

Growing in Grace and Knowledge Making Changes to be Better in 2018

One definition of “insanity” is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. This is not the same as:

- Repeating a process and trying to do it better; or,
- Being “*steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, know that your toil is not in vain,*” 1Cor.15:58.

Are you willing to make some spiritual changes and do things differently in 2018, or is it going to be the same thing over and over for you? Regardless of your age- physically or spiritually, *growth in grace and knowledge* is expected, 2Pet.3:18. That’s *knowing* and *doing* more and better. Let’s make whatever portion of 2018 God allows that kind of year!

Suggestions for a better/changed year:

1. Make an honest and brutal (if necessary) evaluation of your spiritual position.

Before making needed adjustments to get to where you need to be, you have to know precisely where you are. Here are some *sample* questions that might help:

- a. Am I really making progress toward Christlikeness, or am I stuck in a spiritual rut, or even back-sliding? Eph.4:15
- b. Should I be further along in the process than I am? Heb.5:12-14
- c. Am I proactive about personal spiritual growth, or am I depending on or blaming others for my situation? 2Cor.13:5
- d. Am I serious about my spiritual well-being and progress, or are they *secondary* concerns to “my” other life concerns (job, family, recreation, etc.)? Matt.6:33-34

2. Dedicate yourself to really learning/knowing God’s Word. We can’t *live it* unless we *know it!*

- a. Read the Book with the right perspective, practice, and purpose! Acts 17:11; Psalm 119:15,23,27,48,78,97-104,127,140,148,159-160,165,169-176.
- b. Attend Bible Class consistently and conscientiously (with purpose). Acts 2:42a,46a
- c. View each lesson (bible class or sermon) as an opportunity to grow *in knowledge*, then put them into practice *in grace*, 2Pet.3:18.

3. Worship with purpose.

- a. Praise and glorify God. Heb.2:11-12; 13:22-29
- b. Uplift/encourage brethren. Heb.12:12-17
- c. View and utilize services as evangelist opportunities for LOST souls to become saved. Acts 2:41-47

4. Be an Encourager (instead of discourager/discouragement).

- a. Joseph was renamed “*Barnabas*” by the apostles because he was a “*Son of Encouragement*,” Acts 4:36.
 - b. He *encouraged* Paul, Acts 9:26-27; the brethren at Antioch, Acts 11:19-26; and John Mark, Acts 15:36-39 (cf. Col.4:10; 2Tim.4:11; Phile.24).
 - c. We are typically not *neutral* on this point: by our attitude and actions, we either *encourage* (fill or inspire *courage*), or we *discourage* (take away or destroy *courage*). Let that sink in, and be an *encourager* in 2018 by both your attitude and actions!
5. Be Kinder/Gentler/Gracious to EVERYONE. Col.4:5-6; Eph.4:29-32.
- a. When we rid ourselves of *bitterness*, *wrath*, and *anger*, then *clamor* and *slander* can give way to *wholesome words* of *encouragement* and *edification* and *tenderness*, Eph.4:29-32.
 - b. Our attitude and speech should always be *wise* and *gracious*, Col.4:5-6.
 - c. Be *gracious*- which means to regard and treat others *better than they deserve*, Phil.2:3-4; in traffic; in the store; on social media; in your marriage and home; in fellowship. There is no end of *our need of grace from the Lord*, and there should be *no end to our reflection of that grace to others*, Jas.2:13; Matt.5:7; 18:21-35!

Conclusions:

- It seems wrong not to include other seemingly vital *keys* to effecting positive spiritual changes in 2018- such as “*Pray without ceasing*” and “*seek first the kingdom and His righteousness*” and “*forgetting what lies behind...*”, but perhaps these five will get us heading in the right direction, which is moving forward to Christlikeness and heaven!
- So:
 1. Honestly evaluate yourself and get real with what you see;
 2. Dedicate yourself to *knowing* God’s word;
 3. Worship with purpose.
 4. Be an *encourager* instead of a *discouragement*.
 5. Be kinder, gentler, and gracious toward everyone.