



## **HAPPY NEW YEAR, HAPPY NEW YOU**

It's another new year, full of possibilities. We can tell that the New Year is upon us by the kind of television commercials that are airing. Promotions for weight loss programs, gym memberships, and quit smoking aids abound, aimed at capitalizing on people New Year's resolutions.

There is something about turning the calendar to January that prompts us to ponder habits that will make us happier, healthier, and more productive in the New Year. We want to do better, and we resolve to make good changes to that end.

But the fate of most New Year's resolutions is no secret. While we may launch them with the best intentions, most resolutions turn out to be less than resolute after just a few weeks. Our fresh start quickly grows stale as the novelty wears off, and we realize that real change happens much slower than we would like and requires much more discipline than we can muster.

But there is one resolution that is different, and for a very important reason: it does not depend on what we resolve to do starting January 1, but on Who we celebrated on December 25.

When we embrace Jesus, the meaningful changes in our lives do not begin with a gym membership or a nicotine patch, but through our personal relationship with Him. And when we orient ourselves to Him afresh each day, it is like the Wise Men following the star to the newborn King.

When we make Jesus our spiritual North Star, and follow him daily, we find our perspective changing and our time being spent differently, not because of our willpower but because of the new Life within us. When we cooperate with his grace, our desires and behavior change as He changes our heart: "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

The Bible explains this mystery: "...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). This enables us not to just do a little better, but to have the completely fresh start we yearn for. With Jesus as our North Star, we don't experience spiritual home improvement but rather an extreme makeover, and not in our own power but by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us (2 Timothy 1:14).

Jesus likened it to the intimate relationship between a vine and its branches: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The life, growth, and fruitfulness of a branch depend entirely on the vine; that connection is vital to the branch. Likewise, our daily connection to God is vital to growing our relationship with Him, to unleashing the life-giving force of his love within us, and to passing on his love to those around us.

As we live with God each day — talking and listening to Him in prayer, reading his Holy Bible, following the guidance He gives us, and returning to Him when we stray — we and others will see the good work He has begun in us, which gradually brings the glorious transformation into Christlikeness that He promises (Philippians 1:6). It's not a New Year's resolution, but a new life revolution.

With love in the Lord,  
The Rev. Christine Maddux