



THE BEACON BEAM

January 2026

GOOD NEWS THAT NEVER GROWS OLD



Seize the Morning New Habits for a New Year — by David Mathis

Is there any single habit more important than getting your soul regularly within earshot of God? Right there with the basic natural habits we cannot avoid — breathing, eating, sleeping — one supernatural habit stands at the fountainhead of all others for our spiritual life and health and growth in a new year: *hearing God's voice in his word.*

The first and most fundamental means of God's grace for the Christian life is his word to us in the gospel and in the Scriptures. Having his ear in *prayer*, because of Christ, comes in response to God's self-revelation in his word, incarnate and written. And belonging to his body in the *fellowship* in the local church is a reality created and sustained by God's word.

Vital as prayer and fellowship are, all

spiritual life and health and growth begins, just as creation, with the word of God (Genesis 1:3).

First and Greatest Habit

Is there anything more fitting, then, for starting every day in the new year than the word of God?

The Bible never commands the modern "quiet time." Nor does it specify that we must read our Bibles first thing in the morning. In fact, the concept of Christians having their own copy of the Scriptures for private reading is a fairly recent phenomenon in the history of the church. So, here at the outset of the year, we're not talking mainly about an obligation but an opportunity.

"Is there any single habit more important than getting your soul regularly within earshot of God?"

For Christians, getting our souls within consistent earshot of God's voice in his word is as basic as sleeping and eating and even breathing. Our fully human Savior himself said, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). If Jesus needed his Father's revealed words for daily human living, how much more his fallen brothers?

Grow in Grace — or Fall Away

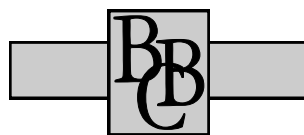
Twice in the apostle Peter's letters, he encourages his readers to *grow*. The second is his final word to them, at the end of his second letter, very last verse.

You . . . beloved . . . take care

(Continued on page 2)

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N. Hunter Strength, *Minister of Youth*

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

(Continued from page 1)

that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:17–18).

Note first the parting of the ways. Peter's "beloved" fellow believers are either being *carried away* and *losing their stability* (verse 17), or they are *growing* in the grace knowledge of Christ (verse 18). Standing still is not an option. There is no neutral in the Christian life, back then or in the coming year. We are either regressing in the faith or progressing. Losing stability or gaining maturity. Shrinking or growing.

The all-important question, then, here at the start of a new year is *how*? We want to grow, don't we? We don't want to regress or fall back or be carried away or lose our position of security and stability. Rather, we want to grow in the grace of Christ, and increase in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:10). And grow in knowing him (John 17:3; Philippians 3:10). *How*, pray tell, Peter, will we grow this year?

Taste His Goodness

Only one other place in Peter's two letters uses this same verb *grow*:

Put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may *grow up* into salvation — if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good (1 Peter 2:1–3).

"Salvation," in this instance, is not something Peter's readers have already attained (unlike Ephesians 2:5, 8), but something they are, if

healthy and true, *growing into*. This is like Paul's statement in Philippians 2:12 not to *work for* but to *work out* our salvation with fear and trembling. Which means, this "pure spiritual milk" Peter mentions has a real part to play in our final salvation.

What, then, is this "pure spiritual milk" that we not only drink but *long for*? Where is it that we will *taste that the Lord is good*? The answer, as the immediately preceding verses make plain, is "the living and abiding *word of God*" (1 Peter 1:23), which is "the good news that was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:25).

"Take steps to remove or keep yourself from whatever is keeping you from the Bible."

In other words, the key to spiritual life and health and growth — the pure spiritual milk — is God's self-revelation to us in his words through his inspired prophets, culminating in the gospel word about his Son, attested to by the inspired apostles. The pure spiritual milk by which Christians grow up into salvation is the living and abiding words of God in the Bible, with the gospel of Jesus Christ at the heart and center.

Seize (the First Moments of) the Day

What we do each morning in the first fifteen to thirty minutes of our day is doubly revealing: it reveals both where our treasures really lie, as well as the trajectory of desires and decisions that will direct the day and, over time, our life. Therefore, while the Bible does not command morning devotions, all Christians would do well to consider starting each day in the Book. What baby steps might you take, along with these suggestions below, toward a new-year's resolve to be in the Bible more next year?

Audit Your Morning Habits

Alexander Hamilton famously wrote, "Man is very much a creature of hab-

it." And perhaps especially so first thing in the morning. The relatively new "science of habit" can help us with this. As Jerome Groopman explains, writing on habits in *The New Yorker*, and quoting author Wendy Wood,

Our minds have "multiple separate but interconnected mechanisms that guide behavior." But we are aware only of our decision-making ability — a phenomenon known as the "introspective illusion" — and that may be why we overestimate its power.

In other words, because our conscious thoughts direct only a limited amount of our behaviors — and we are, unsurprisingly, very conscious of our consciousness! — we tend to overestimate our willpower. New-year's resolves, apart from the formation of new habits, likely will not become new-year realities.

A great place to start is with being honest about what your current habits are. Ask yourself, What are my morning habits? What do I typically do in those first fifteen minutes to half hour each day? What is my morning routine, not ideally but practically? What's the sequence of what I actually do first thing in the morning?

Identify the Cost

New habits typically don't come easily. They aren't "free." There is some attendant cost. New habits that really matter don't just typically thread into your current ones. They must displace the old. According to Groopman, "the key lies not in breaking a habit through willpower but in replacing one habit with another." With regard to your mornings, make conscious decisions to change tangibles in your world that will guide your

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

subconscious. So ask, How can I get into the word of God in those first moments of each day? What needs to wait until later in the day, or go away altogether, to make space for what's more important?

Create Barriers to the Bad

After identifying the bad habits keeping you from what's more important, make concrete plans *against* them. Create "friction" between the bad habits of checking email or getting sidetracked in texts or notifications. Or turning on the TV. Or reading something else less important. Make them inconvenient. Take steps to remove or keep yourself from whatever is keeping you from the Bible.

Incentivize the Good

Reading the Bible is not a chore, and there's no virtue in making those mo-

ments as unpleasant as possible. Identify an inviting space, consider conducive sounds (whether silence or beloved soundtracks), and "treat yourself," within reason, to solidify the habit of coming first to God's word in the morning. In doing so, of course, we want to develop a palate that increasingly tastes and enjoys God's goodness in his word so that the real incentive and greatest reward is knowing and enjoying him.

God Gives the Growth

Whatever little supplemental steps we might try in habit formation, they are but supplements. In the end, the word of God is supernatural, and tasting his goodness is beyond our natural abilities. We cannot cultivate supernatural appetite through natural habits alone.

For those of us who are serious, especially here at the outset of a new year, about making daily and consistent

access to God's word vital in the new year, and the rest of our lives, we look, in and through our efforts and strategies, to God himself as the one who gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6–7), if it is real growth. He is the one who grows our faith (2 Corinthians 10:15) and his church (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20) through his word, and the one who stands ready to have his gospel word bear fruit and grow in our lives (Colossians 1:6, 10).

David Mathis (@davidcmathis) is executive editor for *Desiring God* and pastor at Cities Church. He is the author of *A Little Theology of Exercise: Enjoying Christ in Body and Soul* (2025).



NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

There's an assumption about human nature that is important to have in place as we think about New Year's Resolutions: people do what they want to do. The Reformation theologian Thomas Cranmer held this view of human nature (as summarized by Anglican historian [Ashley Null](#)):

What the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies. The mind doesn't direct the will. The mind is actually captive to what the will wants, and the will itself, in turn, is captive to what the heart wants.

As Cranmer realized, our wills are captive to what our hearts love, and we are powerless to change ourselves without the work of God's Spirit changing our desires. When you think through New Year's resolutions, here's a prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer* as you ask God to work on your heart:

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Justin S. Holcomb, PhD, professor of theology at Reformed Theological Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

BUMPER STICKER THEOLOGY

by Greg Barkman

We've all seen them, bumper stickers that compress a Christian concept into a short, catchy slogan. Designed to attract attention in a memorable way, they endeavor to break into the consciousness of people hurrying along life's road, invading the daily routine sufficiently to cause reflection upon eternal realities. As well intended efforts to reach people for Christ in the marketplace, they are generally applauded by God's people. However since they can also misrepresent truth, we ought to examine slogans like this to discern if they accurately represent the gospel.

JESUS IS THE ANSWER.

Let's start with a common example. Who hasn't seen "Jesus is the answer" on billboards and automobiles at one time or another? But don't we need to ask, "The answer for what?" If the question is, "What is two plus two," obviously Jesus is NOT the answer. The desire for brevity tramples the need for accuracy. There are thousands of questions for which Jesus is not the answer. In fact, there are more questions for which He is not the answer than the reverse. Jesus is the answer only if we ask the right questions. This slogan might be more misleading than helpful. It's one thing for the Gospel to appear foolish because the natural man cannot understand spiritual truth, but it's quite another to make the Gospel appear foolish because it is presented in a bumper sticker format.

THE INTENDED MEANING.

No doubt those who publish this slogan assume everyone will understand their intentions. Since Jesus is obviously not the answer to so many questions, surely everyone will understand the intended purpose and supply the right questions. But is that a reasonable expectation? Here is a slogan designed to communicate to unbelievers, and yet its success depends upon unconverted people being

able to understand the intended meaning and supply spiritually appropriate questions. Would it be impolite to suggest that this slogan works only for those who are already Christians? Few regenerate people can be expected to match the right question with this "answer." Perhaps the actual accomplishment is to make Christians feel better about themselves because they are taking a public stand for Jesus, which we all agree is a good thing. But this slogan may do more to rally the troops than to convey an informative gospel witness to the world.

MISLEADING.

The fact is, many people are asking questions like, "How can I improve my marriage? How can I increase my success at business? How can I enlarge my self-esteem?" Some Christians believe that Jesus is the answer to questions like these. In one sense that's true, but only in a secondary sense. When God saves us, we are much better equipped to handle all the issues of life, including marriage and finances, but there's a problem. People don't come to Christ in repentance and faith because their primary desire is to improve their marriage or increase their financial situation. People only come to Christ in true saving faith because they realize they are sinners in need of a savior, not because they are less successful than they desire and would appreciate divine aid to make their self-centered lives a little better. Christ didn't come to save us from our lack of worldly success or our need for greater self esteem. He came to save us from our sins.

ONE PRIMARY QUESTION.

Jesus is the answer to one question, namely, how can a sinner be reconciled to a holy God, and that is a question very few people are asking. Nor are they likely to ask it until they understand more about the gospel

than "Jesus is the answer." They need to understand who God is, the one true God of the Bible, not the misrepresentations that abound. They need to understand what sin is, why they are sinners, and how serious their sin is before a holy God. Most people have no clue about the true nature of sin. They need to understand that God's condemnation already rests upon them because of their sin. The Bible says more about the wrath of God than His love, yet many Christians believe they are more helpful when they avoid talking about God's holy wrath, and only emphasize His love. Consequently, few people understand and appreciate the love of God because they harbor no fear regarding the fully deserved judgment of God toward sin. Yes, Jesus is God's gracious answer to the question, "How may I be saved from the eternal condemnation I deserve? How may I, as a sinner, be reconciled to the holy God who created me, against whom I have sinned, and before whom I will stand in judgement some day?" Before people are prepared to understand these issues, a lot of fallow ground will have to be plowed up and a measure of Bible doctrine will need to be explained.

BUMPER STICKER THEOLOGY.

Bumper sticker theology, well intended as it may be, is usually not very helpful for evangelism, and may even confirm people in misconceptions about Christ. Christians will need to work hard to communicate the gospel in its fullness. Shortcuts don't work very well in life, nor do they often serve the needs of the human soul and the interests of Christ's Kingdom.

Revised from an article originally published in 2017.

THE GODLINESS OF A GRATEFUL HEART

by Bob LaTour

II Peter 1:3 “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue....”

“Our first problem is that our attitude towards sin is more self-centered than God-centered. We are more concerned about our own ‘victory’ over sin than we are about the fact that our sin grieves the heart of God.”¹ Those who are trusting entirely and exclusively in the Lord Jesus Christ take seriously the command to be holy. They “flee youthful lusts; and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”² No Christians are as godly as they ought to be, but those who see themselves as debtors to grace gratefully exercise themselves unto godliness by consistently obeying the Scriptures and applying them to life. They seek to be instruments of practical righteousness.³ They are Romans-seven-type people who long to do right even when they do not always manage to do so.

In the context of rejoicing in the confident expectation of what awaited them in heaven, Peter encouraged those Christians who were scattered by persecution to rest in the “keeping power” of God. He challenged them to pursue holiness—“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”⁴ Commentator, Kenneth Wuest, writes, “Those who at one time were wholly controlled by their evil cravings, had through

*All-knowing God,
Your searching eye
looks past my habits
to my heart
Where weaknesses
and strengths lie bare
before Your piercing,
holy stare.
With sov'reign gaze,
You loath all sham
and know me
as I truly am.*

salvation entered into a new state of being, that of inward holiness, by virtue of the residence in them of the Holy Spirit, and now *they were to see to it that that inward holiness found outward expression in their lives*. The word ‘holy’ in Greek means literally, ‘set apart.’ Thus, a holy person is one set apart from sin to righteousness. It has in it the idea of separation. Thus it is a separated life of which Peter is speaking. The word ‘saint’ is the translation of the same word. Furthermore, they were not to cover up their characters as Christians by outwardly assuming a masquerade costume patterned after their former worldly garments. They were to become holy ones in their personal experience.”

Those who are “banking” solely upon a “decision” made sometime in the past, or upon scattered “religious experiences,” but who are not pursuing holy living for the glory of God, have

little cause for assurance that they are truly in good standing before Him. They have no growing sense of fellowship with God. They possess no real “kindred spirit” with those whose lives demonstrate an agonizing struggle to be like Christ in thought, word and deed. Our bent—what we are as revealed by our thoughts, speech and actions—says everything about us.⁵ John warns believers, “Let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as (Christ) is righteous.”⁶ Do your own thoughts, speech and actions indicate an understanding that those who are “in Christ” are the temple of the Holy Spirit?⁷ Do you demonstrate an understanding that true Christians are to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God?”⁸ Does your life show that you are consistently exercising yourself unto godliness from a grateful heart?

¹ Jerry Bridges

² II Timothy 2:22

³ Romans 6:13; Ephesians 5:1, 8-16;
Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-23;
Colossians 3; II Peter 1

⁴ I Peter 1:13-16

⁵ Proverbs 23:7; Luke 6:45;
Mark 7:21-23

⁶ I John 3:7

⁷ I Corinthians 6:19-20

⁸ II Corinthians 7:1

TEN QUESTIONS FOR A NEW YEAR

by Don Whitney

Even those most faithful to God occasionally need to pause and think about the direction of their lives. It's so easy to bump along from one busy week to another without ever stopping to ponder where we're going and where we should be going.

Once, when the people of God had become careless in their relationship with him, the Lord rebuked them through the prophet Haggai: "Consider your ways!" (Haggai 1:5). He urged them to reflect on some of the things happening to them, and to evaluate their slipshod spirituality in light of what God had told them.

Ten Questions

The beginning of a new year is an ideal time to stop, look up, and get our bearings. A great time for us to "Consider our ways." To that end, here are some questions to ask prayerfully in the presence of God.

1. What's one thing you can do this year to increase your enjoyment of God?

Our enjoyment of God comes primarily through the means of grace he has given us. He has promised to bless us most directly and consistently through means such as his word, prayer, and the church. One specific suggestion I'd offer would be to include some *meditation* on Scripture along with your daily reading. It's better to read less — if necessary — and yet as the result of meditation remember *something*, than to read more and remember *nothing*.

2. What's an impossible prayer you can pray?

There are more than a dozen "but God" statements in Scripture, such as in Romans 5:8, which reads, "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ

died for us." Situations that were humanly impossible were transformed by "but God" (Ephesians 2:1–7). What's a "but God" prayer you can pray for the coming year?

3. What's the most important thing you could do to improve your family life?

If your family doesn't practice family worship, beginning there is the single best recommendation I could make. Just ten minutes a day, simply reading the Bible, praying, and singing together — an event that requires no preparation — is all it takes. My little book titled *Family Worship* can tell you more.

4. In which spiritual discipline do you most want to make progress this year?

Would it be a *personal* spiritual discipline (that is, one you practice alone), or an *interpersonal* spiritual discipline (one you practice with other believers)? Once you decide, determine the next step to take and when you will take it.

5. What's the single biggest time-waster in your life, and how can you redeem the time?

Social media? TV? Video games? Sports? Hobbies? It's easy for any of these (or something else) to take too much of our hearts and time. Is repentance required? Trying to stop, by itself, is probably not the answer. Actively replacing it with something better helps us in "making the best use of the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16).

6. What's the most helpful new way you could strengthen your church?

While we often stress the fact that individual believers are the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:15), the New Testament actually says seven times

to one that the *church* is the body of Christ (Ephesians 5:23). We mustn't let our frequent emphasis on our personal relationship with Christ minimize the importance of our service to Jesus through his body. How can your church be stronger this year because of you? Serving? Giving? Praying?

7. For whose salvation will you pray most fervently this year?

Praying frequently and fervently for someone's salvation makes us more sensitive to opportunities to share the gospel with him or her. Will you commit to praying for at least one person's salvation every day this new year?

8. What's the most important way, by God's grace, you will try to make this year different from last?

Obviously, God's sovereignty rules over all things, and there is nothing we can do about much that he brings into our lives. On the other hand, under his sovereignty he gives us a measure of responsibility over many areas of life. In which of these would you most like to see a change from last year? You may find that your answer to this question is found in one of your answers above. To which of them do you sense the Holy Spirit calling your attention most urgently?

9. What one thing could you do to improve your prayer life this year?

For many, it might be as simple as designating a time exclusively for prayer instead of praying only "on the go" types of prayers. For others, it might be learning the simple, biblical practice of praying the Bible.

10. What single thing can you plan to do this year that will matter most in ten years? In eternity?

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

Short-term deadlines tend to dominate our attention. Busyness and fatigue often limit our vision to just getting through today. But don't let the tyranny of the urgent distract you from something you're neglecting that would have enormous long-term impact on your soul, your family, or your church.

Consider Your New Year

The value of many of these questions is not in their profundity, but in the simple fact that they bring an issue or commitment into focus. For example, just by making a goal to encourage one person in particular this year is

more likely to help you remember to encourage that person than if you hadn't set that goal.

If you've found these questions helpful, you might want to put them someplace — on your phone, computer, calendar, or wherever you put reminders — where you can review them frequently.

I hope this article will help you to "consider your ways," to make plans and goals, and to live this new year with biblical diligence, remembering the principle that "the plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance" (Proverbs 21:5). But in all

things, let's also remember our dependence on our King, who said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Don Whitney is Professor of Biblical Spirituality and the John H. Powell Professor of Pastoral Ministry at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO. He is the author of *Praying the Bible*, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, and *Family Worship*. Free resources for teaching others to pray the Bible may be found at his website, The Center for Biblical Spirituality.



"Lord, grant that this year I may be more holy and walk more closely than ever in all holy conversation. I earnestly desire to be filled with holy thoughts, to be carried out in holy affections, determined by holy aims and intentions, and governed in all my words and actions by holy principles. Oh that a golden thread of holiness may run through the whole web of this year!"

—James R. Boyd



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WNAH 1360 AM (Nashville, TN) 2:00 p.m.
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WTRU 830 AM (Winston-Salem, NC) 2:00 p.m.
WDZY 1290 AM (Richmond, VA) 6:15 a.m.
10:00 a.m.
WDZY 103.3 FM (Richmond, VA) 6:15 a.m.
10:00 a.m.
WSKY 1230 AM (Asheville, NC) 7:15 a.m.
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WXTH-LP 101.7 FM (Richwood, WV) 10:05 a.m.
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(Internet station based in Greenville/Washington, NC)

Saturday

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BEACON HIGHLIGHTS FOR JANUARY

CALENDAR

01 New Year's Day
03 The Forge (Men's Bible Study)
04 ESL (English as a Second Language)
07 IMPACT Club
08 Coffee n' Courage
11 ESL
13 Coffee n' Courage
 Elders/Deacons Meeting
14 IMPACT Club
15 Silver Saints
18 Members Meeting
 ESL
20 Coffee n' Courage
21 IMPACT Club
25 ESL
28 IMPACT Club

MEMBER BIRTHDAYS

03 Jonathan Wright
04 Aaron Lynch
 Debra McDonald
05 Tony Benesch
 Amy Oakley
06 Connie Moody
08 Joe Davis
12 Wayne Moody
20 Jonathan Guthrie
22 Robin Byrd
23 Tracy Arey
 Greg Phillips
 Jeremy Verroi
24 Kristine Noonan
25 Arthur Pope
26 Debbie Redd
28 Bill Brown
31 Melinda Arey
 Amy Freeman

MISSIONARY BIRTHDAYS

03 Tom Chapman
04 Julie Rudolph
08 Lynne Champlin
15 Herb Taylor
18 Dave Rudolph
21 Bill Hill
 LaVerne Waugh

 *Children of Missionaries

We express our heartfelt sympathy to the families of:

Miranda Brooks
 Sara Ann Coleman
 Otis Gagnon
 David Williams

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