

Mark A. McGee

HOLY RESOLUTIONS

For A New Year

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INTRODUCTION

Let's count down to the new year together! The last week of every year is a great opportunity to reflect on what we've done the past year and plan for what we want to do in the new year. So, how do we as Christians phrase that question? I suggest this: "What does God want us to do for Him in 2011?"

Jesus made the issue of what God wants from us every year very clear in what He told His followers just before He ascended back into Heaven after His resurrection.

"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.' Amen" (Matthew 28:18-20)

"And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." (Mark 16:15-18)

“Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” (Luke 24:46-49)

“So when they met together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.” (Acts 1:6-9)

Jesus told His disciples what God wanted them to do each year of their lives:

1. go into all the world, preach the Gospel (repentance and remission of sins) in the name of Jesus to every creature and make disciples of all nations
2. be witnesses for Christ to the ends of the earth
3. baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
4. teach the disciples to obey everything Jesus had commanded them

The apostles did what Jesus told them to do. They waited in Jerusalem to receive power from the Holy Spirit, then began to witness to everyone around them. They started in Jerusalem, then into all Judea and Samaria. They preached repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul, saved many years later, took the Gospel of God's love beyond Israel into the Gentile world. He taught the Gentiles to preach the Gospel of God's Grace in their ministry of reconciliation and to represent Christ as ambassadors to the world.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, *‘The just shall live by faith.’* Romans 1:16-17

“Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

As we count down to the New Year, let's look at four specific areas of our life that God wants us to use for Him. We'll call it the **Holy Resolutions For The New Year.**

HOLY RESOLUTION #1

Worship

God created the human race to love and worship Him, so let's focus on that for our first Holy Resolution. Jesus Christ said that the highest aim of our life should be to love God with everything we are and have.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Matthew 22:37

Jesus pointed to three distinct areas of the human life that should be devoted to loving God:

1. all your heart
2. all your soul
3. all your mind

The Greek for “all” is *holos* and means “the whole” of something or someone. Jesus says our highest goal as His disciples is to love Him with our “whole” heart, soul and mind. These areas represent every aspect of the human experience:

1. “heart” is *kardias* and was understood by the Greek readers of Luke's Gospel to mean the entire mental, emotional and moral activity of the human race

2. “soul” is *psuche* and was understood to mean the immaterial, invisible part of a human being that would continue to exist after death of the body (*soma*)
3. “mind” is *dianoia* and was understood to mean the thinking through, meditating, reflecting part of people

Jesus told His disciples that their goal should be to love God with every part of their mental, emotional and moral activity; the immaterial, invisible part of themselves that would continue after their death; their abilities and the strength God had given them to accomplish the results of their abilities; and the part of their being that thought through, meditated and reflected.

We worship God because He is “worthy” of our praise. We love and worship Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). To worship God is to “revere” Him. The Greek word *sebomai* is the feeling of deep devotion and awe toward someone. *Proskuneo* comes from words that mean “to kiss toward” someone in the sense of reverence. *Latreuo* means to render religious service toward God. Look at how the words are used in the Bible for how we are to worship God. As you read these accounts, put yourself in the shoes of each person who is worshiping. What were they thinking and feeling at the moment they spoke to or about the Lord? Which ones of them were truly loving and worshiping God with their whole heart, soul, strength and mind?

Sebomai

“Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The

Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.” Acts 16:14

“And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.” Acts 18:7

Proskuneo

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him ... And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” Matthew 2:1-2, 11

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” Matthew 4:10

“And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’” Matthew 14:31-33

“And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, ‘Rejoice!’ So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.” Matthew 28:9

“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.’” John 4:21-24

“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.’ Then he said, ‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him.” John 9:35-38

“But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.” 1 Corinthians 14:24-25

“Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their

crowns before the throne, saying: ‘You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.’ Revelation 4:9-11

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’” Revelation 7:9-12

Latreuo

“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”
Philippians 3:3

“But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.”
Acts 24:14

So, what is our first **Holy Resolution** for the new year? To love and worship God with all our heart, soul and mind. Christians should, by

definition, be lovers and worshipers of God. How do we express worship? God has been teaching the fine art of worship for thousands of years. Here are some of the lessons He taught the children of Israel during their exodus from Egypt. What do these verses teach us about how to worship God?

“And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people. So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped.” Exodus 4:30-31

“And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.’ So the people bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.” Exodus 12:26-28

“Now He said to Moses, ‘Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. And Moses alone shall come near the LORD, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him.’ So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has said we will do.’” Exodus 24:1-3

“And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood *at* the door of the tabernacle, and *the LORD* talked with Moses. All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing *at* the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man *in* his tent door. So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” Exodus 33:9-11

“And He said: ‘Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you *are* shall see the work of the LORD. For it *is* an awesome thing that I will do with you. Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their *sacred* pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and *one of them* invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods. ‘You shall make no molded gods for yourselves.’” Exodus 34:10-17

“Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest

you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that *is* on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that *is* in the water beneath the earth. And *take heed*, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and *when* you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage. But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day.”
Deuteronomy 4:15-20

God looks at worship as a serious and vital part of following Him. He did not tolerate any Israelite worshiping other gods (carved images, idols, etc). It’s interesting that in the context of worship, God revealed that His name is “Jealous.” He is not going to share His people’s worship with anyone. Worship is for God alone.

You will not find God’s attitude toward worship change anywhere in Scripture. Whether He’s dealing with Israel or Christians, God demands the same high standard of love and worship from those who called by His Name. Look at the reasons God’s Word gives us for worshipping Him.

“But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; In fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple. Lead me, O LORD, in Your righteousness because of

my enemies; Make Your way straight before my face.” Psalm 5:7-8

“All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations Shall worship before You. For the kingdom *is* the LORD’s, And He rules over the nations.” Psalm 22:27-28

“Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, Give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” Psalm 29:1-2

“Say to God, ‘How awesome are Your works! Through the greatness of Your power Your enemies shall submit themselves to You. All the earth shall worship You And sing praises to You; They shall sing praises *to* Your name.’ Selah Come and see the works of God; *He is* awesome *in His* doing toward the sons of men.” Psalm 66:3-5

“Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me! There shall be no foreign god among you; Nor shall you worship any foreign god. I *am* the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.” Psalm 81:8-10

“The sea *is* His, for He made it; And His hands formed the dry *land*. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He *is* our God, And

we *are* the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand.” Psalm 95:5-7

“Give to the LORD the glory *due* His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth. Say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns; The world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously.’” Psalm 96:8-10

“The King’s strength also loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His footstool— He *is* holy.” Psalm 99:4-5

“You answered them, O LORD our God; You were to them God-Who-Forgives, Though You took vengeance on their deeds. Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His holy hill; For the LORD our God *is* holy.” Psalm 99:8-9

“I will praise You with my whole heart; Before the gods I will sing praises to You. I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name. In the day when I cried out, You answered me, *And* made me bold *with* strength in my soul.” Psalm 138:1-3

God shows us in His Word that He wants us to experience worship in three basic ways:

- I. Personal

2. Family
3. Congregation

Personal worship is your time alone with God to express your love and praise. **Family worship** is your time with members of physical your family to express love and praise to God. **Congregation worship** is your time with members of your church family to express love and praise to God. Each type of worship is important to your spiritual health and growth as well as the health and growth of people in your family and church.

We have so many reasons to worship God! He is worthy of our love and devotion. We should worship Him in the morning when we rise, throughout the day as we work and play, and in the evening when we lie down to sleep. We should worship Him for all He has done for us. God is our Creator and Sustainer. He is the Ruler of the universe. We should worship God for His forgiveness of our sins. We should worship Him for His lovingkindness and truth. We should worship Him for His magnificent Word. He should worship Him because He gives us life and hope. We should give God the glory due His Name!

Think deeply about this first Holy Resolution. May our worship experience in 2011 be greater than in any year we've experienced so far as His disciples.

HOLY RESOLUTION #2

The Word

Our second Holy Resolution for the new year is to become engaged in the **Word of God**. “Engaged” is a key word. It means to be “deeply involved” in something. If I said I was engaged in a business deal, but rarely showed up for meetings, and when I did show up wasn’t prepared to participate and spent most of the time staring out a window, would you believe me when I said I was “engaged” in the deal? Of course not. My actions would speak louder than my words. My lack of interest in the deal would be obvious to everyone.

The same is true about being “engaged” in God’s Word. We would not know Who God is or What He wants if it were not for His Word. God reveals Himself in His Word. He reveals His purpose in His Word. He reveals His will in His Word. He reveals His methods in His Word. He reveals His Truth in His Word. He reveals His future in His Word. God shows us how to be saved from sin, how to serve Him, how to worship Him, and how to tell other people about Him. Everything we need to know about this life and the next life are explained fully in God’s Word.

Look at what God said about the importance of being deeply involved in His Word. Let’s begin with God’s dealings with Israel during their time of wandering in the desert between Egypt and the promised land. First, notice what God said, what the ministers of His Word said and did, and what His people said and did. Think about your own involvement in His Word.

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.’ So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do.’ So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.” Exodus 19:5-8

“So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has said we will do.’ And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel.” Exodus 22:3-4

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’ So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.” Exodus 34:27-28

“Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor

take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.” Deuteronomy 4:1-2

“To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself *is* God; *there is* none other besides Him. Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire. And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power, driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land *as* an inheritance, as *it is* this day. Therefore know this day, and consider *it* in your heart, that the LORD Himself *is* God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; *there is* no other. You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong *your* days in the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time.” Deuteronomy 4:35-40

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” Deuteronomy 6:5-7

“And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you *and*

test you, to know what *was* in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.” Deuteronomy 8:2-3

“When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. Then the LORD delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them *were* all the words which the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, *that* the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.” Deuteronomy 9:9-11

“And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime. You shall write on them all the words of this law, when you have crossed over, that you may enter the land which the LORD your God is giving you, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey,’ just as the LORD God of your fathers promised you.” Deuteronomy 27:2-3

“Cursed *is* the one who does not confirm *all* the words of this law by observing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’
Deuteronomy 27:26

“The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe *them*. So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, *to* the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them. But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.”
Deuteronomy 28:9-15

“If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD, then the LORD

will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues—great and prolonged plagues—and serious and prolonged sicknesses.” Deuteronomy 28:58-59

“Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do. All of you stand today before the LORD your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives—also the stranger who *is* in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water— that you may enter into covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath, which the LORD your God makes with you today, that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and *that* He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Deuteronomy 29:9-13

“So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying: ‘At the end of *every* seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who *is* within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and *that* their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to

fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.” Deuteronomy 31:9-13

Do you see the importance God places on His Word? Hearing and obeying what God says has great importance and serious implications. God promised to bless and protect Israel as the people obeyed His Word. God also promised to curse and remove His protection from Israel as the people disobeyed His Word.

This emphasis on obeying God’s Word continued during all of the history of Israel in the Bible. God made it clear to Israel’s leaders that **knowledge of** and **obedience to** His Word were paramount to their success and the success of Israel.

Look at what God promised Joshua, the man who became Israel’s leader after Moses’ death.

“After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying: ‘Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall *be able to* stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, *so* I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the

land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God *is* with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:1-9

We know about the many successes of Israel under the leadership of Joshua. Here’s why he was successful in defeating the larger and better equipped armies of Israel’s enemies.

“Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them *were* in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.” Joshua 8:33-35

“The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.”
Joshua 21:44-45

Israel succeeded in doing all that God wanted them to do because they heard and obeyed God’s Word. Unfortunately, Israel also failed miserably through the centuries that followed because of their disobedience to and lack of interest in God’s Word. However, it did have a prosperous time during the reign of Israel’s greatest King, David. Here’s what he said about the importance of God’s Word in his life. Notice how “engaged” King David was in the Word of God.

“The words of the LORD *are* pure words, *Like* silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.” Psalm 12:6-7

“*As for* God, His way *is* perfect; The word of the LORD is proven; He *is* a shield to all who trust in Him.” Psalm 18:30

“For the word of the LORD *is* right, And all His work *is done* in truth.” Psalm 33:4

“He *is* the LORD our God; His judgments *are* in all the earth. He remembers His covenant forever, The word *which* He commanded, for a thousand generations, *The covenant* which He made with Abraham, And His

oath to Isaac, And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel *as* an everlasting covenant, Saying, ‘To you I will give the land of Canaan As the allotment of your inheritance,’ When they were few in number, Indeed very few, and strangers in it. When they went from one nation to another, From *one* kingdom to another people, He permitted no one to do them wrong; Yes, He rebuked kings for their sakes, *Saying*, ‘Do not touch My anointed ones, And do My prophets no harm.’
Psalm 105:7-15

“With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You. Blessed *are* You, O LORD! Teach me Your statutes.” Psalm 119:10-12

“I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word. Deal bountifully with Your servant, *That* I may live and keep Your word.” Psalm 119:15-17

“Remember the word to Your servant, Upon which You have caused me to hope. This *is* my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life. The proud have me in great derision, *Yet* I do not turn aside from Your law.” Psalm 119:49-51

“Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness *endures* to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides.” Psalm 119:89-90

“I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, *Sweeter* than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.” Psalm 119:102-104

“I hate the double-minded, But I love Your law. You *are* my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word. Depart from me, you evildoers, For I will keep the commandments of my God!” Psalm 119:113-115

“Your testimonies are wonderful; Therefore my soul keeps them. The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple. I opened my mouth and panted, For I longed for Your commandments.” Psalm 119:129-131

“Look upon me and be merciful to me, As Your custom *is* toward those who love Your name. Direct my steps by Your word, And let no iniquity have dominion over me. Redeem me from the oppression of man, That I may keep Your precepts.” Psalm 119:132-134

“Your word *is* very pure; Therefore Your servant loves it.” Psalm 119:140

“I rise before the dawning of the morning, And cry for help; I hope in Your word. My eyes are awake through the *night* watches, That I may meditate on Your word.” Psalm 119:147-148

“The entirety of Your word *is* truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments *endures* forever. Princes persecute me without a cause, But my heart stands in awe of Your word. I rejoice at Your word As one who finds great treasure.” Psalm 119:160-162

“My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments *are* righteousness.” Psalm 119:172

“I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.” Psalm 138:2

King David succeeded in leading Israel through many tough situations because he looked to God for his success. In good times and bad, David wanted to hear from God.

That’s how it should be for all of us, every day. Whether things are going well in our lives or not, we need to be engaged in studying God’s Word.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God (John 1:1-3, 14) and depended on hearing from His Heavenly Father. Jesus used the Word of God to face the testing of Satan (Matthew 4). Jesus taught that hearing and obeying God’s Word were necessary to spiritual life and success (Matthew 13:23). Jesus spoke with great authority (Luke 4:32-36) and said that His Words were spirit and life (John 6:63) and would never pass away (Mark 13:31). In the Lord’s great prayer before His arrest, beating and crucifixion, Jesus told His Father about the importance of God’s Word to Him and His disciples.

“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me ... I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.” John 17:6-8, 14-19

The disciples of Christ based their faith on God’s Word and believed deeply in its power to transform lives (Acts 4:31). The apostles believed preaching and teaching God’s Word was their solemn duty and responsibility and that nothing should take them away from it (Acts 6:2-7). The Apostle Paul took the Word of God to the Gentile nations and they were saved by the hundreds and thousands (Acts 13 – 28). He knew that God’s Word was the door and the path to their salvation and would be to all who came to Jesus Christ by grace through faith (Ephesians 1:13; 2:8-9). Paul knew that God’s Word would protect them in their battle with Satan and his evil empire (Ephesians 6:17), bring them great wisdom (Colossians 3:15-17) and give them tremendous power in their service to the Lord.

So, what do we do? How should we handle God's Word? Look carefully at the words of the Apostle Paul as the Holy Spirit inspired him on that important matter.

“For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.” 2 Corinthians 2:17

“But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.” 2 Corinthians 4:2

“Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.” 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

“We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all *things* we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor,

by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and *yet* true; as unknown, and *yet* well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and *yet* not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things.” 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

“But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God *is* witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 2:4-6

“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.” 1 Thessalonians 2:13

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nour-

ished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.” 1 Timothy 4:1-6

“If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of gain*. From such withdraw yourself.” 1 Timothy 6:3-5

“Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, *even* to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” 2 Timothy 2:8-10

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

“I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teach-

ers; and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” 2 Timothy 4:1-5

God has given all of us a high calling. We are to be ready at all times to share God’s Word with people. How do we get ready? How do we know that what we’re telling people is correct? “Rightly dividing the word of truth” means to “cut straight” the Word of God and handle it “correctly.” It carries the idea of focusing on the Word of God with such intensity that we cut a straight line through it, dividing the Word with the precision of an experienced surgeon. That’s how important God’s Word is to God.

Finally, let us never forget the **power** that is the Word of God. It is alive!

“For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.” Hebrews 4:12-13

Knowing and obeying the Word of God is our **Holy Resolution #2**. Think about it today, this week, and throughout 2011. Ask God to help you “rightly divide the word of truth” in a way that is far above anything you have experienced before. May God’s Word be magnified in our hearts, minds, mouths and lives this coming new year.

HOLY RESOLUTION #3

Ministry

Our third Holy Resolution for the new year is to be involved in **ministries** that present the saving Grace of Christ and build up the people of God. The word “ministry” comes from two Greek words, *diakonia* and *leitourgia*. *Diakonia* is the office and work of a *diakonos* (minister, deacon, servant). *Leitourgia* was used for sacred service performed by priests and is also used for the service Christians perform for each other.

Here are some examples from the NKJV that show the diversity of the use of the words.

Diakonia

“But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.’” Luke 10:40

“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, ‘Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry ... And they prayed and said, ‘You, O Lord, who

know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.’ And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” Acts 1:15-17,24-26

“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” Acts 6:3-4

“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.” Acts 12:25

“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:24

“On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.” Acts 21:18-19

“For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may

provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them.” Romans 11:13-14

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it* in *our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.” Romans 12:6-8

“Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.” Romans 15:30-32

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

“I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and *that* they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with *us*.” 1 Corinthians 16:15-16

“But if the ministry of death, written *and* engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which *glory* was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away *was* glorious, what remains *is* much more glorious.” 2 Corinthians 3:7-11

“Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.” 2 Corinthians 4:1

“Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

“We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.” 2 Corinthians 6:3

“For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.” 2 Corinthians 8:3-4

“Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority ... For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for *your* liberal sharing with them and all *men*, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.” 2 Corinthians 9:1-2, 12-14

“Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to minister to you.” 2 Corinthians 11:7-8

“And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.” 1 Timothy 1:12-13

“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” 2 Timothy 4:5

“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and *as* for your works, the last *are* more than the first.” Revelation 2:19

Leitourgia

“And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house.” Luke 1:21-23

“Yes, and if I am being poured out *as a drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all ... Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.” Philippians 2:17, 29-30

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.” Hebrews 8:6

“For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, ‘*This is the blood of the covenant.*’”

“which God has commanded you.” Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.” Hebrews 9:19-22

Ministry is the work of serving others. It’s about meeting the immediate and long-range needs of people. Jesus did it, Peter did it, John did it, James did it, Paul did, Christians all over the world have done it for almost 2,000 years. Ministry is something God has called every Christian to do. Being involved in ministry is like breathing; it’s a vital part of our life.

Paul made that clear when he explained the simplicity of salvation: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10) We are God’s workmanship and created us in Christ Jesus for “good works” (*agathois ergois*).

Ergois is our work, employment, task, enterprise, deeds, actions, ministries. We are God’s “good work” and He has given us the task of doing “good works” for Jesus and others. In fact, we were “created” in Christ Jesus for the express purpose of doing good works! Good works was not an afterthought for God. He always intended that “good works” would be part of our faith-walk. We are saved by grace through faith with a view toward the accomplishment of good works that God intended for us to do as part of His amazing plan for our life. Wow!

If you're already involved in serving others for the glory of Christ, enjoy another great year of ministry! However, if you're not involved in service, let's take a look at how to get started.

Paul explained the ministry process beautifully in 1 Corinthians 12:

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Notice the path of service:

1. diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit
2. differences of ministries, but the same Lord
3. diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all

What Paul shows us here is how the Triune God is involved in our service. The Spirit gives the various spiritual gifts (*charismaton* - gifts of grace), Jesus gives the different ministries (*diakonion* - service), and the Father gives us all the activities (*energmaton* - power) we need to accomplish His purpose for the “good works” He created us to do.

God is so wonderful! Everything comes from Him. He chose us from before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) and part of that choice included our spiritual gifts, ministries and the power to accomplish God's purposes within our service to Him and others. God will reveal His will for us clearly as we look to Him for guidance.

First, look at the lists of **spiritual gifts** in the Bible (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4) and see which ones God has given to you. Talk with Christians who are busy in ministry and ask them how they discovered their spiritual gifts. Your spiritual gifts are often well-suited to your personality and interests. Remember, God created us in Christ Jesus for good works, “which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” God knew everything about you before you were born. It’s no surprise that so many Christians are good at what they do. God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Our personal interests and physical and mental abilities usually go well with the spiritual gifts God gives us. Also, look for people in your church who God is using in ministry who have similar spiritual gifts to yours. Ask to spend time with them, learn from them, see what goes into using the particular gifts you have for the glory of God.

Second, look at the many examples of **ministries** in the Bible and in the church today. There are so many ways we can serve God and others. We can minister to people in our family, our neighborhood, our church, our school, our workplace, our government, our armed forces, etc. Truck drivers have ministries to truck drivers. Martial artists have ministries to martial artists. Computer programmers have ministries to computer programmers. Entertainers have ministries to entertainers. Inmates have ministries to inmates. Moms have ministries to moms. Dads have ministries to dads. Kids have ministries to kids. Seniors have ministries to seniors. And the list goes on and on. There is no end to the creative ways we can minister. If you can imagine it, you can do it, with God’s help.

Third, look to God for the **power** to minister. The Greek word *energmaton* comes from *energeia*, which is used in the Bible for the power of God to accomplish great and mighty things. It's the word used in the resurrection of Jesus Christ ("and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His **mighty power** which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come." Ephesians 1:19-21). It's the word used for the power of Jesus Christ in subduing all things to Himself ("For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the **working** by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself." Philippians 3:20-21).

This is a stunning statement in light of what God will do through us as we use our spiritual gifts in creative ministries. He will use His miraculous energy and power to bring about eternal results through our efforts. We are not strong, but He is mighty to conquer!

Resolve this coming year to use your spiritual gifts to serve God and others and look to the Lord for the mighty working of His power in your ministry to accomplish great things for God.

HOLY RESOLUTION #4

Missions

Our fourth Holy Resolution for the new year is **missions**. The idea for the word comes from the Hebrew *mismeret* (duty, requirement, service, duty, obligation) and *derek* (way, road, journey, path) and the Greek word *diakonia* (ministry, service). The Hebrew words were used for the Israelites completing the work God gave them to do, including missions of warfare. The Greek word was used for Christians completing the work God gave them to do. Here's an example of how different versions of the Book of Acts handle the word *diakonia* from Acts 12:25.

“When Barnabas and Saul had finished their **mission**, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.” (NIV)

“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their **mission**, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.” (NASB)

“And Barnabas and Saul came back from Jerusalem when they had completed their mission, bringing with them John whose surname was Mark.” (Amplified Bible)

“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* **ministry**, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.” (NKJV)

“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their **ministry**, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.” (KJV)

Since the primary Greek word, *diakonia*, is translated **ministry** and **missions** in different versions of the Bible, what’s the difference between the third Holy Resolution of **ministry** that we studied yesterday and the fourth Holy Resolution of **missions** we’re looking at today? None. There is no difference in the Greek language. **Ministry** and **missions** are the same thing. They are the work God calls us to do for Him and others.

The difference in the meaning of the words comes to us from the Latin, not the Greek. The Latin word for **ministry** is *ministerium* and means “the function of the priest.” The Latin word for **mission** is *missionem* and means “the act of sending.” The word was used by the Jesuit priests in the late 16th century for sending members of their order abroad. It was used in the early 17th century for sending a group of people to a foreign land on commercial or political business. The English word **mission** is a transliteration of the Latin *missionem* from the early 17th century and carries over the same definition of “sending people abroad for religious service.” It has also been used for a permanent embassy in a foreign country, the work of spies, and military tasks.

I met many missionaries when I was a child. They often came to our church and talked about the great distance they had traveled to serve God and the many dangers they faced for the sake of the Gospel. They made their point by speaking foreign languages, wearing the native clothing of the people they served, demonstrating how to use

native tools and weapons, and showing slides of half-naked villagers carrying spears and looking fierce. The missionary and pastor would then call on the young people of the church to dedicate their lives to become missionaries and go overseas to preach the Gospel.

The fact is that **every Christian** is a missionary and **every place** is a mission field. God does call people to travel far away from home for the purpose of preaching the Gospel. Paul and Barnabas are examples of the first Christian missionaries in that sense.

“Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” Acts 13:1-4

What Paul and Barnabas, and later Paul and Silas did during their travels from city to city, crossing national boundaries, was the **ministry** God called them to do. God used them to spread the Gospel quickly throughout the Gentile world. Paul and his fellow ministers/missionaries were able to establish churches in most regions of the Greek and Roman world in less than 30 years. The letters Paul wrote to many of those churches have been used to spread the Gospel of Grace around the world. More than half of the Book of Acts is about Paul’s ministry/mission to the Gentile world. We can hold him up as a great example of a foreign missionary.

What did Paul tell Christians to do? Leave their towns and villages and travel to foreign countries to preach the Gospel? Paul did ask churches to send help for his work in other countries, but the dominant message Paul gave to Christians living in the 1st century was to serve God where they lived. There would always be a place for foreign missions, but the vast majority of Christians would never leave the village of their birth. Their most powerful ministry was with their family, friends and co-workers.

That's interesting in light of how people look at Christian missions. Do an Internet search for "history of Christian missions" and almost everything you find is about foreign missions. What about missionary work at home?

The modern idea of "home missions" began in the 18th century and expanded in the 19th and 20th centuries. This is where denominations and mission organizations established ministries to primarily reach the down and out. Some of the better known home missions that developed in the 19th century were The Salvation Army in London and The Bowery Mission in New York City. Today, most cities across the U.S. have one or more missions to the poor (sometimes called rescue and Gospel missions). When you look at their mission statements it becomes clear that what these home mission groups did was do what God told Christians to do in their cities and towns.

"And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the cap-

tives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” Luke 4:17-19

“Then He also said to him who invited Him, ‘When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.’” Luke 14:12-14

“...and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. *They desired* only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.” Galatians 2:9-11

“My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and say to the poor man, ‘You stand there,’ or, ‘Sit here at my footstool,’ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the king-

dom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man.” James 2:1-6

“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion *is* useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” James 1:26-27

Caring for the poor, orphans and widows is an ancient command of God to His people. It should always be a vital ministry of any church, denomination and Christian organization. “Christian home missions” should have had an unbroken history of 2,000 years based on what the apostles told believers to do.

How many ways do you see from these writings that we can impact our community (our mission field) for Christ?

“*Let* love *be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. *Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is

possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, '*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*' says the Lord. Therefore '*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:9-21

"Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, '*You shall not commit adultery,*' '*You shall not murder,*' '*You shall not steal,*' '*You shall not bear false witness,*' '*You shall not covet,*' and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law." Romans 13:8-10

"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, '*The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.*' For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." Romans 15:1-7

“But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.” Romans 15:25-27

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints ... For *I do not mean* that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, *that* now at this time your abundance *may supply* their lack, that their abundance also may *supply* your lack—that there may be equality. As it is written, ‘*He who gathered much had nothing left*

over, and he who gathered little had no lack.” 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, 13-15

“But this *I say*: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. *So let* each one *give* as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: ‘*He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.*’ 2 Corinthians 9:6-9

“Therefore, putting away lying, ‘*Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,*’ for we are members of one another. ‘*Be angry, and do not sin*’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 4:24-32

“Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a

complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Colossians 3:12-17

“But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and *that* you may lack nothing.” 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in

Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

“My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and say to the poor man, ‘You stand there,’ or, ‘Sit here at my footstool,’ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?” James 2:1-7

“Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. Servants, *be* submissive to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God.” 1 Peter 2:17-20

“Finally, all *of you be* of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, *be* tenderhearted, *be* courte-

ous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For *'He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.'* 1 Peter 3:8-12

“But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for *'love will cover a multitude of sins.'* Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it*, as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Peter 4:7-11

“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for

‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*. To Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Peter 5:1-11

Finally, we have the most amazing words ever spoken to churches directly from the mouth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life,

which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*. And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, These things says

the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and *as* for your works, the last *are* more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— *He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'*— as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 2 & 3

So, to conclude as we say goodbye to 2010, let's consider all the opportunities God has given us and will give us in the coming days, weeks, and months. What we do as Christians in 2011 will be all about serving God and obeying His Word. He commands us to go and make disciples in every city and nation. Remember that the vi-

sion of ministry/missions belongs to the Lord. He told us to go and make disciples of all nations. Jesus may call you to leave your home and travel to another town, another state, or another country to preach the Gospel and build up the saints. Jesus may ask you stay at home and minister to your family, friends and co-workers. Where Jesus sends us is up to Him. He has the vision and the plan. What we need to do is be prepared, ready and obedient.

My prayer for you is that the new year will be an amazing opportunity for you in your service to our Lord. I'm asking God to give me thoughts and insights into His Word this coming year that will help you in your ministry/mission for Him. That's one of the missions God's given me this coming year. May it be our best year ever with Jesus Christ and His people.

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