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fresh start

New Year

memories

goals progress

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resolutions questions

new year

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personally speaking



The New Year is more than just a marking of time—or at least it can be. Many people see it as an opportunity to make a new start in some area of their lives.

Perhaps it's our new calendars with their fresh images or our new diaries and weekly planners with their unspoiled pages. Perhaps it's the knowledge that millions of other people around the world (and a few people closest to us in particular) are making New Year's resolutions and setting their sights higher. We don't want to be outdone or left behind. Call it what you will—a personal wake-up call, a jolt to our collective conscience, or peer pressure—it's effective ... at least for a few days. We all know how that goes.

But this year can be different. This year your New Year's resolutions can be the start of wonderful, lasting changes—if you include God in your plans and work with Him. If your motivation is to please Him most of all, then you can be sure that He's more than happy to help you make any necessary changes. In the process, because He loves you and wants you to be happy, He will also grant you the other desires of your heart. That's a promise! (Psalm 37:4).

And don't let it stop with you. Find out what changes others you care about would like to make, and get behind them. Now *that's* rewarding!

From all of us at *Activated*, may God bless you and may the coming year be your happiest and best yet.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Keith Phillips". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

Keith Phillips
For the *Activated* family

God's Mysterious Ways

THE HOSPITAL CHART

By REBECCA WATERS, USA

It was 11:30 P.M. on New Year's Eve when my husband Paul and I received an unexpected phone call from our city's hospital—a call that led to a mysterious and wonderful meeting with a man whom neither of us will ever forget!

"A Mr. McMullen has been admitted to this hospital," the voice on the phone informed us. "He is in extremely serious condition. His admission records list you as his next of kin."

"Neither my wife nor I have any relatives named McMullen," Paul replied. We looked at each other in bewilderment. "In fact, neither of us can recall having ever met a man by that name," he added.

It seemed such an obvious mistake. But then the hospital did have our correct names and phone number. After we hung up, we couldn't put the call out of our minds. Finally we decided to go see Mr. McMullen.

We arrived at the hospital at 1:30 A.M. As we entered the room, we found a very frail, graying old man whom we had never met before. The nurse asked him if he knew us, and

he responded that he did not.

"What is your name?" I asked him softly as I bent over to take his hand.

"It's Jim," he answered, in a tone that betrayed his loneliness.

For the next hour or two we talked with Jim, getting to know him and reading him comforting passages from the Bible. "Jesus loves you in a very personal way," we reassured him. Then Jim prayed with us to receive Jesus as his Savior.

The next day we brought Jim some flowers, and our children came along to chat with Jim and sing for him. He was no longer the lonely, forlorn man we met the night before, for he had found Jesus, and the Lord's love shone in his eyes.

About a week later, Jim died. We missed our new friend, but were happy to know that Jim had passed on to a better life.

We made some inquiries, but never did find out who put our names on Jim's chart. Perhaps it was an angel, sent by the Lord to lead us to Jim just in time to help him find his way to his eternal home. ○

To be faithful until death ...

... Just be faithful today!

One of the best verses that you could claim for the coming year—and for the rest of your life, for that matter—is: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

Some people teach that this is referring to salvation. They say, “Well, if you always do the right thing and don’t make any mistakes, if you’re perfect, if you ‘keep the faith,’ *maybe* you’ll make it to Heaven.” That’s *not* what that verse

is talking about at all!

The Lord isn’t talking about salvation; He’s talking about your faithfulness in *service*—if you faithfully do your best to please God and obey His Word from now until the day you die.

The secret of being “faithful until death” is to be faithful one day at a time. You can only live one day at a time; you can only be faithful one day at a

time. So don’t worry about whether you were faithful yesterday or not, or whether you’re going to be faithful tomorrow. Just do your best to be faithful today. The Bible tells us to forget the past (Philippians 3:13), and tomorrow will take care of itself (Matthew 6:34)—or the Lord will take care of it. Just be faithful today. Don’t worry about your whole life! Don’t keep asking yourself, “Am I going to be faithful until the day I die, so I can be sure to get a crown of life?”

Just be faithful every day, one day at a time, and you’ll be faithful until death and receive an eternal crown of life. I believe that it is going to be some sort of an actual halo or shining crown that will enable us to shine like the stars (Daniel 12:3). So that’s my prayer for you, that you will be faithful every day, just one day at a time until the day you die or the Lord returns, and that you won’t worry about the future.

If you think about trying to be faithful for the rest of your life, that scares you, that worries you. That’s just too overwhelming, and you feel that you’ll never make it. But what about today? Weren’t you pretty faithful today? Surely you did a lot of things faithfully today.

I dare say that you were probably faithful today. Give the *Lord* a little credit! I’m trying to get you to



appreciate yourself a little bit, and to thank the Lord for how long He has kept you faithful *already!* You have probably worried about lots of days and events that are now passed. You have probably had *many* worries, nearly all of which never happened. And here you are—still faithful!

Look at all the time that you wasted wondering about whether you were going to be faithful or not, or whether you were going to succeed or not, and whether you were going to still be doing your best for the Lord. All that time you worried about it was time wasted, because here you are, still loving and following the Lord, still faithful. Be thankful for that! You have been faithful—not yet “until death”—but this far!

So quit worrying about the future! Quit worrying about whether you’re going to make it tomorrow or not. Jesus said, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:34). Don’t try to live the coming year in advance, and the year after that. “I wonder if I’m going to make it through tribulation, and I wonder if I’m going to be ready when the Lord comes, and I wonder if I’m going to get any reward or crown?” Quit worrying about that! Just keep busy today. Do what you’re supposed to do today. Be faithful *today!*

The *Lord* has kept you faithful today, and you ought to thank Him for that! Too many people think that being faithful is some kind of a “good works” thing that they have to work up on their own. But that’s not where faith comes from. Faith comes from the *Lord*. He’s “the author and finisher of our faith”



(Hebrews 12:2). He gives us faith as we take in His Word (Romans 10:17).

If you’re faithful, you’re full of faith. Do you still have your faith today? Then you are full of faith. Do you still believe in Jesus today? Then you’re full of faith. Do you believe you’re saved? Then you’re full of faith. My goodness, you’re so full of faith, I don’t see how you can hold it all!

You’ve been faithful today; you’ve been full of faith today. So why worry about whether or not you’re going to be full of faith tomorrow? You may have trials and tests, you may get discouraged, you may get tired, you may make mistakes, but so what? You’ll still have your faith, so you’ll still be



So don't
worry about
the future.
Don't worry
about
tomorrow.
Don't worry
about even
the next
hour.

more full of that than anything else, right?

Stop trying so hard! Stop worrying about it. We just have to depend on the Lord to keep us faithful, and trust Him that our faith won't fail, because our faith comes from *Him*. Faith is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

Only the Lord can keep you faithful. Of course, you have to give Him a little cooperation. You have to pray and listen to Him, you have to read His Word, and you have to try to do what you know He wants you to do, but that's the easy part. It's *His* job to keep you faithful—full of faith, filled with faith that comes from Him. And if you don't have enough faith, all you have to do is read and listen to the Word. That's the source of faith. If you do that, He'll give you all the faith you need. Just keep reading the Word and trusting the Lord and don't worry.

You don't have to have faith for tomorrow. You don't have to have faith for next week or next month, and certainly not for next year or many years from now. You don't have to have that faith *now*. You'll get it when the time comes. The only faith you need now is for today.

You made it through another year, so what were you worrying about? Before long, you will have made it through this day—another day of faithfulness—and then you can go to sleep and not worry about tomorrow. Rest in the Lord. “Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on *His* faithfulness” (Psalm 37:3).

You don't even have to have faith for a whole day. Just have faith for this

moment—right now. Just have faith for one moment at a time! When you wake up in the morning, you don't need to worry, “Have I got faith for today?” Just get up and have faith for each little thing that you do throughout the day. That's all you have to have faith for. If faith no larger than a grain of mustard seed can move an entire mountain (Matthew 17:20), then it shouldn't even take a microscopic speck of faith to keep you doing all the things that you need to do in a day!

So don't worry about the future. Don't worry about tomorrow. Don't worry about even the next hour. God will give you grace when the hour comes. He not only gives power for the hour, He gives power for the second or the split second—the instant! That's all you need. The only faith you need is what you have right now, for right now.

“Be faithful until death,” Jesus says, “and I will give you the crown of life.” You're going to get a special crown, a shining crown, a crown that you can be proud of. Of course, you're going to fall down before the Lord and cast your crowns before Him, like the 24 elders do in Revelation 4:10. Every time you start praising the Lord, you're going to forget all about that crown and it's going to tumble off at His feet. When you bow down and give Him the glory, you'll cast your crown at His feet! But since the Lord gave it to you, you'd better pick it up again and wear it. Your crown will show what you have done for the Lord, and the Lord wants the world to see it! He wants everyone to see the badge of your faithfulness—a crown of life!

God bless and keep you faithful throughout the New Year and all the years to come, until you join Him in Heaven and receive your crown! ○



Goodbye Past, HELLO NEW YEAR

By CLAIRE NICHOLS

GO FOR GOLD IN 2002

By PAUL THE APOSTLE, WRITING
FROM THE 1ST CENTURY

In a race everyone runs, but only one person gets first prize. So run your race to win (1 Corinthians 9:24 TLB).

I do not count myself to have apprehended [attained]; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13–14).

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:1–2).

The New Year is traditionally a time when businesses check their inventories, weigh accounts, set goals, and make projections for the coming year. It's a time of reevaluation and establishing new policies. All of that is simply good business.

It's also "good business" to stop and take stock of our personal lives. A short time of reflection can refresh the spirit, bring goals and priorities back into perspective, and help us start the new year on the right foot.

Ask yourself, "What am I doing to help people? What will I be remembered for? Am I making a difference by making others' lives better or happier? What did I accomplish this past year? What goals did I reach? Was it a year that I can be thankful for because, in spite of some missteps and mistakes, I gave of my best in the big things? Is Jesus pleased with how I used last year? In which areas do I need to try harder?"

Count your blessings and remember all that the Lord has done for you, and pray for the year ahead. "What in the past year am I most thankful for? What should be my prayer for the year ahead?" Commit your goals and dreams to Jesus in prayer, and dedicate the coming year to Him. Ask Him to be a part of every facet of your life. Ask Him to guide your thoughts and actions, and to order your days. And above all, ask Him to fill you to overflowing with His love, for your sake and the sakes of those whose lives you touch.

Then you'll be ready to launch into the new year with a heart full of faith, hope, love, and courage. And if you will continue to include Jesus in all you do and follow where He leads, success is guaranteed! ○

Picture yourself on a rugged wind-swept mountain path. The boughs of the fir trees sag under the weight of fallen snow. This is no beginner's trail. It's steep and rocky and there are treacherous crevasses and gullies. It's snowing so hard that you can't see very far ahead. When the snow lets up momentarily, the sky is gray and bleak. Your path isn't marked and you're not traveling with a guide, so you have to go by sight and intuition.

You trudge onward, knowing that the hardest is yet to come. There will be even steeper grades and less visibility. You'll come to places where you must use your climbing equipment just to be able to hold on to the mountain. Even now it

takes every ounce of your strength to press onward. Your muscles ache and your face stings from the cold. The wind causes tears to form, then blows them from the corners of your eyes and they turn to beads of ice on your cheeks. Your hands are numb. But you have great courage and tenacity, and you are spurred on by a tremendous compulsion to

reach the peak. These obstacles can't stop you. You forge onward.

Still, your strength is waning. You're being stretched to the limit in body and spirit, and deep down inside you wonder if you can make it.

Just then, through the trees, you see a glimmer of light. As you move on, the forest parts and there's a mountain lodge, a sort of way station for travelers. It's built of logs, with a steep pitched roof and wide overhang. It looks so warm, so inviting.

There are probably hot drinks inside—perhaps coffee or tea or



hot chocolate, perhaps even brandy, you think.

Smoke from the chimney tells you that a fire is burning in the fireplace. As you get closer, the fire flickers and gleams through a break in the curtains at the window. You can hear people laughing inside as they eat and drink, and you catch glimpses of

them. It's so warm inside that they don't even have their jackets on. The lodge is like an island of warmth, cheer, and encouragement in the middle of the snowstorm.

You pause for a moment to observe the travelers inside, who are getting warmed, refreshed, strengthened, and rested for the rest of the journey. *Maybe they're exchanging information about what lies ahead or tips on how to make it the rest of the way, you think.* Or maybe this is their first time too, but there are guides inside who know the way, the pitfalls, and

dangers, who are advising them of the safest and quickest route.

And there's food inside—good, hearty, nourishing food. You've been hungry for so long that you can hardly even remember what it's like to enjoy a warm meal. You've just been eating trail snacks along the way because you

didn't want to stop long enough to fix anything more substantial.

There are probably guest rooms where you could nap or even spend the night. The place seems to have everything a weary traveler might need. You feel pulled by the happy voices inside. You could use some companionship and a chance to compare notes, draw encouragement, and learn from fellow travelers.

Yet, as you survey the lodge and consider the benefits it offers, you have second thoughts. You've got to keep up your momentum, you reason. Sure, your muscles ache, you're half-starved, and your extremities are numb and stinging with cold. But stop? That's for weaklings and quitters.

to stop and get rested and refreshed at that lodge.

Onward you press, into the dark forest and the blizzard, up the menacing mountain. It's better to go it alone, you reason, relying on sheer determination to carry you through to the end.

And that's the last you're seen or heard from.

—
It's hard to imagine anyone doing such a thing, but this is actually what many of us do in spirit when we're faced with difficult challenges and when a rest in the warm and caring arms of Jesus could make all the difference. He has given us everything we need to make the rewarding yet sometimes difficult and perilous journey

Why then do we ignore this help and go it alone? Does pride get the better of us? Is it partly because we don't want to admit that we're not sufficient in ourselves—that we need Jesus, the guidance of His Word, and the help of fellow Christians?

And so we trudge on, and oh, the way is so difficult!

Jesus can't take away the steepness of the climb or the difficulty of the path, but He *can* make your journey much easier. These rest stops with Him along the way will make the journey a joy because you'll have the strength to meet each challenge as it comes.

Listen to His call in your heart, "Stop in at My Word Lodge, won't you? Have a cup of comfort with Me. Warm

THE MOUNTAIN LODGE

—Adapted from a message from Jesus

You can make it. You'd rather find the way yourself. You'll get a little more glory that way.

A little voice inside you says, "What if you don't make it? What if you take a wrong turn? What if you have an accident because you didn't know the danger points? What if you run out of strength?" But you ignore this voice that is telling you

of life—His Word, prayer, communion with Him, and Christian fellowship and partnership—yet so many of us try to make the journey on our own. If we stopped for spiritual rest, we'd find food for our soul, fellowship with Jesus, and answers to our problems in His Word and through prayer. We'd find guidance from helpers who know the way.

yourself by the fireplace of My Word. Learn from those who have gone before you. Rest in one of My big comfortable beds. Then you'll be ready to set out again. And when you reach the mountaintop, you'll rejoice at the breathtaking view and drink from crystal clear mountain pools—and you'll return to tell others how they can get there too." ○

it happened to me



one mistake I don't regret

FROM P.G., COLOMBIA

One Saturday I was pulled over by the traffic police for a routine check. To my chagrin, I had carelessly let some of my paperwork expire. I was taken directly to jail. Since it was Saturday afternoon, nothing could be done until Monday. *What a way to spend my weekend*, I thought. The Lord, however, had other ideas. He was about to make good use of my mistake.

I shared a cell with four men who were all in jail for more serious crimes. Realizing the dim futures they faced quickly chased away my self-pity. I decided to tell my cellmates about the forgiveness and hope they could find in Jesus. The youngest prisoner, a 27-year-old charged with homicide, was the first to pray with me to receive the Lord. Upon seeing this, the three others offered me some of their food and a

bed (there weren't enough beds to go around). We began talking, and I continued to explain more about God's great love for them.

On Monday I was taken before a judge, fined, and released. Before leaving, I promised my cellmates that I would visit them soon, and asked for authorization to do so.

The next Sunday I went back to jail, this time under happier circumstances. The tracts and small gifts I took the men—sugar, tea, and bread—were met with heartfelt thanks. The four men I had shared a cell with then helped pass out tracts to the other inmates and visitors.

My wife and I continue to visit and minister to the men in this jail. We are thrilled to see peace and happiness replace despair in the lives of those who are getting to know Jesus as their best Friend and constant Companion. They are now reading *Activated* magazines and other faith-building publications from The Family, and they continue to help their fellow inmates learn about the Lord as well.

God works in mysterious ways, and sometimes He even uses our mistakes—like my failure to renew my car papers—to help accomplish His purposes. ○



GOD KNOWS

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

—MINNIE LOUISE HASKINS
(1875–1957)

THE BIG ROCKS

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

An expert on the subject of time management was speaking to a group of business students. He stood in front of these high-powered overachievers, pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed Mason jar, and set it on a table in front of him. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, “Is this jar full?”

Everyone in the class said, “Yes.”

Then he said, “Really?” He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. Then he asked the group once more, “Is the jar full?”

By this time the class was on to him. “Probably not,” one of them answered.

“Good!” he replied. He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, “Is this jar full?”

“No!” the class shouted.

Once again he said, “Good!” Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim.

Then he looked up at the class and asked, “What is the point of this illustration?”

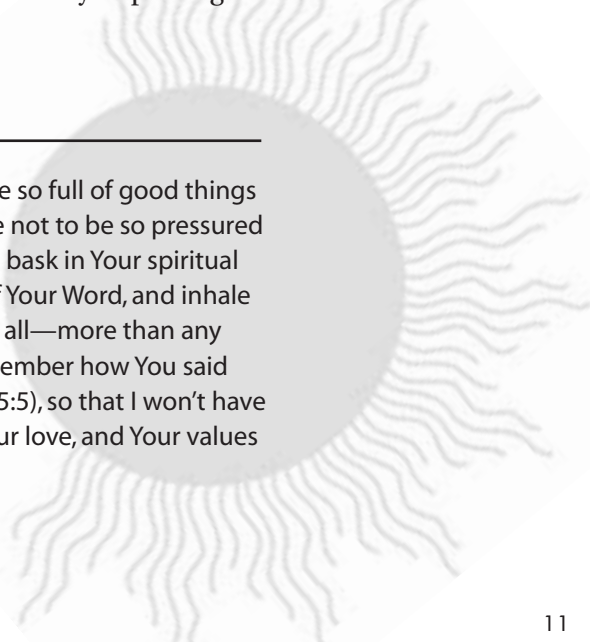
One eager beaver raised his hand and said, “The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard you can always fit some more things into it!”

“No,” the speaker replied, “that’s not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is this: If you don’t put the big rocks in first, you’ll never get them in at all.”

What are the “big rocks” in your life? Are you putting them in first? ○

Prayer for the New Year

Dear Lord, keep me from having my life so full of good things that I don’t have time for the best. Help me not to be so pressured that I put off my time with You. Help me to bask in Your spiritual sunshine, rest in Your arms, drink deeply of Your Word, and inhale of Your Spirit. Help me to seek You most of all—more than any of the other things I enjoy. Help me to remember how You said that without You, I can do nothing (John 15:5), so that I won’t have misplaced priorities, but I will have You, Your love, and Your values in the right place—first!





Q : Each New Year I make resolutions that I feel will help me get more out of life. But no matter how great a start I make, I can't seem to keep up the momentum. What can I do to stick with my resolutions and get the results I want?



A : We can all relate. It's difficult when we feel we're not making progress in the areas we know we need to improve in. As much as we try and as many resolutions as we make, we often can't seem to break bad habits or form new good ones. That can become so frustrating and disappointing that we eventually lose faith that we can change. Because we've tried before and failed, we feel we might as well give up.

Though you may sometimes feel that way, the change you desire *is* possible. You are God's creation, and like the loving Father He is, He's very interested in every aspect of your life. He's ready, willing, and able to give you what you need to be truly happy, make progress, and live up to your full potential. So if you're willing to let God help you, then you'll get the results you're looking for. All He needs is your cooperation and for you to put forth effort in the right direction. If you'll do what you can do, then He will do the rest.

Here are some simple tried and proven techniques for solid progress:

1. Be fully persuaded that the change is needed. Make a list of reasons for making the change. Start with your own reasons, then study God's Word on the subject and add *His* reasons. Your own reasons may be good, but Word-based reasons will reinforce your conviction and give you something solid to stand on when you're

tempted to not live up to your resolution (Matthew 24:35).

2. Ask for and claim God's help. If you're convinced that a certain change is what God wants for you (and this should be one of the main reasons for wanting to make any change in the first place), you can ask for and expect His help. It *is* possible for you to change in any area you and God agree needs to be changed, because even the things that are impossible for you are possible for God (Luke 18:27). He is always there to help you—24/7! Memorizing and claiming appropriate verses from the Bible will help you overcome old thought patterns and provide the impetus to change (Titus 3:5).

3. Set realistic goals. Unrealistic goals are demoralizing and therefore counterproductive. Don't attempt to break the world record in the high jump on your first try. You'll only become discouraged and quit far short of your potential, let alone the record. Start with the bar at a height you know you can clear with a little work, then raise it a notch at a time.

4. Don't try to improve in too many areas at once. Determine what your priorities are, and stick to those. Once you're making consistent progress in the big areas, add the others one or two at a time.



5. Program the change into your daily or weekly schedule. Unless you set aside specific times to take positive action to enact the change—to get more exercise, for example—it will probably get lost in the press of everything else you have to do, like it always has. Begin and end those times with prayer.

6. Confide in someone. Few things encourage and strengthen resolve like sharing your desire to change with somebody who respects you, understands your reasons, and will cheer you on. This is why support groups such as those offered by Alcoholics Anonymous are so successful.

7. Be open to help from others. It takes humility to ask your spouse, a close friend, or a coworker for their honest opinion about how you're progressing toward your goal, but they can provide insight as well as encouragement. Nearly everyone in the record books and history books had a coach, trainer, mentor, or supportive mate.

8. Make a pact. Work on it together with someone who shares the same goal. Challenge each other. Spur each other on. Help one another up when one stumbles. Victories are sweetest when they're shared.

9. Be patient. Progress usually comes one step at a time, and sometimes that one step is the result of two steps forward and one step back. As long as you're making some forward progress, you're on your way toward reaching your goal. Consistency is the key. It takes six weeks to two months to build a new habit.

10. Don't quit. If you slip back into your old habits, don't condemn yourself and don't give up. Review your list of reasons for wanting to change. Reevaluate your means for making that change. Fix whatever went wrong. Pray and claim appropriate promises from God's Word. Then get up and try again. Every setback that you don't let stop you actually strengthens you.

Happy New Year—and happy new *you!* ○

PERSONAL CHOICE AND DECISION-MAKING

For Christians, decision-making is synonymous with finding the will of God.

Psalms 25:4–5,9

Psalms 143:10

Don't try to reason things through on your own; ask God to tell you what's best, and be led by His Spirit.

Proverbs 3:5,7a

Proverbs 19:21

Isaiah 55:8–9

Good decisions are based on spiritual considerations and goals, rather than solely on circumstances or personal desires.

2 Corinthians 4:18

1 Kings 3:5,9–14

The Lord always chooses the best for us.

Psalms 37:4

Psalms 84:11

Jeremiah 29:11

Romans 8:28

One of the main principles involved in reaching a decision: Pray for the Lord's guidance.

Psalms 37:5

Proverbs 3:6

Isaiah 30:21

John 16:13

James 1:5

Sound decisions are based on God's Word.

Psalms 119:105

Psalms 119:133a

Proverbs 6:22–23

Matthew 7:24–25

Seeking godly counsel from others often leads to sounder, wiser decisions.

Proverbs 11:14

Proverbs 12:15

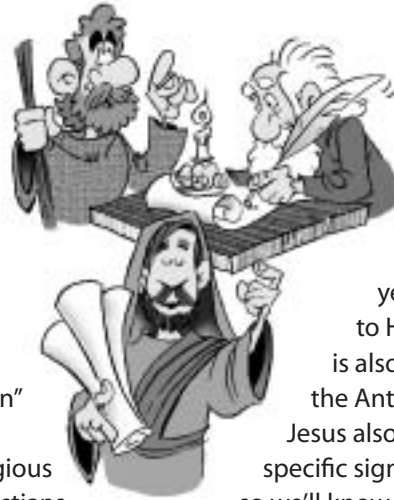
Proverbs 15:22

The final test: Is it loving?

Romans 13:9b–10

1 Corinthians 16:14

"left



Matthew chapter 24 is quite clear on the subject of Jesus' Second Coming, when He is going to return to gather all those who have received Him as their Savior and take them with Him back to Heaven—an event commonly referred to as "the Rapture." The rest of the Bible is also clear on when this happens. That's why for nearly 1,800 years practically every Christian believed Jesus would come back *after* the period He refers to as "Great Tribulation"—three and a half years of intense persecution.

It's only in the last couple of hundred years that people like C.I. Scofield (1843–1921) came along with the false doctrine that Jesus would come *before* the Tribulation. "Don't worry, Jesus is going to come and take you out of this world before the trouble comes, so you won't have to suffer." Naturally that became a very popular doctrine because it was just what everybody had been waiting to hear.

From my experience, many Christians who say they believe in the pre-Tribulation Rapture just don't want to have to go through the Tribulation and aren't the least bit prepared for it, so they come up with their own interpretation of the Scriptures or latch onto someone

else's false teaching. But the Bible specifically says not to do that. "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20). I don't care what other religious groups or other Christians say; what does the *Bible* say?

In Matthew 24, Jesus' disciples ask Him what will be the sign of His return, and Jesus answers with not one but a number of signs—wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution of Christians, a proliferation of false prophets, lawlessness, a pervading lack of love, and the Gospel being preached in every nation. "Then," He says, "the end will come" (Matthew 24:4–14).

Beginning with the next verse, Jesus tells us what we can expect during the Great



Tribulation—the last three and a half years leading up to His return, which is also the last half of the Antichrist's reign. Jesus also tells us what specific sign to watch for, so we'll know exactly when

that period is beginning. "When you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place ... then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:15,21). We find out in the book of Revelation that this "abomination of desolation" is an image of the Antichrist, or Beast (Revelation 13:14–15). Both Daniel and Revelation tell us that this image will be set up in the holy place at exactly the middle of the Antichrist's seven-year reign (Daniel 9:27; 12:11; Matthew 24:15–21; Revelation 13:5).

When does Jesus come back for us?—That's also plain as day: "Immediately *after* the tribulation of those days" Jesus returns (Matthew 24:29). Jesus doesn't say that when we see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place He's about to rescue us out of this world, away from the Antichrist

and the trouble to come. He warns us to head for the hills (Matthew 24:16). In other words, we will still be here.

And why did the Lord and the prophets go to so much trouble to tell us exactly how long the Great Tribulation would last—the exact time in terms of days, months, and years—if we didn't need to *know* these things, if we won't be here, counting the days and the weeks? (Daniel 7:25; 12:11; Revelation 13:5). Jesus told us these specifics because He wants us to be able to take heart in knowing that the Tribulation isn't going to last forever, and that every passing day is bringing us closer to the glorious end.

During the Tribulation, things will get so bad that many people will think it's time for Jesus to come, especially Christians who were taught that He was supposed to come *before* the Tribulation. They're going to expect Him to come any day. But Jesus warns us *not* to expect Him sooner than has been foretold. He also warns us to not be deceived by either false christs who will try to deceive us into thinking that *they* are Christ, or by false prophets who will try to tell us that Christ's coming is imminent or that

He's already here somewhere (Matthew 24:23–26). He tells us to not believe any of them, because when He comes, we will know it!

Some people who teach a pre-Tribulation Rapture go so far as to say that it's going to be a *secret* Rapture—that nobody is going to see Him except the saved. Nobody else is even going to know He came. All of a sudden a bunch of us are just going to disappear, and those who are left behind won't know what's happened to us.

If the Rapture is supposed to be a secret, why will the Lord make so much noise and put on such a show when He comes? His Word tells us that He's going to "come in the clouds with great power and glory." The sky will light up from one end to the other, and there will be such signs in the heavens that we



couldn't possibly mistake the fact that Jesus is coming. In fact, it says that "every eye shall see Him." Everyone



will also see the dead in Christ—all the saved people who have already died—rising to meet Him in the air as He comes. They'll hear Jesus, too, because He'll "descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and a great sound of the trumpet of God." And why are all of the unsaved going to mourn?—Because they're going to see and know what's happening (Matthew 24:27,30; Acts 1:9–11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 1:7). It will be the greatest spectacle the world has ever seen.

That doesn't sound like a secret coming or secret Rapture to me! Does it to you?

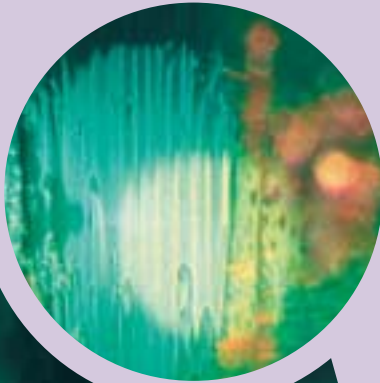
And there it is again, plain as day: *After* the dead rise to meet the Lord, "then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). If we got raptured *before*, then what are we doing still here? ○

(To be continued.)

behind"?

The Truth About the Rapture, Part 1

From Jesus With Love



**THERE'S NEVER A
FRACTION OF A
SECOND...**
... that I'm not caring for you.

In times of darkness I will be your light. In times of sadness I will be your joy. In times of struggle I will be your deliverance. In times of weakness I will be your strength. In times of question I will be your answer. And more important than any of this, I am love to you. You can never be lost to My love.

So never be discouraged or disheartened, and don't look back. Don't be remorseful about the mistakes and sins of the past, for the past is the past. In the very moment that you sought My forgiveness and called out to Me, I granted forgiveness, so there is no need to worry or fear or carry the burden yourself.

Never agonize over the past, and never fear for the future. Look up into My loving face. Come to Me, and you will find perfect forgiveness, perfect comfort, perfect strength, perfect love, from now until the day that I return for you.