

A Word for 2020: The Bible Still Has Applicable Lessons to Learn

We can use some joy because 2020 has been less than joyful.

So I have a message for you from the Bible. Yes, the Bible—the book many believe to be out of date and out of touch.

Some people call the Bible old. Well, gravity is also old. Is gravity still relevant? I think so.

The Scripture is far from out of touch with reality. Just because the Scripture is unpopular does not mean it's irrelevant.

So here's the message. "Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11, NLT).

If a counselor said, "Be joyful and encourage others," we would count that as wise.

If your teacher said, "Grow up and live in peace with everyone," we would say that's smart.

But when we quote a Bible verse, many discredit the Scripture's validity.

But this verse is enlightening and relevant to 2020.

Let's break it down.

Choose Joy

This is good advice for sure. Joy is better than sadness. No matter who you are, positive is better than negative, and

optimism is better than cynicism.

Michael J. Fox is right: "Happiness is far less the result of our circumstances than our response to them. Psychologists refer to the 'hedonic treadmill' as 'the observed tendency of humans to quickly return to a relatively stable level of happiness despite major positive or negative events or life changes.'"

Happiness is not our end game.

We live in cynical times. Creating and stimulating some joy will turn that around.

The Bible says laughter is good medicine.

Joy is a choice.

Many want joy, but few want to rejoice.

Grow to Maturity

Many resist growing up, but most adults know that growing up is a part of life. Being young is fun; staying young is not.

No one wants to be the person who never matures.

Christians are no exception. Christians are called to be disciples, and disciples are learners. Learning is a way of life for the earnest disciple of Christ.

Conforming to the image of Christ is the highest call of the believer. Most of Christendom is focused on making heaven.

Heaven is a benefit of being a Christian. Heaven and hell are not the primary reasons Christ gave us salvation.

God commands us to mature into Christ's image:

"Follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1, MEV).

"Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children. Walk in

love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us, as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1-2).

Christians are not saved to go to heaven, but to bring heaven to earth.

Encourage One Another

I recently shared an email with an adviser. The content was about the future of our organization and the difficult decisions we faced.

The adviser sent this reply:

"I am not surprised that you are out in front of these decisions. Many people fear sharing their inner struggles and face the reality of the moment. I am so proud to know you and the leadership you display."

The reply from my adviser was so encouraging. The response fueled my confidence and calmed my fears. This is the power of encouragement.

I heard someone say once, "People are way too quick to criticize and way too slow to encourage."

Encouragement shifts dark seasons to brighter moments.

And as J.K. Rowling wrote, "Happiness can be found in even the darkest of times if only one remembers to turn on the light."

Encouragement is not always about our words. Encouragement comes in a variety of ways:

- Be a good listener.
- Express gratitude regularly.
- Send a note.
- Give your time.

–Share affirming words.

–Say thank you.

–Live in harmony and peace.

Harmony and peace escaped our 2020 experience. Americans are far from harmonious. Acquiring harmony would undoubtedly be a noble goal for America.

The political environment and the impact of the virus are real thieves to our peace and sanctity.

Peace never comes easily.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will protect your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:7).

There is a peace greater than our circumstances.

When our faith is in God and not this world, peace is ours. God’s peace is a guard to our heart and mind.

Let’s look at our key verse again.

“Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Cor. 13:11, NLT).

Notice the word “then.” “Then” is a word of the outcome. “Then” comes after obedience and compliance.

The Word of God works if we work it.

God says give, and it shall be given to you.

God says forgive, and you shall be forgiven.

God says give your life away, and you will find your life.

Look carefully—God says, “the God of love and peace will be with you, after you choose joy, grow spiritually, encourage others and live in harmony and peace.”

Let’s jump all-in to the commands of the verse, and the outcome will be automatic.

Notice the result—the God of love and peace will be with you—after you obey God’s commands.

And that’s good news. {eoa}