

January: Walk in Love in the New Year

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Verse:

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord,
plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.
Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV)

Upward Gaze:

Heavenly Father, as we begin a new year, new goals, and plans. Let us remember Your plan and purpose for us. Thank You that we can bring our dreams and desires to You. Thank You for opening doors and closing doors. Let us seek You in every choice that's made in our lives. Thank You for answering prayers. In Christ's most holy and precious name. Amen.

Development of Theme:

January is a well-known month for making resolutions for the new year. setting goals for things to get accomplished in the year. Maybe we have projects to start or projects to finish. It could be vacations to plan. Financial goals. Fitness goals. Learning a new language. Writing a book. This is the time of year when people stop and think about what they want to make as a priority for the year. What they want to change to make life better.

This is also the time of year when we look back and see what we have accomplished or not accomplished and how that influenced the person we've become. This is the opportunity to reflect on the past. Find where we failed and how we can do better. Where we've slacked off and where we need to be more driven.

I'm not a huge fan of New Year's resolutions. Many people give up after the first few weeks because they missed a day or two on their goal. We aren't perfect. We're going to fail on our goals sometimes. That's okay! We just pick right back up and learn from whatever made us veer off course.

Our verse is an important one to remember when we are making these plans in our lives. Whether we are planning on January 1st or July 1st. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" Jeremiah 29:11.

Too often we start planning without first asking God in prayer what He would have us do. Some don't ask in case His plans are not their plans. However, scripture clearly states "for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope". God only wants the best for us, and He is the only one who knows what is best for us. God's answer of a no, is truly a blessing we've yet to realize. I love the example of an artist and spectator. Before the artist begins a drawing, the spectator only sees a white canvas. However, the artist sees the full picture. As he paints, the spectator sees only in part. It's not until the painting is complete that the spectator sees what the artist was seeing all along.

God is the artist. He knows all things. He sees the completed picture. We walk in faith because we cannot see His plans. Through His Word, we are assured that His plans are for our good and not harm.

As we set our resolutions, what should we be mindful of? Our theme for the year revolves around showing love to those around us. What does that look like? By this point you should have read through several studies. You've gotten a glimpse into some ways of showing love to those around you.

We don't often think about doing for others when January 1st rolls around. The new year's resolutions tend to be about what we think will make us happier, better, thinner, smarter, less stressed, etc. What if we changed our thought process and put others before self. I believe God blesses us when we are selfless. We don't do it for recognition, but what's that saying, "you can't out give God." That's in all areas of our lives.

Mindfully, purposely walking alongside people this year could be a changing point in your relationship with others and with God. He is walking alongside them, and if He asks you to join Him this year what will your answer be? Mine is, "Yes Lord! Open my eyes to see those I need to be with and who need me." They can be strangers, people from our past, people we have never given much thought or attention to. Keep you mind, heart, and eyes opened. He has work for us this year. We need to be willing vessels.

Inward Glimpse (Reflection):

Take time to reflect on the past year. Ask God to reveal areas in your life that need improving. How can you improve relationships with those you struggle with? Seek Him and His plans for this new year. Commit your plans, dreams, goals, and desires to Him and let Him direct your steps.

Outward Glance (Discussion):

As a women's group make some goals for this new year.

Set a monthly goal to reach beyond your CPWM. Some ideas include:

- Plan a card writing day, visiting shut-ins, volunteer at a rescue mission.

- Find a simple pattern to make some "prayers and squares" quilts.

- Have a craft day to crochet/knit hats or blankets for a local hospital.

- Brainstorm about other ideas.

Then plan some special outings for your group.

- See a movie together.

- Plan a meal at a restaurant together.

- Meet for coffee.

Go ahead and put the monthly projects on the calendar and commit to see it happen. At the end of this year you will be able to reflect back and see how much closer your group became and the wonderful things you accomplished.

One more peek:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

Matthew 7:7-8 (ESV)