

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* (Romans 12:2)

Well Church, we’ve finally arrived at the last month of yet another year and what a journey it’s been! For most of us, 2018 began with some well-intentioned resolutions that we could proudly check off of our list of personal or spiritual successes this year. Unfortunately for so many of us, at some point things just seemed to get a little sideways on us. When it did and adversity reared its ugly head we often found ourselves struggling to deal with situations that put our faith to the test. Some of us suffered mentally or spiritually while others lost loved ones or suffered through debilitating injuries or illnesses. But, as we look forward to the annual celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior, will there ever be a better time to stop and reflect upon where we’ve grown spiritually, where we may have fallen short and what we’ve learned about ourselves this year? Of course we all know that these are things that we should be taking stock of every day but sometimes the challenges of this world just seem to get in the way of our good intentions. So, as we prepare to put 2018 behind us, wouldn’t this be a great time to turn our focus away from the stresses of the world and look to God to get our lives back on track? *“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand...”* (Isaiah 41:10)

We’ve all heard it said that *“sometimes bad things happen to good people.”* In-fact, in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus himself said that not a one of us, good or bad, are immune to adversity. *“He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”* (5:45) Never one to mince words, in that one verse Jesus makes it very clear that at some point we’re all going to find ourselves right smack in the middle of situations that we won’t be able to control or overcome on our own. Christian, it really doesn’t matter how well-intentioned your New Year’s resolutions are in January, when things begin to unravel on you, all of those good intentions and your positive attitude will be overwhelmed with feelings of doubt, regret, sorrow, frustration, anxiety or even depression. But, when adversity does come your way, it’s important to remember that even the darkest moments of your life are a part of God’s plan for your spiritual growth. So when the misfortunes that life sends your way wind up on your doorstep, you simply can’t afford to wallow in self-pity or wrap yourself in the cloak of a victim. If you don’t do something to detach yourself from adversity quickly it will absolutely consume you so you have to get proactive and do something about it right away! *“Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains.”* (Psalm 107:13-14)

Sadly, when things are going well we all seem to take God for granted and rely on ourselves to get through our daily routines. When we fall on hard times though, it certainly doesn’t take long to find that we are not in control and on our own we are absolutely powerless to do anything that will change things for the better. Those are the times when we need to pray constantly and lean even more heavily on our faith in God or we’ll just fall away and wallow in misery and despair. Christian, when you find yourself struggling through hard times, your faith in God and the power of prayer is the only way that you’ll ever find the strength to overcome them. It’s only when you put your trust in God and pray sincerely that His Holy Spirit will calm all of that chaos and confusion that you’re feeling. As you continue to pray your focus will be directed away

from your earthly concerns and He will provide you with the spiritual strength that you'll need to overcome even the toughest of times. He may choose not take away all of your pain right away, that's just not how God usually does things, but, through Christ Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, He will certainly open your eyes and teach you to understand it so that you endure the pain that you're feeling. *"But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."* (1 Peter 4:13)

Today is indeed the perfect time to stop and reflect upon how much or how little you've grown. However, it's important to keep in mind that every new day that God provides brings with it the opportunity for a new beginning and another chance to get it right. So please don't put off your salvation until you think the conditions are right because that day will probably never come. Put your trust in the Lord today! Pray and start working on your spiritual life wherever you are and do it today, right here, right now! Yes Christian, God does hear your prayers but He may not provide you with an answer today and when He does it may not be the answer that you're looking for. In either case, keep praying because tomorrow just might not be that sure thing that you think it is. You don't have to wait for the New Year to make another resolution, there is no better time than today to put all of your earthly cares on God's broad shoulders, pray for His divine guidance and then simply do His will to the best of your ability! *"The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles"* (Psalm 34:17). And Christian, you certainly don't need to wait until your life conditions are perfect because in all honesty, they'll never be perfect. If you fall short today, remember this, you can't go back and restart the clock today but you can make a new start and you can do that RIGHT NOW!

Your Brothers in Christ Jesus,

Brian, Rod and Carl