

January 7, 2011

Dear Friend,

Warm greetings in the Lord at the dawn of the New Year. May you be totally aware of the magnitude of God's love for you!

Martin Luther is quoted as saying that "a Christian should live as if Jesus died yesterday, rose today, and is coming back tomorrow." What a magnificent set of values for every Christian! Imagine the impact of restructuring our priorities and our lives around this idea. It most certainly would transform the world as we know it!

It's the ideal time for taking these truths to heart. We've just been reflecting on the meaning of Christmas, the joyful news of the birth of the Savior. Now it's time to ask: ***How do we follow up on such a momentous holiday?*** As profound a celebration as it is every year, how would God have us follow up on all those biblical passages that are read, and sung, and embossed in gold and silver script?

Follow up is "king." We're asked about it all the time. If we have a well-attended festival, people feel almost a duty to ask us, "How do you follow up?" Well, we follow up by planting churches. Hundreds of them!

But consider the tradition that gets repeated year, after year, after year: ***We follow up Christmas grandeur with matter-of-fact New Year's resolutions!*** Look at the most popular Christmas verses:

- Luke 2:11: "For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."
- Galatians 4:4: "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law."
- Isaiah 9:6: "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."
- Matthew 2:10: "When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."
- Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."
- 1 John 4:10: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Now look at the most popular New Year's resolutions (normally made just one week after Christmas!):

- Lose weight
- Spend more time with the family
- Exercise regularly
- Enjoy life more
- Get out of debt
- Volunteer to help others
- Read my Bible more
- Go to church more regularly
- Pray more

One week later, after the celebration of *such a momentous event*, Christmas is gone until the end of next year! The resolutions, Christian or non-Christian, don't reflect any disposition **to follow up on the grand event of a week ago!**

Could this be a big reason why the Great Commission
is so slow in reaching the world for Christ?

As we read in the Bible, it is God's written purpose that we be His witnesses. He has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. The "ministry" of reconciliation is not merely for those who are "in" the ministry. According to 2 Corinthians 5, *those whom He reconciled* have been registered by God Himself into the ministry of reconciliation: ALL the reconciled.

So what the general population takes up as their New Year's resolutions should look quite different from a Christian list of New Year's resolutions. It would seem that since so many people out there (even Buddhists) are celebrating Christmas, the resolutions should reflect at least logically if not *theologically* what is universally being celebrated.

But what about us, who are not just Christians in name only? What about us who have been born again by the Savior who was born to die for us? We most certainly have been reconciled, and God, who was in Christ, has committed to us the work of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20). How should our true celebration reflect in our resolutions for this New Year?

In a *theological* way there are hundreds of biblical possibilities! But just in keeping with the Spirit of last week's Christmas, the Great Commission is the most *theological* follow up. Here's just a short list of possibilities that would reflect consistency with the Christmas message: **"Joy to the world, the Lord is come!"** Consider:

- I will share the Good News of the Savior with my family and friends.
- I will be wise like the magi and seek Him daily in my walk.
- I will make Him Lord of my life in my decisions.
- I will go, pray, and send others to share the Gospel.
- I will learn at least one new way of sharing the Gospel.

I believe God is in this list! The more distant a person may be from a true focus on authentic Christianity, the more this list will sound "archaic," "out of touch," "crazy," and other such words. But

the fact is that God does not ever, even for one moment, get distracted from the true eternal perspective and destiny of our lives.

In Isaiah 5 we read of God's experiment, when He had chosen Israel to be a royal priesthood to be a light unto the nations. The chapter tells how God poured Himself into the project with painstaking personal care. He spared no effort in choosing the best land, the best vine, a stone wall, a winepress, and so on. He had high expectations for His vineyard—but it only yielded sour grapes! The identity of the vineyard is Israel. This is an account of all that God did for them and the great expectations He had for them.

After disclosing the identity of the vineyard, God reveals an indictment of the specifics that caused the downfall of His people. **You might say the people adopted six wrong resolutions:**

1. The rich bought up all the desirable properties leaving no place for the poor. (vv. 8–10)
2. The people became engaged in pleasure seeking, but had no time for the things of God. (vv. 11–17)
3. They ignored God and taunted His timing. (vv. 18–19)
4. They twisted the scale of values calling the bad good and the good bad (a modern-day example: gay marriage is good, but school prayer is bad). (v. 20)
5. They became wise in their own eyes and smart in their own opinion. (v. 21)
6. They released the crooks who had good lawyers, but denied justice to the innocent. (v. 23)

*The values of the world are thriving in our day as they did long ago. **What we must do is cultivate values and resolutions in keeping with the clear direction of the Scriptures.** We can take a proactive approach and **serve Him gladly in this year ahead!*** Rather than be mesmerized by the cacophony of worldly voices calling out their values and strategies to us, let us use God's Word as a lamp to our feet on the journey of the year ahead.

In our World Link Ministry together, we feel the urgency to press on with the Gospel in the year ahead. We have seen hundreds of new churches started in 2010, but they are precious few when we see that the vast majority of the countries where we work are still without the Gospel. A couple of examples will illustrate this reality:

- In Mexico we had 25 church-plants in and around the capital city where **26 million people** live.
- In Vietnam we are launching another 150 churches where **87 million** people live.
- In Cuba, our biggest success story, a nation of 13 million people, there are 11 million yet to be reached!

I don't share this for guilt's sake or for pity's sake. I share this because we have been shown by the Lord how we can plant churches wholesale. We can plant them cheaply and yet quite effectively.

We need to be people who will be consistent with their God-given calling and commission. We need to engage with biblically consistent resolutions to become partners and sponsor church planters in the various countries. God's intended plan is clear: "How will they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:15). God intends that we send preachers!

In view of what God did and what we celebrated on Christmas, we now make our New Year's resolution: to press on toward the goal of planting 10,000 churches! We are at the 3,000 mark, but now we know the way. We just need more inputs. **One church planter in Cuba, at \$25 a month, can plant three churches.** So if we invest \$100 per month we can plant 12. **One thousand dollars per month can plant 120 churches.**

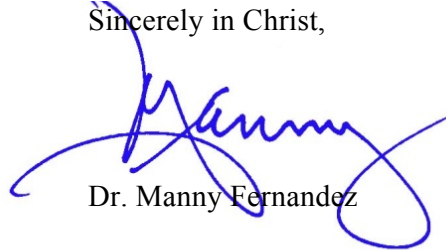
- In Vietnam the church planter gets \$75 per month. One church per month is \$25.
- In Mexico City, and in Ukraine, one church is \$200 per month.

You can create resolutions of your own, BUT
for Christmas' sake, make them
Christmas resolutions!

There is a world of opportunities to engage in biblically guided New Year's resolutions. We would encourage you in the Lord to join Him and to let Him guide you according to His purpose in your life. Please give as generously as you can today. We need you—because the world needs the Savior!

May the year ahead prove to be a fruitful year as you walk in the light of His Word.

Sincerely in Christ,



Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. Please write to us today and let us know how the Spirit is leading you to engage in your Christmas resolutions!