

# What Do You Expect This Year?

Pastor Cliff Bergman - Pinawa Alliance Church

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(Topical)

Unless the Lord should return this year or He should call us to our eternal home, we have 362 days remaining in 2021. What do you expect this year? I'm not thinking about what do you predict will happen in our world, but rather what expectations do you want to fulfill this year? What do you want to accomplish? What do you want to fill these 362 days with? Let me encourage you today to not merely watch the days go by, but to be proactive and intentional with them.

Last week I pointed out that we are faced with a choice when our hearts are troubled. Jesus implied that is the case when He said, "*Let not your hearts be troubled,*" (John 14:1a ESV). While we require supernatural assistance to gain victory when our heart is troubled, that victory really begins with our choice to address our troubled heart from a Biblical standpoint. We decide how we will respond. At the very least we decide to try. That is also the case with many things this year. At the very least we will decide how we will relate to the things that will happen this year. In light of that it makes sense to establish some personal expectations or goals to pursue so that a year from now we will be able to look back with a sense of achievement.

The place to begin is to consciously renew our commitment to *walk with God*. That might seem unnecessary and something which we can just assume, particularly if you have known the Lord for decades. However, In the busyness and routine of everyday living it is easy to lose sight of this overarching vision; hence it is profitable to recommit ourselves to the vision of *walking with God* and keeping it in focus. For those who are married, even though we are confident our spouse still loves us, we still like to hear him/her vocalize that to us. Start this year by consciously declaring in your heart that you will seek to *walk with God* no matter what happens in 2021. Only God knows what lies down the road; it may be a year filled with unimaginable joy and blessing, but it could also contain the deepest of sorrow and pain. Decide at the outset, that no matter what happens or what anyone else does, you will *walk with God* as best as you can.

Before moving on, let me take a moment to address anyone who is reading this message and hasn't yet decided to accept Jesus' invitation to turn to Him for salvation. This is the most important and significant choice you will make in your entire life. Nothing is as pivotal as placing your faith and trust in Jesus. Jesus, whose arrival on earth we just celebrated, came with a very definite purpose. He came to do something no one else in the entire universe was qualified to do – to lay down his life for our sins on the cross of Calvary and offer salvation to all. Salvation is a free gift; it cannot be earned. It matters not how good a person tries to be or how many commendable qualities they display, none of that contributes to a person's salvation. Salvation is only gained by depending on that which Jesus has already done. He paid the price for sin – our sin. Becoming a Christian is by *faith alone*, in *God's grace alone*, in *Jesus Christ alone*. Our part is to believe on Jesus. It is God's gift to those who accept His assessment of their need for salvation and His provision for their salvation from their sin. Click on the following link for more on *How to Have a Personal Relationship With God* – <https://pinawaalliance.com/resources/how-to-have-a-personal-relationship-with-god/>

While the choice to *walk with God* should be at the forefront of every believer's agenda, it needs to be undergirded with some essential components in order to make it happen. We should have the expectation that a year from now our *walk with the Lord* will be more mature and we are more Christ-like in character than now. When we look back on this year there ought to be evidence that we have victoriously navigated through whatever this year holds in a manner that pleases the Lord; at the very least, that we have made some progress in living out our faith. Let us resolve to be intentional in our *walk with the Lord*. I have identified four critical components in our walk with God – places to set specific goals for this year.

## The Word of God

The Word of God, or the Scriptures are fundamental in outlining what a *walk with the Lord* consists of and how we might carry it out. The Word of God is essential to our growth and stability. That isn't surprising at all since the Scriptures are God's Word to us, they are His handbook on how to successfully navigate through life.

I frequently draw your attention to **2 Timothy 3.16-17** because of its importance.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** (ESV) 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Consider the roles of Scripture:

### 1. For Teaching

It is in the Scripture where we are given details about our God whose presence is unmistakably evident in creation and who has placed the innate knowledge of His existence within everyone. How else would we know He is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, righteous, loving, holy, true, just, infinite and so on? And we have been made in His image! We aren't a descendent of an ape as our world tells us, but we have been specially crafted by God, designed for an intimate relationship with Him. Apart from the Bible we would not know we are all sinners who needed a Savior, nor of God's provision for our salvation through His Son Jesus Christ who is fully God and fully man. We would know nothing of having a personal relationship with God nor of His innumerable promises and provisions for each of His children. The Scriptures inform us, direct us, nourish us, and nurture us. They are also,

### 2. For Reproof

According to the dictionary *reproof* means, *censure, condemnation, rebuke, reprimand, reproach*. While God is a loving God and wishes everyone would turn to Him for salvation, there are those who dismiss Him, or choose to come up with their own game plan for life. Scripture offers *reproof* to all who reject God, dismiss His standards of righteousness, or His Gospel.

### 3. For Correction

It comes as no surprise that many times we hold to beliefs or standards or understandings that have been shaped by the world, rather than the Word of God. Since, Scripture is absolute truth, (John 17.17) it is the grid by which we can accurately assess what we believe. Truth is not determined by majority opinion or the most recent and popular trend; it is determined by God. Thus, as we read God's Word we are *corrected*.

#### **4. For Training in Righteousness**

It is in the Word of God where we uncover God's standard of righteousness. Rather than conform to the pattern of this world, we need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12.2). How we should live and what we should value is not to be derived from the latest trend or by some celebrity or popular leader, but by what God has said.

An intentional walk with God demands we spend time in His Word. Not merely to gain information and direction, but also to nourish our souls. Unlike any other book, the Bible is living.

**Hebrews 4:12-13** (ESV) 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

In order for God to direct us, inform us of His care for us, His promises to us, His provisions for us, and experience His ministry to us, we need to actually read God's Word. It is as we read His Word that He illuminates it by His Spirit and impresses it upon our heart. It is often when we are reading the Bible that He reminds us of a truth, or enlarges our understanding of it, or directs us to an application, or gives us clarity in a decision before us, and so on. That won't happen if the Bible remains a closed book. Those who don't take time to read their Bible forfeit so much.

Reading a quality daily devotional is a great choice. They are readily available not only in print format but also online. You can be greeted each morning when you turn on your computer or check your phone. They usually include a Bible verse or two along with a brief commentary on them and perhaps an inspirational thought. But we need to supplement those brief devotionals with more extended and systematic Bible reading. If you don't already follow a Bible reading plan, let me encourage you to establish expectations for systematic Bible reading in 2021. You may want to follow a '*read through the Bible in a year*' plan. Many people simply start with Genesis 1.1 and continue on to Revelation 22.21. Some Bible reading plans include Old Testament and New Testament readings every day. My primary Bible, which has a nicely sized font, is 1,547 pages long so I only need to read a little more than 4 pages a day to read through it in a year. Some people supplement each day by reading 1 Psalm every day which means they complete the Book of Psalms every quarter. Another option is to add reading a chapter of Proverbs every day, thereby reading through the Proverbs every month. The important point is to decide to systematically read the Bible. The goal isn't to check off a box every day but to enhance your *walk with God* – to become more Christ-like, more intentional in your relationship with Him and to experience His care for you. If you haven't been too faithful in systematic Bible reading, you may want to start with the Gospels and set a goal to read through the New Testament this year. Choose something that is manageable for you. It is possible to move

through some portions of Scripture relatively quickly whereas others require a much slower pace to give us time to reflect on what it means and how it applies to us. If reading is difficult for you, today audio readings of the Bible are readily available. For those who would like a Bible reading plan to follow, check out the plans available in the following link is The Navigators. You may find a plan that works for you or you may want to establish your own.

[https://www.navigators.org/resource/bible-reading-plans/?mwm\\_id=242211979391&APCode=W04&gclid=Cj0KCQiA0MD\\_BRCTARIsADXoopbLDi4xcBQ2VwiuBEWDoC-3RxxUcMltwH8GJML0iegh5VWY5uknHBgaAk7dEALw\\_wcB](https://www.navigators.org/resource/bible-reading-plans/?mwm_id=242211979391&APCode=W04&gclid=Cj0KCQiA0MD_BRCTARIsADXoopbLDi4xcBQ2VwiuBEWDoC-3RxxUcMltwH8GJML0iegh5VWY5uknHBgaAk7dEALw_wcB)

Just like the children of Israel gathered manna every day to nourish them, we need a regular and consistent intake of God's Word to nourish us.

## Prayer

Prayer is simply communicating with God. We may pray silently or audibly. Different postures of prayer are reflected in the Scripture. There are different aspects to prayer – for example, praise and worship, confession, thanksgiving, petition on behalf of others, petition on behalf of ourselves. Some follow the pattern of the acronym ACTS – adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Others follow the pattern apparent in the Lord's Prayer. The most important point is to spend time with the Lord in prayer.

Often in conjunction with reading the Scriptures, we pray that God will illuminate His truth by His Spirit, reveal an application in our life, or identify how we might live it out in our setting. Sometimes we pray about very weighty matters, like the salvation of a friend or a complete stranger, victory for someone facing tremendous adversity or trials, wisdom when facing a difficult decision, etc. The reasons we pray are as varied as the people we pray for. Sometimes the reason we pray seems so small we feel a bit embarrassed to pray about it. I can't remember the number of times I have prayed when I am taking something mechanical apart and I drop a small part and I pray God will direct me to its location. Recently that happened when I took my shop vac apart and I didn't even realize I had dropped a part until I was putting it back together and I concluded a tiny little spacer from the motor shaft was missing. Somewhat sheepishly I prayed about it – and the Lord directed me to the inconspicuous spot where it was hidden.

It is only natural that the scope of our prayer life would range from very small and relatively trivial matters to ones which are huge and of grave consequence. Such is the range of our discussions with a trusted friend, so it is not unexpected that we will address them with our Lord. He is interested in us! He wants an intimate relationship with us.

There are so many things about God's will we don't need to pray about because God has already made His will clear in the Scriptures. In those instances we only need to pray God will give us the determination to be obedient. We call those areas where God reveals His will in Scripture, His *general* or *universal* will, because it is the same for everyone. It doesn't matter who you are or where you live, it applies to you. However, God also has a more *individual* and *specific* will. Lest anyone think otherwise, God's specific will is never contrary to His general will. When we spend time alone with the Lord, or as we read His Word, or throughout the day, He may prompt us by His Spirit to do something or He may remind us of a truth from Scripture and tug upon our heart with a place to apply it. The Lord may place a thought in our mind that pertains to

something where you have been searching for an answer. Not only do I need help from the Lord to accurately understand passages of Scripture, but I cannot recall the number of times when I am putting together a Sunday message and can't come up with an outline, or can't find the right word or expression to convey the meaning of the text, that the Lord provides me with the thoughts I needed.

One of the places where prayer is so important is when we are personally going through a difficult time. Or may it may be one of our children or a grandchild, or another loved one of ours. Our heart may be filled with anguish and despair and we need to the Lord to sustain us. The only solution is a supernatural one; we desperately need God to reach down and minister to us and see us through. There are innumerable times when Beverley and I have prayed for someone in the midst of great adversity and sorrow. Sometimes it is a spouse who has just stood at the grave of his or her spouse and we pray God will care for him or her; that God will reach down from heaven and come alongside after family and friends have left, when he/she returns to an empty house, or when they encounter the frequent occasions when they are reminded they are alone. Sometimes it is for a parent who deals with the death of a child. Or it might be someone who has lost his/her job. The needs people face and the adversity they encounter is great. It is through the avenue of prayer that God nurtures and nourishes His children.

We need to pray for God's protection of His children. We face a powerful enemy and we need to pray that God will guard His children from satan and those who serve him. They are committed to the destruction of followers of Jesus Christ and will do all they can to derail and divert Christians from walking with the Lord.

Evaluate your prayer life; perhaps it is a place to set some specific goals.

A third place to consider as you set expectations regarding your walk with the Lord this year is,

## **The Church**

With every passing decade I am more persuaded of the importance of all believers having an integral relationship with a Bible believing, Christ exalting Church. The importance of such a relationship of course comes as no surprise since the Church is God's idea; Jesus created the Church. He knew that a relationship with the Church is essential to maximize all we and others will become. Last year has disrupted local Churches a great deal. We have been reminded that the Church is not a building and just because we are restricted from in-person meetings doesn't mean the Church is shut down. Christians have taken advantage of online ministries. Many pastors I have interacted with are concerned about who will return when in-person services resume. I suspect most Churches will see some people fall away, but I pray that when this period is over, believers will not only return, they will return with a much greater appreciation for the Church and the value of corporate gatherings of the Church.

It is important for us to realize that we are in an aberration now, this is not the norm, it falls short of what God intends for His Church. God's desire is very clearly for His people to be integrally involved in local Churches. The Church is comprised of believers in interdependent relationships with one another and who utilize the gifts God has given them for the mutual benefit of the Church. It is impossible for a believer to achieve the same level of maturity apart,

as they could in relationship with fellow members of the Church. The truth is we need one another, even if we don't realize we do.

During this restricted time let us maintain contact with fellow believers, minister to one another, encourage one another, reach out to one another, care for one another, pray for one another, and long for the day when we can gather together with one another to worship God corporately, hear from Him through His word, and minister to, and fellowship with one another in-person. The Church is an essential component in the life of every believer. My prayer is that rather than let COVID-19 undermine and fragment the Church, that we refocus and refresh our commitment to the Lord such that when we are permitted to gather again, we will do so with renewed vitality and a clearer focus individually and as a Church body.

The fourth place to consider as we set expectations regarding our walk with the Lord this year is,

## Righteous Living

Many of you will recall from our study of the Book of Ephesians that the first half of Ephesians focuses on our position in Christ. When you grow discouraged, those first three chapters can't help but lift you up as Scripture reminds you of the privileged position of God's children. The second half of Ephesians focuses on the practice of believers. It provides a good deal of insight into what are acceptable and unacceptable choices. It follows that in light of who we are, we will desire to know the will of the Lord and do that which pleases Him. Here again is another reason why it is important for us to saturate our minds with God's Word.

As this new year begins you may want to set some goals in the area of righteous living. Perhaps there are some practices that merit change to bring them more in line with righteous living.

## Conclusion

Let us begin this year with intentionality and a clear desire to *walk with God* no matter what. May God provide a straight path to follow, clearly illuminate it for us, give us the resolve to follow it, and enable us to do so in His strength. When we conclude 2021 may there be evidence that we made progress in our *walk with the Lord*.

May God richly bless each of you!

I chose the grand hymn of the Church, ***Holy, Holy, Holy!*** sung by the choir of *Grace Community Church* as our concluding song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBjM47zICos>