

Answer These Questions as You Plan for the New Year

One of the deepest truths of Christianity is that our lives are not our own. If you are a believer, your life belongs to Jesus. He is Lord, and you aren't. Romans 12:1-2 instructs us to present our bodies daily as "a living and a holy sacrifice," which means we give Him full ownership of our plans, relationships, choices, finances, talents and—most importantly—our time.

I try to surrender to Jesus daily, because my tendency is to crawl off the altar. At the end of every year I also make an intentional effort to yield control of my time and goals. I do this by scheduling time for prayer and fasting, usually in the early days of January. I also evaluate the past year by writing down in a journal my favorite moments, biggest mistakes and most important life lessons.

Reflection and self-evaluation are good for mental health as well as spiritual growth. Lamentations 3:40 says: "Let us examine and probe our ways, and let us return to the Lord." This kind of examination requires some quiet moments. If you rush through life without ever taking a break, your spiritual growth will slow, your heart will be less thankful, your joy will wane and the blade of your axe will grow dull.

British preacher Charles Spurgeon said it best: "You who do not like self-examination are the persons who need it most. ... If you search yourselves, and allow the Word of God to search you, it is well with you."

How do you conduct a self-examination? I like to answer the questions below, and then write my answers so I can look back on my comments throughout the next year:

What were my biggest victories in 2022? What am I most

thankful for? David wrote: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits” (Psalm 103:2). I like to look back at the photos on my phone from the previous year so I can easily recall these special moments.

What prayers did God answer? I take note of specific answers to prayer—not only for personal needs but also for people I prayed for. For example, I prayed almost daily in 2022 for a young couple that experienced a miscarriage. This week they announced they are having a baby, and I am rejoicing with them!

In what ways did I grow spiritually in 2022? If you are growing in Christ, the fruit will be evident—in the lives you touched, and in your own character. Perhaps you stepped out in faith to serve the Lord in a new way. Perhaps you discovered a new spiritual gift? You might want to ask close friends to give you feedback on how they see you growing.

How did I fall short in the past year? In today’s culture we’ve been conditioned to overlook sin and avoid discipline. But maturity requires accountability and correction. You will never grow spiritually if you don’t make repentance a lifestyle. Did you develop a bad habit in 2022? Did you lose your spiritual focus? Did you sabotage a relationship, or grow bitter toward someone? Be honest about your failures and wrong choices, and then ask the Lord to cleanse you and give you the power to overcome. (And take the necessary steps to reconcile with the people you may have hurt, or with those who hurt you.)

What did I learn in 2022? The Holy Spirit, who is called our Teacher, is an amazing resource. He lives inside of us, and He constantly leads us into God’s truth (see John 16:12). What did He show you about Himself? What did He reveal through His Word, or through the example of other Christians you know? Write down those revelations so you can treasure them.

Who helped me during the past year? Thankfulness keeps us humble. I savor the memories of people who gave me an encouraging word, cried with me during a sad moment, offered wise counsel or gave me loving correction. I was especially blessed in January 2022, for example, when several friends drove more than ten hours to support me at my mother's funeral. I will always cherish their thoughtfulness.

What would I have done differently? You can't go back in time and fix your mistakes, and regret can be a toxic emotion. But after you fully embrace God's forgiveness you can learn from your failures. Be honest so you won't repeat the same scenario again.

What do I believe God is saying to me about the coming year? Self-evaluation will help you get to this vital step—and it is the most important. Your heavenly Father wants the best for you. He has been kind and merciful toward you, regardless of the ups and downs of 2022. Your Shepherd wants to guide you in 2023.

As you pray about your goals and dreams, surrender 2023 to Jesus and ask Him to give you His marching orders. Expect to hear His voice. His plans for you are good. And His promise from Ephesians 3:20 is that, after you pray, He “is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.” Happy New Year!

J. Lee Grady was editor of *Charisma* for 11 years and now serves as senior contributing editor. He directs the *Mordecai Project* (), an international ministry that protects women and girls from gender-based violence. His latest books are “Follow Me” and “Let's Go Deeper”(Charisma House).

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