



A Challenge for 2014
By Becky Ramsey

You have arrived at a powerful point of promise--the beginning of a new year. You have made it to the end of the 2013 journey, halfway through a school year. Even if you have already made plans for this year, those plans may not materialize. I am sitting at home on my second snow day, and I will have to readjust my lesson plans that I made before I left for Christmas vacation.

Starting a new year in the middle of a school year is similar to a place in the life of the Israelites when they were getting ready to cross over into the Promised Land. They were at the end of one juncture of their journey, but they were just beginning a new part of this important wilderness trek. Joshua gave some wise direction to God's people at that time. He told them to closely follow the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. Joshua 3:4 advises: "Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before."

Whatever our plans, we have never been through 2014. As we go, we must remember to prepare for the battles we will face. The Promised Land was not conquered without facing conflicts. The Israelite tribes had to fight for their allotted area.

We have not finished our course. We are rounding the bend to our next adventure. Our school year is only half over, but we are crossing into a new year with renewed spirits. As Joshua advised the Israelites to stay close to the Ark of the Covenant, the very presence of their God, we must stay close to the Word. John 1:1 reminds us: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." We will never draw closer to the source of Truth if we do not commit to be daily in the truth of His Word.

When I thought of a challenge to pass on to teachers for this year, I thought of one that truly challenged me. It came when I was leading a mission trip. One of the missionaries asked me about the spiritual status of my group. I was able to say confidently, "This is a good group." They had worked hard to prepare; they were ready to serve. I was pleased with what our team had to offer.

I was not ready for the next comment. "Becky," said the missionary, "God did not call us to be good, but to be our best for Him." I have never been able to escape those words. I can't be just a "good" wife; I must do what is best for my husband. I cannot strive to be a "good" mother and grandmother; my love must be unsurpassed by any love other than my love for my Lord. I can no longer be satisfied to be a "good" teacher; I must find the methods that would allow me to serve supremely, because I serve my Savior not my school. I can never be just a "good" Christian because God had called me to be like Christ.

Philippians 2:5-7 says: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus who being in the very nature of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant." Christ gave His all! This is the attitude to which Christ referred as he talked to the Rich Young Ruler about what was necessary to obtain eternal life. The young man was looking for the least he could do and still receive the offered reward. When Christ told him to obey the Law, he breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh, I already do that—done it all my life—church, youth group, Christian school...." "Then Christ asked him to sell out...to become totally committed... to give his very best...his all... but he walked away sorrowfully. Being one's best for God is too steep a price for some, but God's Word demands it.

Listen to the verbs, the adjectives, the adverbs used in these verses to direct us to HOW we should live for God. (Yes, even God uses diction to direct us!):

Philippians 3:8 "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

Luke 9:23 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Romans 12:1-2 "In view of God's mercy, offer your body as a living sacrifice ...Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of you mind." Those verses are all in the imperative mood—an order not an option.

Romans 8:5 "Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."

I Peter 1:13 "Prepare your mind for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you."

I Peter 1:22 continues that thought: "Now that you have purified yourself by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love...love deeply, from the heart."

I Corinthians 15:58 "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord."

Colossians 3:17 "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord."

We will follow different paths as we forge into a new year, but each path is to be a path of promise, God's promise. Each person must have the same purpose—to bring glory to His name.

These few verses only scratch the surface in what our attitude, actions, and love should be, but each one demands our best efforts. None of these verses acknowledge the mediocre, the convenience of chance, or the half-hearted effort that is often prevalent in the world. A life with this attitude is not easy. Christ promises, "In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world."

In our life, we must not fall into the same trap as the two men on the road to Emmaus, recorded in Luke 24. The two men did not recognize that Christ was right there walking with them because they were focused on the problems of the situation, the death of Christ. Even when they were directed back to the prophetic Word of the prophets that foretold both the death and resurrection, they did not recognize Jesus. The events that had just taken place did not fit into their own personal perspective of what should have happened, the way they wanted it to play out. It was not until they took the time to compel Him to come into their daily routine, their fellowship, their practice of the breaking of the bread, that they recognized the Messiah. Then they sensed the burning in their hearts from being in the very presence of their Lord.

It is like these words—NO WHERE. We may be in a circumstance in which we are all alone, struggling, and we look around for God. We do not see Him through the struggle of the situation. We cry out that God is NO WHERE to be found. That is not true. All we must do is move closer to the one who "knows" us better than we know ourselves, and we will suddenly realize that His Spirit is NOW HERE. Actually, He had been there all the time.

Everyone wants to claim Jeremiah 29:11 for the new year. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." We want the hope, the hopeful future—that sounds good. We like to think of God's plans to prosper us, but we forget that God is speaking these words to His children when they are in captivity, a difficult time, a struggling time, a learning time—a time when they felt separated from God. And we miss the lesson only two verses later in verse 13. God says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. To find His plan, His prospering, His hope, His future, we must seek Him with ALL our heart."

As we begin 2014, I challenge each individual to hold up each new day as a gift to the Lord who gave everything for us. Choose words and actions that give our best to Him—such a small sacrifice to bring a smile to the face of our Savior in 2014.

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