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CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Looking Ahead - 12.29.2024 - Church at Home

December 29, 2024

With 2024 quickly drawing to a close, this week offers the perfect opportunity to reflect on the past year and anticipate the one to come.

Begin by taking a few moments to sit quietly. Set aside all distractions, close your eyes, and take a few slow, deep breaths. With each exhalation, give God your worries and concerns and allow his peace to wash over you. Then ponder and reflect on the highs and lows of 2024 and remember where you sensed his presence.

Next, take some time to slowly read through Ephesians 2:20-22. What do you learn about Jesus from these verses? How does this impact your walk with Christ?

Finally, consider recording your responses in a journal, whether digital or hardcopy. It's a great way to be able to look back on the adventure God has you on.

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for this past year! While it wasn't always easy, I am grateful for the opportunity to get to know you better through the good times and the hard ones. Lord, in the year to come, help me draw closer to you and trust in you more. Be a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105) as I go on this adventure with you. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Icebreaker: What is one thing you are thankful for from 2024?

Why is it important to reflect on the past? How can this help us grow?

Read and reflect on Ephesians 2:20-22. What do you learn about God? What is your response to this?

How did you grow closer to God in 2024? What step(s) did you take in your faith?

Where do you feel God is leading you in 2025? What is one thing you can do this week to step into it?

This post was written by Kelly Pagel, Director of the LivingItOut.

Monday: Look Back Before Moving Forward - Church at Home

December 30, 2024

2025 will soon be upon us. It feels like there are unlimited possibilities and exciting adventures awaiting us. However, we cannot fully welcome in the new year without reflecting on the previous year. There is something special about beginning a new year but something equally significant in reflecting on the year that just ended.

Years ago, I began the practice of a year-end review. At the end of December, I would head over to a local coffee shop with my Bible and a journal. I look over the goals I had for the previous year, contemplate the ways I had grown, and look forward to the new year. I take the time to think of areas where I need to grow, books I'd like to read, projects I would like to accomplish, and I choose my word for the year. Past words have included *abide*, *selah*, and *content*. Then I find a passage in the Bible that embraces that theme to commit to memory.

Last year, the word *cultivate* kept coming to mind. Cultivate means "to prepare and work on, promote growth, to devote oneself." As I reflect on where I am in my life, I realize that there are areas of my life that I want to develop and improve. There are skills I would like to have, relationships I want to grow, and a faith I want to deepen.

Reflection is not something that comes easy in our fast-paced society. However, there is something sacred in allowing ourselves the gift of reflection. When we think about what is happening in our hearts, we can see where and how God is moving.

Proverbs 27:19

As a face is reflected in water, so the heart reflects the real person.

There is value in the pause. The time we allow to quiet our souls gives God the opportunity to speak. When we stop focusing so much on what is next and reflect on where we have been—we can see that we are growing, where God is working in our lives, and areas where we need to improve. The time doesn't have to be long but it should be intentional. Allow yourself time to be still, turn off the outside noises and listen. This practice will be challenging, but it is worth the effort. You will find yourself refreshed with new hope for the coming year.

Questions:

Have you ever taken time for a year-end review? What is stopping you?

Next Steps:

Set aside an hour or two this week to reflect on the past year and the year to come. Give yourself time to celebrate the wins and grieve the losses.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of stillness. Thank you for coming to us in the midst of our busyness to speak to us. Help me still my mind so I can truly listen to your voice. Guide my steps as I enter into this new year. Help me see where I need to grow and areas where I need to let go. Thank you for your grace. Amen.

This post was written by Julie Mabus, a Whitehouse campus attender and regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.

Tuesday: God Lives in Us - Church at Home

December 31, 2024

“House of the Lord” by Phil Wickham

We sing to the God who heals

We sing to the God who saves

We sing to the God who always makes a way

'Cause He hung up on that cross

*Then He rose up from that grave
My God's still rolling stones away*

*There's JOY in the house of the Lord
There's JOY in the house of the Lord today
And we won't be quiet
We shout out your praise*

Where is your *house of the Lord*, your temple? Where do you go to worship God?

Ephesians 2:20-22

²⁰ Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. ²² Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

Historically, the cornerstone was the strongest, most supportive component of a building's foundation and served as the guide for the rest of the structure. Similarly, Christ is our cornerstone—the unshakable and unbreakable foundation on which we build our lives. And the truth is we can go to God at any time because he came near to us! You don't have to go to a physical place to be with him. You just have to trust in God's promise that he is with you.

There is joy in our lives because God lives within us—we are his temple. Lately, I have been reminded of the simple truth that no matter what is going on in my life, when I look to Jesus, I can find joy. He wants *us to be with him*.

Some of us really do feel closest to God at church, but for others, it's being outdoors, reading Scripture, quietly praying or journaling, participating in a Group, or serving on a DreamTeam. For me, it's listening to worship music on my way to work in the morning. During those moments, I am present with God and open myself up to receive him. I experience true peace and joy in his presence.

My hope for you this coming year is that you find your own way to connect with God. Because he is always with you, and you can encounter him wherever you may be.

Questions:

God is with you, but are you with him?

How do you find joy in the Lord? What is your favorite way to worship God and experience his presence?

Next Steps:

Try out different types of worship to find one or two of your favorite ways to connect with Jesus. Then challenge yourself in the next year to regularly incorporate them into your daily and weekly schedule. Start small and go from there!

Listen to "[House of the Lord](#)" by Phil Wickham.

Prayer:

God, there is joy in the house of the Lord, and I don't want to be quiet about it. I want to look to you and praise you no matter what circumstances I am facing. I know you are with me, and I want to be with you. I am ready to be open handed and receive you. I am not going to ask you for anything at this moment. I just want to praise you and experience the joy of being in your presence. Amen.

This post was written by Becca Roberts, a West campus attender and regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.

Wednesday: Reflection: A Beautiful Mix - Church at Home

January 1, 2025

Taking the time and space to reflect on the beautiful mix of life that God allows is a great exercise. However, it's easy to get discouraged when we feel the only answers to our prayers are "no, not yet," or "I have something else in mind for you."

“What are you thankful for?” can be challenging to answer, especially during seasons of unwanted changes, loss, brokenness, consequences, and health issues. To be honest, there have been moments when I thought, “God has forgotten me.” I’ve experienced anger, and my faith has been challenged.

But knowing that God notices and cares for each of us has been a lifeline for me.

Psalm 34:18

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

In my humanness, I fixate on the negatives. I am torn between, “it’s all about me” and blaming *them!*

In the Spirit, my eyes are opened to the bigger picture. In surrender to God’s will for me each day, I can see him at work. I focus more on the positives and can see the prayers that were answered with life-giving hope and resurrection.

It can be difficult to find thankfulness in the grip of challenges, but that’s when it becomes vital to sacrifice the time and space to look for it.

Psalm 50:14

Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God, and keep the vows you made to the Most High.

During my year-end reflection, God, in grace, brings me gently back to him. He helps me see where he sprinkled joy, love, and hope throughout the year—in a song, a kind gesture, or an opportunity to serve. This year, I’ve had conversations that wouldn’t have taken place and relationships that wouldn’t have been renewed, some strengthened, without my challenges.

I have found that when I focus on the whole and not just the bad parts, I can see where God is in the beautiful mix. He is bigger than any challenges, stronger than any anger, and more loving than anything else I’ve ever known. He allows a balance of good and bad so that we can be grown, pruned, and renewed. He knows me, and he loves me.

He loves you too! When challenges come, it’s more important than ever to cling to your faith and the promises God offers.

Questions:

What are you thankful for? What challenges have you faced? How has God been at work in those challenges?

Next Steps:

Take a moment to thank God for the beautiful mix of challenge and faith in your life. Find a passage in the Bible that will help you surrender to God's will and speak to the hope you have for this coming year.

Prayer:

God, I thank you for a faith that allows the ups and downs that life will bring. I pray the new year will provide me with more opportunities to serve you. God, help me always see you in the mix of everything going on around me, in me, and through me. You are bigger, stronger, and more powerful than anything that comes my way. I praise you and love you! In the name of Jesus, amen.

This post was written by Julie Estep, a Perrysburg campus attender and regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.

Thursday: Leaning into God's Strength in Challenging Times - Church at Home

January 2, 2025

The Apostle Paul shares a profound revelation in **2 Corinthians 12:9**:

Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."

Paul understood that our weaknesses allow God's strength to weave our story and purpose—we're his masterpieces.

Our lives are a complex weave of contrasting threads, stitched with moments of joy and strands burdened by the weight of adversities. Each passing year contributes distinct patterns to this design. Often, we find ourselves face-to-face with moments that test our endurance and challenge the depths of our strength, resilience, and faith.

It is within this tension that we discover a profound truth—*these challenges offer a unique and transformative opportunity.*

As we reflect on the twists and turns of the year gone by, we find an invitation to lean into God's divine embrace. We recognize that these trying times are not meant to be endured alone. They become a sacred space where we shift from self-reliance to a profound trust in the unwavering strength and grace found only in him.

In the intricate dance of joy and adversity lies a poignant choice: We can lean into God, seeking solace, wisdom, and strength beyond our own, or we can navigate the intricacies of life solely by our limited understanding and abilities.

Today, we choose to anchor ourselves in the divine.

When we attempt to navigate life's challenges in isolation, we risk breaking under the pressure. Yet, when we acknowledge our vulnerabilities and turn to God, we invite him to interlace our struggles with threads of love, hope, and peace. These divine strands strengthen not only our individual fibers but also the ties that bind us to one another. In our weakness, God's grace becomes the gentle yet resilient reinforcement that prevents us from unraveling or even breaking.

Imagine a story in which:

*The threads of **love** bind us together;*

*The threads of **hope** bridge the gaps of despair;*

*And the threads of **peace** bring calm to the chaos.*

As we reflect on the trials we faced last year, let's be open to his transformative work. Allow God to do what he does best—mend us where we are frayed too thin. In the act of surrender, we unveil the truth that our challenges serve as the raw fibers awaiting God's masterful touch to be intricately woven into a beautiful tapestry.

Questions:

In what specific situations during the last year did you find it challenging to rely on God's strength rather than your own?

How might embracing your weaknesses provide an opportunity for the power of Christ to work through you?

Next Steps:

Identify one area in your life where you've been relying on your own strength. Purposefully surrender it to God, asking for his grace and inviting his power to work through your weakness. Ask a spouse, significant other, or close friend to help keep you accountable to leaning in and receiving God's grace.

Prayer:

Father, in moments of challenge and weakness, I am grateful for the assurance that your grace is all I need. Teach me to boast in my weaknesses, knowing that it is through them that your power finds its fullest expression in my life. Help me lean into you, relying not on myself but on the strength and grace that flow from your loving heart. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

This post was written by Monique Myers, a Perrysburg campus attender and regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.

Friday: Abiding in Christ - Church at Home

January 3, 2025

An early mentor of mine had a discipline of praying about and selecting a character trait to focus on throughout the coming year and a related Bible verse. I adopted that practice for myself and have found it helpful in seeing God's work in my life in the new year.

A few years ago, as I reflected on how at Christmastime, God came near to us, my word for 2023 was *abide*. The accompanying scripture verse was **John 15:7** (NKJV):

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you wish, and it shall be done for you."

For me, abiding in Christ means making time for him and resting in his presence on a daily basis. It allows me to see God's movement in my life. Every day, I ask myself these questions and patiently listen for answers:

What am I thankful for?

What are the challenges facing me?

Where is God at work in all of these places?

Unless I slow down long enough to ask and listen carefully for the responses, it is difficult to discern God's movement in the busyness and bustle of my world! When I take time to look and listen, I see how God has indeed given me all I have asked for ... and more!

Of course, in some instances his answer has been, "Not yet." But when I abide in his presence, I gain the assurance to know that he will provide those things in his timing and in his way. His answers enable me to trust that he will do what he has promised, even when the way seems blocked.

These verses from Proverbs are favorites of mine, because I know they are true!

Proverbs 3:5-6

⁵ ***Trust in the Lord with all your heart;*** do not depend on your own understanding. ⁶ ***Seek his will in all you do,*** and he will show you which path to take (emphasis added).

He will—when you ask *and listen*. He is a gracious and loving Father!

Questions:

What are you thankful for? What challenges are you facing? Where is God at work in your life?

Next Steps:

Spend some time with God, pondering the answers to the above questions. Find a character trait that God might want you to work on in 2024. Find accompanying verses to memorize so you can focus on that trait throughout the year.

Prayer:

Gracious Father, thank you for new beginnings! As I look at the blank canvas that is 2024, I ask you to help me write your name at the top of every day. Help me to seek you first and listen closely as you speak—sometimes in a whisper, sometimes with a megaphone if necessary! I trust you, Lord, with all my heart because you have been so kind to me! I know nothing will change

about that, no matter what challenges this year brings. You are faithful and good, always! I love you, and it's in Jesus' beautiful name that I pray. Amen.

This post was written by Lauri White, an Oregon campus attender and regular contributor to the LivingItOut Devotional.

Saturday: A Year in Response- 1.4.2025 - Church At Home

January 4, 2025

God often speaks to us when we spend time in Scripture.

Ask God if there is something specific for your life in the next season that he'd like you to focus on or lean into. Use these verses to ask God for a word or guiding theme and then journal his response. (After reading the devotional, scroll down to the featured verses. Click on the blue arrows below each verse to expand journal boxes available to capture your thoughts.)

Proverbs 29:18

Where there is no vision, the people perish.

John 10:27

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Psalms 95:6-7

Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care.

If only you would listen to his voice today!

Need more time? Didn't get a word and aren't even sure how? Haven't attended service yet? Click [here](#) for an additional resource on finding your word for the year.

This post was written by CedarCreek Staff.