

The Unknown Year Ahead

Anyone as old as I am will remember autograph albums. My childhood friends and I collected messages from our friends in the little 4- by 5-inch books as eagerly as today's kids collect friends on Facebook and Instagram.

What we didn't know was that autograph albums had been around a long time. As early as the 16th century, Germans were designing these albums with the coat of arms of the owner. Later, the Victorians used flowers and figures to cover their albums in which they collected poems, prayers and other serious thoughts from friends.

In her book *Little Town on the Prairie*, Laura Ingalls Wilder mentions receiving an autograph album from her mother with the following inscription:

If wisdom's ways you wisely seek,
Five things observe with care,
To whom you speak,
Of when you speak,
And how, and when and where.

I can't remember wondering, as I grew up in small-town Kansas, where this practice came from. I just remember enjoying the funny little jingles my friends would write, like:

Roses are red, violets are blue,
Monkeys like you should live in a zoo.

Teachers and parents, of course, would dutifully include more serious notes. Like Laura's mother, my mother wrote an instructive one in my autograph album. The album was lost long ago, but every New Year's Day I remember what my mother wrote:

Your future lies before you,
Like big, white drifts of snow.

Be careful how you tread it,
For every step will show.

For many of us, New Year's Day is a time of pondering the future, as well as reflecting on the past. This is not surprising, as the month of January is named for Janus, the Roman god of doors who had one face looking forward and one looking back. The practice of pausing to look both ways on New Year's Day has apparently been around a long time.

New Year's Day is a time to once more follow Paul's injunction to the Romans:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:1,2, NIV).

This verse includes our total being—our bodies and minds—as part of our spiritual walk with the Lord. It includes looking back to the time when we conformed to the world, and looking ahead to our transformed life. When we present ourselves totally to the Lord, we are prepared for whatever the New Year brings, knowing we are walking with Him.

So on New Year's Day, I look back at the year past, and see His footprints with me all the way. I look at the snowdrifts of the unknown year ahead, knowing I will need the Lord's help to wade through them. Once again, I present myself to Him—physically, mentally and spiritually—knowing He will continue to walk with me.

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