually, the theology which undergirded that philosophy. In short, I realized that the methods of evangelism I employed produced many decisions but few conversions. As I struggled to understand what was wrong, I progressed from examining methodology to reconsidering theology. I realized that methods grow out of theology, and if my methods were wrong, my theology must be as well. I resisted this conclusion for a while, but slowly surrendered to the obvious. While I was considering these questions, the Lord directed several influences into my life, which I will now endeavor to explain. I may not list everything in proper sequence, since some of these influences overlapped, but taken together, they united to overcome my resistance and bring me to surrender.

I previously told about a man from my home church who urged me to read one sermon a day by Charles Spurgeon. He helped me purchase the entire sixty-seven volumes of *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, one volume at a time, each containing about fifty sermons. My small pastor's salary was stretched thin in those early years, but this became a priority, and I was able to complete the set in four or five years. Last of all, I obtained an index which catalogued every sermon

by text, title, and topic. Each sermon takes forty-five minutes or more to read, and I cannot claim to have read one every day, but I was able to average two or three a week for several years. At first, I was not aware of Spurgeon's Calvinism. I was blessed by his warm spirit, love for souls, high view of Christ and the Gospel, lin-

"I had been taught that Calvinists were never effective evangelists with a passion for souls, but here was a man who was both a fervent Calvinist as well as a fervent soul-winner. How can this be? Was it possible that I was mistaken? This led me to investigate the lives of other great missionaries and evangelists, and to my astonishment, learned that most of them were Calvinists as well."

guistic skill, and ability to illustrate succinctly. Gradually, I realized that Spurgeon was a full-blown, five point Calvinist. This surprised me greatly! I had been taught that Calvinists were never effective evangelists with a passion for souls, but here was a man who was both a fervent Calvinist as well as a fervent soul-winner. How can this be? Was it possible that I was mistaken? This led me to investigate the lives of other great missionaries and evangelists, and to my astonishment, learned that most of them were Calvinists as well. George Whitefield, the divinely empowered instrument of the first American great awakening, was a committed Calvinist. William Carey, the Father of Modern Missions, was also a five-point Calvinist, and on it goes. Although there were

some Arminians who were notable evangelists, such as John Wesley, the majority, it seems, were Calvinists. Surprise, surprise! That fact of history certainly challenged my thinking.

I suppose I will never know until I get to Heaven, the name of the anonymous individual who sent me a subscription to the periodical, *Sword and Trowel*, a paper produced by the Reisinger brothers, Ernie and John. The title was borrowed from a similar publication edited by Charles Spurgeon in the nineteenth century that ceased publication decades ago. The Reisingers published their paper in the late 1970's, before a doctrinal divide sent them along different paths. Though each remained a staunch Calvinist, they differed about Covenant Theology. God used this paper in my life, as I'm sure He did others. The main purpose of this publication was to explain and defend the Doctrines of Grace, otherwise known as the five points of Calvinism. When the first issue arrived in my mailbox, I was indignant! Who had the audacity to send me such a piece of trash! I promptly threw it in the wastebasket without reading it, as I did several subsequent issues. I still remember the day, sometime around 1977, when I was preparing a sermon in my little bedroom study on Woodale Drive in Elon. I glanced into the wastebasket beside my desk where my eye fell upon an article on the front cover of *Sword and Trowel*. I don't remember what, exactly, caught my attention, but I slowly pulled it out of the trash and read it. I was surprised at how sensible and Biblical I discovered that article to be. As I continued to read, I found much food for thought. I could not yet agree with everything I was reading, but I had to admit that it was difficult to refute. After that, I looked forward

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Suffering can come into the lives of Christians for many reasons. It can be part of service for God.¹ It can be part of the sanctifying work of God in our lives.² It can be the harvest of sin in our lives, or of poor choices on our part or on the part of others.³ It can be the result of living godly in Christ Jesus.⁴

II Corinthians 4 offers principles that can be of great help to Christians as we navigate suffering in our lives.

We must be *honest in our motive and our method* of ministering the Word of God to others.⁵ The Bible is not a sugar pill that can be used to trick individuals into feeling better about themselves, or that can be a means of justifying a carnal lifestyle. The Bible is the vehicle through which we share “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (Verses 1-4).

We must be *humble in our mindset*. The Bible is never to be a vehicle for self-promotion. Paul’s focus was consistently on the glory of God and the eternal good of others.⁶ His mindset was that of a bondservant for Christ’s sake (Verses 5-6).

As we read about the lives of men like Paul and how they served through difficult times, we must remember that they were ordinary *humans in their make-up*. They had the same passions, weaknesses and fears that plague us. Although he was highly commendable, Paul was not some spiritual superman. He confessed to the Corinthians that his trials in Asia had almost brought him to despair.⁸ Paul reminded his readers that we have the treasure of the gospel “in earthen vessels so that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.” The Greek word for excellence means “to throw beyond.” It sheds light on God’s glory and power and not on our ability. The message must

always outshine the messenger! (Verse 7).

Four times Paul states the reality of suffering for the cause of Christ. Four times He counters with the optimism that can only come from learning and living the Word of God. Hard pressed, yet not crushed. Perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed. In the midst of

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

persecution, he clung to the reality that God is in control of all aspects of our lives. If we believe that God orders our every step, then we must also believe that giants, lions’ dens, fiery furnaces and the like are part of His over-arching plan to bring glory to Himself. He has promised to be with us on the battlefields, in the lions’ dens and in the fiery furnaces of life.⁹ Paul’s unquenched optimism was anchored by his faith that God is sovereign in all things. The promise of Romans 8:28-29 is paraphrased throughout his teaching like a lighthouse in the midst of the severest storms (Verses 8-9).

Paul saw suffering as a means through which he could develop and display his testimony for Christ. Suffering was his constant companion.¹⁰ Like those who had gone before him, Paul personified the commitment, perseverance and focus of those who

looked to Jesus Who made it clear that the world would hate His followers because the world hated Him.¹¹ Because suffering for the cause of Christ was an indicator of true piety and an instrument for growing strong in Him, Paul actually embraced it for Christ’s sake¹² (Verses 10-13).

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to focus in the midst of trials upon the promise of a resurrected body, upon the eternal good of those who would benefit from the gospel and upon the abounding glory of God. With the eye of faith upon the eternal, Paul did not lose heart, even in the midst of prolonged physical and emotional hardship. He had come to realize that his affliction, which he astoundingly described as “light” and “momentary,” was working for him a “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” It is only by viewing persecution and suffering against the backdrop of eternity that the Christian can see the silver lining around the darkest of storm clouds. Charles Hodge writes, “The Bible does not teach, either by precept or example, that Christians are to bear pain as though it were not pain, or bereavements as though they caused no sorrow. Unless troubles prove to be real sorrows, they will not produce the fruits of sorrow. It was only by comparing these sufferings with eternal glory that they dwindled into insignificance” (Verses 14-18).

For a wonderful example of how seeing the glass half full of opportunity in the midst of severe trial or persecution can bring forth an eternal harvest, read Acts 16:22-34. Paul and Silas had just cast a demon out of a girl whose masters then took them to court. The resulting incarceration in the inner prison and their feet fastened in stocks did not stop a prayer meeting and praise service from hap-

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to each issue and read the articles with growing interest. I don't know how many issues I digested, but somewhere along the way I found myself in reluctant agreement. To my surprise, and not a little bit to my embarrassment, I was becoming a Calvinist.

I think I know who gave me a copy of the book, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* by Iain Murray, but I am not completely sure. At any rate, I read it with interest, and discovered that my dear friend, Charles Spurgeon, was not only a committed Calvinist, but openly defended that position in a day when Calvinists were not highly regarded in England. Along with the decline of Calvinism among English Baptists in the nineteenth century, there was a corresponding decline in Biblical fidelity. Apostasy was making ever greater inroads among Baptist pastors and churches. Thankfully, Spurgeon was an able defender of the faith once delivered unto the saints, and his influence can be credited with slowing the erosion of Biblical Christianity among English Baptists for many decades. In some ways, it was a lonely fight, and took its toll upon his health, hastening his death. What surprised me was the alleged connection between the abandonment of Calvinism, and erosion of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. That was a new perspective for me, and it took some time to digest, but I eventually agreed that it was a valid connection. Abandonment of the Doctrines of Grace usually precedes a more general doctrinal decline, and conversely, recovery of Biblical Christianity is usually accompanied by a revival of the Doctrines of Grace. A modern example can be found in the recent resurgence of conservative theology within the Southern Baptist Convention in America. Along with this revival of Biblical fundamentalism, there has also been a

“Although I was reading things that I had never before considered, I didn't want to be one of those people who twist Scripture to try to make it mean what they think it ought to say. I truly wanted to know what it says.”

rediscovery of the Doctrines of Grace. Though not every faithful Christian will understand or agree with this statement, the reason is clear; Calvinism is Biblical Christianity in its purest form. In the early days of my ministry, I would have stoutly denied that assertion. Today, I am totally convinced that it is true.

Another powerful influence was reading *The Sovereignty of God* by A. W. Pink. Again, I'm not completely sure who gave me my first copy, but I have since distributed dozens of this classic to others. I well remember agonizing over the pages of that book. At first, I strongly disagreed with what I read, but was unable to refute it from the Bible. I could announce my disagreement, and defame the book and author with vehement denials, as I'm afraid others have done. What I could not do was demonstrate that its teaching was contrary to Scripture. I was reading things about God that I had never heard before. But as I read the Scriptures discussed by Pink, I had to admit that they were indeed in the Bible, and I could discover no flaws in Pink's interpretations. In truth, these passages were not hard to understand. They may be difficult to believe, by someone from a background like mine, but their meaning was clear. I exam-

ined several commentaries that disagreed with Pink, and discovered they employed amazing exegetical gymnastics to try to deny the obvious. Although I was reading things that I had never before considered, I didn't want to be one of those people who twist Scripture to try to make it mean what they think it ought to say. I truly wanted to know what it says. I had not considered these passages carefully before now, having passed over them lightly without thinking through their full implications. But there they were, and as one who believes, “Whatever the Bible says is so,” I was forced to enlarge my understanding of the phrase, “God is sovereign,” to a more Scriptural definition. Little by little, my arguments crumbled before the Word of God, and despite my desire or intention, I became one of that sometimes despised company of Christians called Calvinists. How grateful I am that God pursued me until I surrendered. It has made all the difference in the world to my understanding of God, and I am debtor to those faithful men God used to break down my resistance, and bring me, sometimes kicking and screaming, to a more solid understanding of truth.

I can sympathize with those who find the Doctrines of Grace strange, and perhaps frightening. Been there, done that. But I encourage you to be like the noble Bereans, and search the Scriptures daily to see if these things are so. I pray that God will open your understanding as you ponder these weighty and vital issues. The most precious gold of God's Word lies buried, waiting for committed workmen to dig it out. Please believe me when I tell you that the treasure is more than worth the effort. May the God who loved us long ago, before we came to be, guide you into the riches of His grace.

The house guests have bidden us goodbye, holiday trappings are back in their boxes, and we begin the return to normal. It's a new year and it's time to move on! Twelve months of opportunity lie ahead. Out with the old, in with the new! 2014 is a thing of the past...or is it? Most of us approach a new year with some determination for change, and at least a mental list of what we hope to be and do during the next twelve months. These are changes we *want* to make and we are hopeful as we envision our future success. But look at the items on your list. How many of them were there last year, leftovers barely touched the first time around? Why is it we fail to accomplish those changes that held such promise as we viewed them at the outset of 2014?

What do the average New Year's Resolutions include? I'm guessing that most lists will contain some version of these: 'I want to lose weight, I want to exercise regularly, I want to be more organized, I want to be more patient, I want to be a better wife/mother/friend...' All good goals, no doubt! So why do we seldom succeed? And is that the best we can hope for?

I recently came across a list of six characteristics described as 'what one must cultivate as the appropriate context for theological activity.' You may be thinking, "What in the world is theological activity and why would I be interested?" "Theology means 'a word about God; so when we speak or think about God we are engaged in theology. It is an aspect of thought and conversation for all who live and breathe, who wrestle and fear, who hope and pray.'" Well, that's all of us so then everyone is a theologian! But just thinking and speaking about God is not enough...our thoughts and words must be *correct*! Could it be that our plans for improvement fail more

often than not because our thinking is wrong? If you want to see change that happens and is more than those surface deep items found on most lists, take time to read thoughtfully through these characteristics listed below.

"God has not left us without a guide! By faith, go to God's word and just start digging through, not looking for quick specific answers but looking for God, believing that he keeps his word."

First... **Faithful reason:** Is your life a series of mind-numbing questions? Being more organized is the least of your worries...your life is one big puzzle, you need to know where to start. Do you reason your way to truth, typically asking questions about what you think you are capable of bearing or doing, or do you start with God, believing what he has said, and from there reason things out? Augustine, in addressing this question, said, "God will help us and make us understand *what we believe*. Unless you believe, you will not understand. Faith is not optional for genuine understanding, but it is essential and presupposed..." Sometimes life IS a puzzle and the pieces make no sense. If only we had a box with the picture to follow! But God has not left us without a guide! By faith, go to God's word and just start digging through, not looking for quick specific answers but looking for God, believing that he keeps his word. Fill your mind with truth, as much as you can any time you can get it! And when it comes to reasoning, making sense of things, making plans, your mind will be enlightened by that truth.

Second... **prayer and study.** Most of us start a new year with resolves about our personal communion with God. But failure comes soon and

often. Why? Might it be that we find it ineffective? Sometimes we find ourselves 'getting by' with just one, prayer or study. If that is our practice then which of the two is most important? The answer is not a 'one or the other' but *both*. B. B. Warfield said, 'Recruiting officers do not dispute whether it is better to have soldiers with left legs or right legs. Soldiers need both legs.' We would find our time of study and prayer more effective if the two were intertwined, if our praying was a response to what God has said to us, rather than simply a reciting of our 'shopping list' of requests.

Third... **humility and repentance.** A resolution to be humble and repentant, really? But read on..."What is it about arrogance that God so abhors and why does he regard humility so favorably? Both of these attributes are attitudes toward God and others. Pride has lost sight of the gap between the holy Creator and sinful humanity, producing self-absorption and contempt for others. Humility has a vision of God's majesty, love and forgiveness in Christ, producing love for God and one's neighbors. How we treat others... reveals a great deal about how we view ourselves before God. Pride burdens us with defensiveness and humility frees us to receive teaching and correction." Hmm...I think you should read that again! What real changes would take place if we repented of our pride and began to think of ourselves as God sees us!

Fourth... **Suffering, justice, and knowing God:** "But what does it mean to know God? Biblical knowing...includes, but also goes beyond the acquisition of information. It is emphatically and deeply relational. And, when we come to the question of knowing God, the Bible plunges into caring for those he cares for, and thus into living with a concrete concern for

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Suffering's Silver Lining

Bob La Tour

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pening at midnight in the presence of other prisoners. The harvest of that event was the salvation of the prison keeper, his family and who knows how many others! Suffering's silver lining becomes visible when we embrace the truth that the sovereign God Who filled Christ's cup in Gethsemane fills ours as well.¹³ May He grant us the same grace to focus upon the joy that awaits all of those who trust God in the midst of testing and trial. May He grant us the grace to pray, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."¹⁴

- 1) II Cor. 6:4-5; I Peter 4:14, 16
- 2) I Peter 1:6,7; I Thess. 3:3
- 3) I Peter 4:15
- 4) II Timothy 3:12; John 17:4; Acts 14:22
- 5) II Cor. 4:1-4
- 6) II Cor.4:5-6; I Cor. 2:1-5; I Cor. 10:31-33

- 7) James 5:17; Acts 14:15
- 8) II Cor.1:8-10
- 9) Psa. 37:23-25; Heb. 13:5-6
- 10) II Cor. 4:10-12
- 11) John 15:18-21; Hebrews 11; Hebrews 12:1-3
- 12) II Cor. 12:10; Matt. 5:11-12; Phil.1:29
- 13) Matt. 26:36-46
- 14) Matt. 26:39

The Lord Our Confidence

(Psalm 27)

*Though sons of earth would buffet
me and try my soul to tears,
I'll bask within that Blessed Light
that scatters darkest fears.
When fleshly hosts may gather
round, and wars against me rise,
I'll rest with confidence in God,
and claim peace as my prize.*

*Dear Lord, make clear faith's
wistful eyes. Thy beauty I would
see. I tremble at the purging touch
that draws Thine own to Thee.*

*Yet, sheltered in protective grace,
I'll worship all my days. While
heart and breath shall hold life
fast, I'll joyfully sing praise!*

*Oh, Abba, Father, hear my cry!
Thy blessed mercy shed. When
Thou didst bid me seek Thy face,
twas to Thine arms I fled.
If loves of earth's frail ties forsake,
be thou my help and stay.
Lord lead me in Thy path so plain,
my hand in Thine always.*

*Though oft I faint from life's long
toil towards death's awaiting door,
fresh hope I've found believing in
the goodness of my Lord.
Unlike the pilgrims of the pit
—grim strangers to God's grace—
I'll wait secure within Thy bonds
for strength to run life's race.*

(From Psalm 27)

Marti Barkman

On the Feminine Side

(Continued from page 6)

the poor, the weak, and those who suffer." When we know God we'll love him and we'll be interested in his interests and concerned for those for whom he is concerned. "God judges our theology faithful or false by our attitudes and responses to those in need." A resolve like this turns our self-absorption into compassion.

Fifth...Tradition and community: "God has put us into a body, the church -- for our worship is not a solo but a chorus of praise!" We need to spend time with our fellow worshippers! This is not *just* about being there to fellowship, and not *just* about worshipping with those in the pews near ours, but with those who

lived long before us, who worshipped the same God in different times and learned valuable truths that can inform us today. "One of the best ways to become aware of our cultural prejudices and reduce our blind spots it to spend time in the presence of the saints, especially the saints who lived in times different from our own." Shouldn't your plans for the year include an enthusiastic involvement in both the teaching of and fellowship with the body? Life lessons from past and present await you!

Sixth...Love of Scripture: How does this differ from the second resolve on prayer and study? The Psalmist said, "I rejoice at your word, like one who finds great spoil." The key word is 'spoil' or 'treasure.' The Word is a treasure and we are to

regard it as such, seeing it as 'the means by which we can know and live to God.' So it's not just a matter of putting in our time so we can cross it off our list, not something we regard from a distance during a sermon on Sunday, but rather the truth that takes root in our hearts and grows out in our thinking, our actions. What a goal that would be for the year ahead...a treasure trove springing from our hearts!

Don't let the failed attempts at change in 2014 follow you through another year! Worthy goals, pursued in the right way...make that your resolve!

*All quotations are taken from
A Little Book for New Theologians
By Kelly Kapic

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manipulating God to transform us more quickly.

In His grace, the Lord invites us to cooperate with the formative work of the Holy Spirit in our lives by engaging in the disciplines of faith, repentance, and obedience and by trusting in His ways and in His timing. Inevitably, God's timing will seem painfully slow to us, but as we grow in wisdom, we learn to be more patient with the divine process, knowing that He alone knows what we need and when we need it. Thus spiritual growth is nourished by years of disciplined compliance to the means of grace.

The great theological virtues of faith, hope, and love encapsulate the dynamic of the spiritual life in Christ. We could say a lot about these virtues but I believe it is helpful to think of faith particularly focusing on Christ's redemptive work for us in

the past. Hope looks to the ultimate completion of this work in the future; and love manifests the life of Christ through us in the present.

Biblical faith is intrinsically bound up with hope because it is grounded in a Person we have not yet seen. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen...And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:1, 6). Faith is pleasing to God because it is the measure of the risk we place in his character and promises. Those who trust in Christ are hoping that what He has promised, He is able to perform (Romans 4:21).

The essence of walking in faith is acting on the conviction that God alone knows what is best for us and that He alone is able to

accomplish it. The problem with faith, is that it goes against the grain of human inclination and culture, because it is based on the invisible and uncontrollable. We may give lip service to the proposition that God alone knows what is best for us, but in practice we are inclined to follow our own wisdom, especially when times are tough. The risks of faith are pleasing to God since they honor his testimony in spite of appearances to the contrary.

Everything hinges on what we trust. If we trust our own wisdom, our hands are too full of ourselves to receive the gifts of God. When we empty our hands of self-reliance, self-righteousness, self-pity, and other self sins, they will be empty enough to receive the life of Christ in us and display His life to others.

God's Blessings to You in the New Year!

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

The Beacon Beam
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