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As the new year approaches, many of us name goals and resolutions that we want to pursue, usually in an effort to become more like the people we think we should be or hope to be-- maybe we want to have more influence or be more successful; perhaps we want to grow in faith, efficiency and wealth, or perhaps feel more known and valued. There's an excitement we experience when we consider new beginnings and a fresh start, often the same feeling we might experience when preparing for a new school year or job. Setting goals and making plans is a healthy practice when we are pursuing these plans for the right reasons.

For some of us, we do these things because we feel we need to clean up our act and seem like we have it together. Or others of us, if we're honest, may experience shame when we consider behaviors and actions of our past that we feel make us unworthy of great purposes in the future. Sometimes this is what a new year can trigger -- fears and guilt about the past, realizing we have gotten off track and we've let ourselves down. Perhaps 2018 has been a year that brought disappointments and you're ready to turn the page, forget the past and declare 2019 will be different.

Are we pressing on in our resolutions because we want to meet worldly expectations? Do we get in a rush to ditch the wounds of the past? Do we do all this striving to clean ourselves up because we don't really believe the Lord could use a mess like us? Here's the good news: we don't have to wait for a new year for a fresh start. The truth is, if we have received Christ, the pressure is off. There is freedom to stop striving and to start resting in the promise that He is making us new. Let's make our plans in the light of the knowledge that the Lord has put to death our old selves with the crucifixion of Christ. We are forgiven. And now, He is restoring us through the resurrection of Christ. When the Lord looks upon us, He sees the covering of Christ. He sees both who we are becoming and who we already are in Christ. He wants to make an eternal difference in the lives of others through us in 2019. He wants to use us to bring wholeness to the broken, hope to the weary, strength to the weak. He uses us, whether we believe it or not, to bring life and abundance to the world around us and His plans to do good things through us for His glory will succeed.

The new year allows us an opportunity to take stock of our focus and priorities. The Lord is giving us freedom to have a new life in Christ that doesn't just revolve around the duration of this physical life where we try to make the best of ourselves in the here and now. He calls us into something so much greater, so much bigger - into purposes that will affect eternity. If the here and now were all that mattered, we would set up our lives to serve worldly aims and please those around us. But because of Christ, we can let go of our old pursuits, of attempts to be good enough and to cover up our past. Seeking to improve ourselves in the new year isn't bad. Let's just remember that our old selves have already died with Christ. We regard Christ in the flesh no longer (2 Cor 5:16) and so we too are no longer regarded in the flesh; instead, anyone in Christ is a new creation. As new creations, we have new purposes and plans given to us by God. Let's allow these truths to be the lens through which we free our dreams and hopes to flourish. May He give us the faith to trust His word that Christ's sacrifice is enough, we are fully forgiven and made new in Him. His life in us is the hope of glory and the promise of eternal impact.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

● ○ ○ FORMOM

Are we asking the Lord what our pursuits in the new year should be or are we looking at the world around us to see what others expect?

Journal about the motivations of your goals and ask the Lord for guidance about what story He wants to write with your life in 2019.

Being intentional to seek goals that affect the eternal kingdom of God can feel daunting and too big for us. Consider asking the Lord for the strength to seek and complete the plans He has for you. Document how he provides for you in the journey this year.

● ● ○ FOR KIDS

Why do we make goals in the new year? Do goals and plans feel overwhelming or exciting?

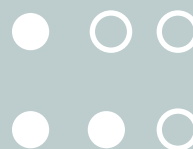
Ask the Lord to show you what He would like to do with your life in this new year.

What is one question you can ask a friend or family this week to help them think about their journey with God? (ex. Ask a friend what goals they have for the new year and how they decided on their goals.)



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FOR KIDS



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hello
LUMINTRUTH@GMAIL.COM