

## A PENNY FOR YOUR PRECIOUS THOUGHTS

As 2022 hobbles off and 2023 toddles in, what is on your mind? Are you remembering the waning year fondly, or are you ready to see it go? Are you excited about the coming year, or leery of it, or maybe some of each? In any case, I offer "A penny for your thoughts." I have one right here for you, in my pocket.

Mid-way through this year I started putting a penny in my pocket every morning, not as an idolatrous good luck charm, but as a tangible reminder to embrace and embody its inscription: "In God we trust." It has been a stabilizing, ready reminder as I encountered assorted bumps in the road of life this year, when the verse embossed on my daily planner was (aptly) "Proverbs 16:9", which reads, "The heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."

As the year unfolded and my plans bowed to his, both the penny and the planner reminded me daily to trust in our sovereign and loving God.

Since trusting God has been a continuing lesson for me, I was inspired to have "Psalm 37:5" inscribed on my new, 2023 planner. Seeing that will remind me daily: "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and He will act."

Being physical as well as spiritual creatures, it is fitting for us to use tangible reminders to reinforce our faith. So, as you consider making New Year's resolutions related to your spiritual life, think about sensory ways to support them. God used the written Word, a bright star, a great light, and an angelic chorus to lead people to the Savior in

Bethlehem (Matthew 2:5; Luke 2:8–20). I encourage you to let your senses guide you to Him, too.

Beginning with sight: as you look around your place, do you see anything that points you to the Lord of your life? Anything that invites you to think about Him, to recall his presence, or to engage with Him?

Do remaining Christmas decorations that you see remind you that Jesus' first coming brought joy and hope not for just one day, nor even for the 12 Days of Christmas, but for every day thereafter? When the Christmas decorations are put away, will you still see daily reminders of Jesus and his love? Perhaps putting out a fresh visual reminder would help you see Him better in 2023 (e.g., Luke 10:23).

You can also use the other senses God gave you to stimulate your daily awareness of Emmanuel, "God with us." He gave us ears, so you may want to listen to an audio Bible and experience the power of hearing God's Word spoken aloud, as his people have done for ages (e.g., Nehemiah 8:1–8; Acts 2:14–36; Romans 10:17).

God also gave us music, a particularly potent way of engaging both brain and heart, so making hymns or praise music an intentional part of your surroundings in the next year may be an effective spiritual avenue for you (e.g., Psalm 13:6, 30:4).

Using your sense of smell to enjoy the aroma of burning frankincense, evoking the Wise Men's gift to Jesus as well as worship in the throne room of heaven, may lift your mind and heart to Him, as it does mine (e.g., Matthew 2:11; Revelation 8:3–4).

When I offered "A penny for your thoughts", I meant it the way philosopher and statesman Sir Thomas More did when he coined that expression in 1522. In those days, a penny was a significant sum, so in

offering it, Sir Thomas meant that he considered the person's thoughts to be valuable and well worth hearing.

Yours are, too, including your thoughts about desiring to walk faithfully in the steps God has established for you in the new year. So share those valuable thoughts with Him, as you employ your amazing, God-given senses to help you perceive his constant presence afresh in 2023 (Matthew 28:20b).

With love in the Lord,  
The Rev. Christine Maddux