

## **Introduction**

Happy New Year! It's good to take some time to reflect on God's faithfulness. I set out last year with the theme of "knowing Christ". I can see how God has shown me more of Himself in the past year, how He gave me opportunities to know more of Christ's heart. I can also see how very much farther I have to go. We are all works in progress, so I refuse to get discouraged. I trust in God's promise in **Philippians 1:6**:

**"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."**

God is going to keep working on us until Jesus comes. God does the work of sanctification and cleansing and renewal and growth in our lives. Still, we have a part to play. If you look back on this past year and don't see any spiritual growth, then that should tell you something significant. If we are plants, then God is the light, water, and nutrients we need for spiritual life and growth. Are we growing?

**Hebrews 5:12-6:3** says,

**"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting we will do so."**

This is a challenge I would like us to take on as a church, at OIC, to be a body of believers that is growing and maturing.

Infants, whose digestive systems are not ready to process solid food, must rely on milk for their sustenance. As the baby grows, solid food can and should be introduced. Does that mean we give up the milk entirely? I hope not! Many people who know me know that I love milk. I asked my roommate in college how to say "I love milk" in Chinese. I enjoy the simplicity of milk. But I know that I cannot rely on milk for all of my nutritional needs.

It is the same for us spiritually. Of course, we need the milk. As we grow and mature in faith, we need to dig deeper into the truths of God's word; learn to walk in faith, not just crawl. With that said, let's dig deep into God's word today!

**2 Corinthians 6:1-10:**

**"As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says,**

**'In the time of my favor I heard you,  
and in the day of salvation I helped you.'**

I tell you now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience, and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, yet possessing everything."

Why did I choose this passage for us today, you may wonder? Can anyone guess what the number one most popular New Year's resolution is?

The number one most popular New Year's resolution is to lose weight. A couple weeks ago, after eating my way almost through this bag of candies, I realized the wrappers had quotations on them. I found one that said, "いつも前向き、明日からダイエット". Which I think basically means, "Eat what you like today; tomorrow you can diet."

Many of us make New Year's resolutions and set goals. Planning is not a bad thing. I think plans are great as long as they are in step with the Holy Spirit. What concerns me most is that probably 99% of people give up on those resolutions once they realize it requires them to make some actual changes! We walk past Mister Donuts and say, "I'll start my diet tomorrow. There are still 364 days left in the year to lose weight." Soon it's February, and we see Valentine's chocolates. Then it's White Day in March. Then Easter candy. Then summer comes and we don't want to be seen in a bathing suit.

I would like for us to set some serious spiritual goals this year. Let's grow and mature as a body of Christ! If you are serious about this, it will take some discipline. I am talking to myself as much as to you. We cannot think, "I will do what I like today, and I'll worry about doing what's right tomorrow."

**James 4:13-15** says,

**"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"**

Not a single day is guaranteed to us. None of us know the time that God has set aside for us. We could be hit by a bus or die in an earthquake. Pastor Dan was planning to give the New Year's message, but his plans changed drastically. If we are putting our spiritual growth off until tomorrow, the thought of not having tomorrow becomes a bit scary. But if we are daily putting our lives at God's feet, soaking up His presence, and listening intently to His voice, we have no fear of whatever may or may not come.

Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, lays out just a few of the trials and difficulties he has faced as a servant of God. He asks the church not to receive God's grace in vain. The church in Corinth had a bit of a problem with procrastination. Their intentions were good. They were going to support Paul in his ministry, but they couldn't seem to get around to it. Paul urges them saying, **"I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."**

If you want to do something good, if you want to serve God, if you want to support a ministry, then do it today!

Don't put it off until tomorrow! You can plan and hope for things in the future, but you do not know what will come tomorrow. Today is the day God has given us to grow and learn and serve Him.

My challenge for us as a church, as we grow and mature, is to display the characteristics Paul lists in chapter 6. I've paraphrased it to make it into a New Year's resolution. Let's say this together!

**As fellow workers, as servants of God here at OIC:**

**Let's demonstrate purity, understanding, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, sincere love, truthful speech, the power of God and great endurance in troubles, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonment, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger.**

Can you imagine if every first time visitor who stepped into this place walked away saying that OIC was a place where the power of God was demonstrated, where the people were pure, understanding, patient, kind, full of the Holy Spirit, sincere, and truthful. These are all excellent things, marks of God's work in our lives. Sadly, I don't think that description matches our church *yet*. We're a bit more like 2 Timothy than 2 Corinthians.

**2 Timothy 3:1-7**

**"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers**

of God--having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. They are the kind that worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.”

That last sentence caught my attention- “always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.” That is exactly the type of church I do NOT want to be. It all seems like so much, though, doesn't it? Overwhelming. With us, it is impossible. But remember, God has promised that he is going to carry his work to completion.

Is it ever okay to throw in the towel and give up? No! With God all things are possible! Let's read what Paul wrote again!

**“through glory and dishonor; bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, and yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”**

That last part is the most encouraging. Having nothing, yet possessing everything.

And to continue to build on last year's theme- **Philippians 3:7-8**

**“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”**

James 1:2-4 says,

**“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything.”**

That is the challenge I set before you for 2012. May we be mature and complete, not lacking in anything. May we demonstrate purity, understanding, patience, kindness, truthful speech, and sincere love through the Holy Spirit and God's power! May we realize that today is the day to begin. Amen? Don't put it off until tomorrow. For those who don't believe in Jesus, but who are interested in knowing more, don't procrastinate. If Jesus is the truth, you don't have the time to spare.

Today is the day of salvation. Let's pray.