

8 Life Lessons to Make 2019 Your Best Year Yet

As a young boy in Cleveland, I spent many Saturdays watching wrestling on TV. Bobo Brazil with his thundering drop kicks was my favorite character, and you bet I believed everything I watched was real.

Commercials in between rounds often highlighted used cars for \$300, and since we grew up without a car, I could never understand why we couldn't just go buy one. Truth was, my dad worked as a custodian, and my disabled mother scrubbed floors on her knees three days a week, so they felt we just couldn't afford it. It was a hard pill to swallow, but it developed in me a sense of gratitude for what we did have plus a sensitivity towards the less fortunate that influences me greatly to this day.

In 1843 in England, a young man encountered small children digging garbage out of trash cans in the dead of the night scavenging for food. With images seared onto the sensitive photographic plate of his mind, he plunged into a project to communicate creatively the urgency of awakening others to their plight.

He crafted a story highlighting a miserly character that he named Ebenezer Scrooge who would eventually be transformed. His miraculous metamorphosis would impact not only the English people but eventually the entire world. It became a script, debuting in theaters on Christmas Day, and *A Christmas Carol* continues to influence countless millions to this very day.

What set of circumstances is God currently and providentially using in your life to mold you into the person He destined you to become? As Daniel, Joseph, Moses, David and Job weren't aware of all God was doing in their time, will you trust Him?

Lessons I've Learned

I'm one year shy of my 50th spiritual birthday. I'm almost there, so let me share some significant life lessons I hope will help you.

1. Enjoy Jesus

Eternal life, according to Jesus, focuses not on a place but a person (John 17:3).

Keep this relationship fresh by spending time daily with Him in His Word and His Presence. As the wife of iconic Christian leader Arthur Wallis told me on her deathbed, "Enjoy Jesus."

My departed friend, Steve Hill, with whom I was privileged to co-labor in the Brownsville Revival, usually began conversations like this, "Are you still hungry for God?" This we want to cultivate daily to stay fresh and on the cusp of what God is doing in our lives and generation.

2. Pursue Your Destiny

"Your eyes saw me uninformed, yet in Your book all my days were written, before any of them came into being" (Ps. 139:16).

In spite of setbacks that are inevitable along the way, let nothing deter you from continuing your pursuit of God's unique plan for your life. Turn your trials into triumphs, your stumbling blocks into steppingstones and your tests into testimonies. Destiny is a matter of choice, not chance.

3. Cultivate Friendships

Jesus told His disciples, "I no longer call you servants ... I have called you friends..." (John 15:15). He had His Twelve, His three—Peter, James and John— and even His closest one, John, whom the Living Bible labels "His best friend."

John Maxwell cites four categories of friends: *just* friends (social); *rust* friends (older ones—some keep and some let go); *trust* friends (confidants and counselors) and *must* friends (a circle of lifelong gifts from God).

4. Adjust With Seasons

Ecclesiastes 3:1 tells us, “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.” At different points in our life, we need to seek God’s wisdom regarding transitions and Spirit-led adjustments if we’re going to finish well.

After decades of planting churches and training leaders, God redirected me into writing projects and cultural commentating. I entrusted our local church into our son’s hands. I transitioned from jogging to mall-walking and powerlifting to dumbbells.

What might God be saying to you about “pruning” for greater fruitfulness and peace in your personal life, family and ministry? Trust and obey for longevity and legacy.

5. Guard Your Health

“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, even as your soul is well” (3 John 2). We’re all aging, but are we aging well?

Don’t wait for a wake-up call. Follow God’s rhythms of life for rest, recreation and relaxation. Eat wisely; sleep soundly; minimize stress; exercise consistently.

The previous pope, even in his twilight years, woke before dawn for his daily exercise. A famous bodybuilding actor related that when he was tempted to skip his fitness routine, he’d ponder the pontiff cranking out crunches and push-ups in the Vatican while leading the Catholics of the world, and he quickly got off his duff.

6. Love by Humbly Serving

When Jesus finished washing His disciples' feet, He said of His example, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17). The world says, "sacrifice others and serve self" but He reversed it to "serve others and sacrifice self."

My personal mantra is a simple acrostic: . (Helping Other People Every day). A plaque hanging in my study reads: "I will pass through this world but once. Therefore any good I can do, any kindness I can show, let me do it now and not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

7. Remember the Brevity of Life

David prayed, "Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how transient I am. Selah" (Ps. 39:4-5).

King Belshazzar's knees knocked in terror as God wrote on the wall, "MENE" (days numbered). "TEKEL" (weighed and wanting), "PERES" (divided) (see Dan. 5:25).

May we remember the "handwriting on the wall" –that we have a finite amount of time, a limited number of days so we live each day with an undivided heart, evidenced by a sense of purpose.

"What've I learned turning 70? How quickly it all goes by."
–Billy Graham

8. Share the Gospel Consistently

Jesus said, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He said this after passing through a city where He was intentional in noticing a man, taking time to stop and engage with him, then went to his home. Finally, the man repented and was converted.

Many opportunities for sharing Christ come disguised as unwelcome interruptions. This is lifestyle evangelism. Join

with me in the adventure and get equipped by the free YouTube videos “Loving Lifestyle Evangelism.”

Here’s the deal: As we prepare to launch into a new year, may we make whatever changes God directs for this to be our best year yet. “For I know the plans that I have for you, says the Lord, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you a future and hope” (Jer. 29:11).