

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn about the practical life of the Christian community. Two teachers will teach from the Bible about the Christian festivals. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today's teaching is: **THE NEW YEAR'S FESTIVAL**, and especially about the way Christians celebrate the beginning of a new year. First, we will learn the importance of examining ourselves before we make a new beginning this year. Second, we will learn the importance of making the right decisions and choices when we begin the new year. Third, we will learn the importance of involving God in every beginning we make.

The Bible is a book which tells you *the beginning* of all important things. It reveals that God existed in the beginning. It relates the beginning of the created universe, the beginning of mankind, and the beginning of God's purpose and man's task on earth. But the Bible also reveals *the end* of all things. It relates the end of this world with all its countries and governments at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Then he will judge every person who ever lived according to their deeds.

Every New Year's Festival reminds all people that God is the Beginning and the End of all things and therefore that all people need God every new year and during the whole of every year. Every New Year's Festival reminds people that their time on earth is limited, that also this year will end and that soon they will arrive at the end of their lives. Every New Year's Festival is an opportunity for all people to evaluate the past year, to make new decisions and choices and especially to make a new commitment to put their whole lives in the hands of the living God. For Christians it is also an opportunity to renew their commitment to God and to God's purpose for their lives on earth.

(S) **POINT 1. DURING THE NEW YEAR'S FESTIVAL, EXAMINE YOURSELF BEFORE YOU MAKE A NEW BEGINNING.**

Whenever you stand at the beginning of a New Year, then you should first examine the past year. The New Year's Festival is a very good time to ask yourself a few very important questions in order to help you evaluate your past year.

The first question. What is the most important question everybody should ask themselves?

The most important question everyone should ask himself is, "Am I a Christian or not?" The most important question you should ask yourself before you make a new beginning this New Year is about your salvation.

2 Corinthians 13:5 says, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you - unless, of course, you fail the test?" Many people will begin this New Year without Jesus Christ, and thus without the Living God. Everyone who does not believe in Jesus Christ is lost. His sins are not yet forgiven, the wrath of God remains on him and he will inherit eternal punishment. Therefore, he should examine and test himself.

If you have never received Jesus Christ into your heart and life as Saviour, then do it now. Pray the following prayer after me: "Dear Father in heaven, I confess that I am a sinner and lost (pause). I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross as a punishment for my sins (pause) and that he was resurrected and is alive (pause). I now ask Jesus Christ to come into my heart and into my life (pause), to forgive me my sins and to give me new life (pause). I want to learn from Christ as my Teacher and to obey him as my Lord (pause). Thank you for hearing my prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen (pause)." Dear listener, have you asked yourself the question, "Am I a Christian or not?"

(T) The second question. Have there been sins in my life during the past year?

An important question you should ask yourself before you make a new beginning this New Year is about sin in your life. Is there any particular sin in your life, which you have not confessed to Jesus Christ? Is there some hidden motive that cannot please God? Is there some secret sin of which you have become a slave? In Psalm 139:1-7,23-24 David says: "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. ... Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ... Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is *any offensive way* in me, and lead me in the way everlasting".

Psalm 139 is a "prayer of examination". David realises that he is neither perfect nor sinless, but he does not always know what things in his life displeases God. Therefore he asks God to show him his sins.

Think about the past year and evaluate your behaviour and words, your motives and attitudes, and the decisions and choices you made during the past year. When you know or feel that your life is not right, pray Psalm 139 as “a prayer of examination”. Use this prayer in the Psalms to ask God to search your hidden motives and to test your deepest feelings. Ask God to uncover your fears, your hurts and your offensive behaviour. *God already knows* what is hidden in your mind and heart, but he wants you to ask him to show it to you. In John 8:32 Jesus promises, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free”. Even the truth about the darkest side of your nature can set you free!

(S) The third question. Did I make progress this last year or not?

An important question you should ask yourself before you make a new beginning this New Year is about progress in your life. In 1 Timothy 4:15-16 Paul says: “Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, *so that everyone may see your progress*. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers”.

What progress in your growth as a Christian did you make during the past year? What spiritual fruit did you bear for God? What does God want you to change during this coming year? What does God want you to improve during this coming year? Take time to think about these questions and give your answers to God in prayer.

(T) **POINT 2. DURING THE NEW YEAR’S FESTIVAL, MAKE SOME IMPORTANT DECISIONS AND CHOICES.**

Every New Year is a very good opportunity to make very important decisions or choices in your life. Some of the most important decisions or choices you should make are the following: What will be the direction of your life during the coming year? In whom are you going to put your trust? What are you going to do with your time, talents, opportunities, money, etc.? What are your goals and priorities in life? Let us look at the decisions and choices some people in the Bible have made. Then, make the right decisions and choices!

(S) The first decision. What will be the direction of your life during this year?

An important decision or choice you should make before you make a new beginning this New Year is about the direction of your life. Jeremiah 6:16 says, “Stand at the cross-roads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.” Every New Year’s Festival is like standing at cross-roads. You must make a decision if you are going to turn left, right or go straight on. Every New Year you should decide whether you are going to turn to God and live in God’s way, which is the good and right way, or whether you are going to turn away from God and live in the wrong way. The good and right way is the way God has revealed in the Bible from ancient times. Pray and ask God to show you the right way.

(T) The second decision. Whom are you going to trust during this year?

An important decision or choice you should make before you make a new beginning this New Year is not to trust in material things or in lying people. To trust in material things is a great danger. Wealth often chokes the words that God speaks and false prophets try to keep people away from Jesus Christ. Read the Bible and test its truth. Although the words in the Bible have been written over a period of about 2000 years by about 40 true prophets, it nevertheless has one and the same message of truth! The Bible is absolutely the most unique book in the world! After you have read the Bible and tested its spiritual and historical truth, then put your trust in Jesus Christ. Never put your trust in material things and never put your trust in lying prophets. Instead, put your trust in Jesus Christ and what he teaches in the Bible. The truth will truly set you free!

In Psalm 20:7-8 David says, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses... They are brought to their knees and fall ...” All the people who choose to trust in weapons of destruction and wars will be brought to their knees and fall. David urges you and me never to trust in weapons, terrorists and wars, but to trust in the God of the Bible. If we do that, we will rise up and stand firm! In Psalm 23, David chooses to trust in the God of the Bible as his Shepherd. The result is that God leads him along the right way, is present with him when he walks through the valley where death threatens and vindicates him against his enemies.

(S) The third decision. In which areas does God want you to make progress during this year?

An important decision or choice you should make before you make a new beginning this New Year is to make real progress in your life. Many people make progress only during their years in school. After that, they stand still during the rest of their lives and learn nothing new anymore. The Lord Jesus taught Christians to make progress during their whole lives! For example, you could decide to stop a bad habit like smoking. You could renounce hatred and revenge and war. Or you could begin to practise encouraging people instead of criticising them. You could give your time, money and energy to help the poor and support the oppressed.

Matthew 25:14-30 teaches about making progress. Jesus has given every person one or more talents. A talent is a natural gift, a skill or especially an opportunity to serve Jesus Christ in this world. Everybody has received at least one talent. Jesus Christ expects everyone to use his talent to gain more talents. He expects everyone to multiply their natural gifts, skills and opportunities. Ephesians 5:16 teaches about making progress. Paul says, "Make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." Philippians 3:13-14 teaches about making progress. Paul says, "One thing I do: I forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Jesus Christ gives every Christian a calling, a goal and a task for his life. He expects every Christian to know the goal of his life and to make progress towards reaching his goal. Dear listener, what is your calling and goal in this life?

(T) POINT 3. DURING THE NEW YEAR'S FESTIVAL, INVOLVE GOD IN ALL YOUR BEGINNINGS.

Every New Year's Festival is a very good opportunity to make some new commitments to God, especially to surrender to his control over your life and to depend on his wonderful presence in your life. Involve God in all the beginnings you are going to make this year.

First. A Christian should depend on God's presence in his life.

An important commitment every Christian should make before he makes a new beginning this New Year is to depend on God's presence in his life.

In Deuteronomy 1:29-33 is taught that God himself goes before his people and that God fights for his people. Wherever we as Christians will have to go during the next year, God himself will be there before we arrive there, he will be on our side and he will fight for us. The God of the Bible does not fight with weapons of destruction like bombs and guns. He fights with spiritual weapons like mercy and forgiveness, love and grace. God often does not take our difficulties away from us, but carries us through our difficulties! Just as a father carries his son all the way through difficult situations, so God carries us through our difficulties until we reach our final destiny! In 2 Kings 6:15-17 is taught that sometimes God will allow his people to come into very difficult circumstances. The prophet Elisha and his servant were surrounded by enemies who wanted to capture and kill them. The servant of the prophet was very afraid, but then God opened his spiritual eyes and he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around the prophet Elisha! Although Christians can only see the physical dangers and enemies, the God of the Bible and all his angels are nevertheless very present! Psalm 34:7 says, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them". In Isaiah 41:10 God promises, "Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." And in Isaiah 43:1-7 he promises, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you ... And when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned."

(S) Second. A Christian should depend on God's grace in his life.

An important commitment every Christian should make before he makes a new beginning this New Year is to depend on God's grace in his life.

In Revelation 3:7-8, the Lord Jesus Christ promises, "I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut!" It is only by God's grace that God opens doors of opportunities for Christian in every place in the world. No matter how much the enemies of Christians try to immobilise Christians, discriminate against Christians, oppress Christians and persecute Christians, Jesus Christ will open some door for them. It is Jesus Christ who opens doors of opportunity to study or to get a job or to find a marriage partner, etc. *Only he* opens a door of opportunity to tell other people about Jesus Christ. Even when other people try to close doors, Jesus says, "What I open, no one can shut, and what I shut, no one can open." It is not the political leaders, military leaders or religious leaders who open and shut doors in our lives, but it is Jesus Christ himself! Christians believe in the sovereignty of God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christians should depend on God's grace through Jesus Christ to open doors of opportunities for them during this new year!

Of course, every Christian will face difficulties. But God has a purpose with the difficulties you face tomorrow or during the coming year. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 Paul teaches that when you face difficulties, sickness or persecution, you should depend on God's grace. God did not take Paul's difficulties away, but instead said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, Christians should depend on the grace of God whenever they face difficulties, sickness and persecution during the new year.

(T) Third. A Christian should depend on God's sovereign and good will for his life.

An important commitment every Christian should make before he makes a new beginning this New Year is to depend on God's sovereign and good will for his life.

In James 4:13-17, the Bible warns that you should not boast and brag that tomorrow you will do this and the next day you will do that. Nobody knows what will happen tomorrow! You do not know whether you will be alive tomorrow! Therefore, you should depend on God's sovereign good will for your life when you make your plans for tomorrow and for every day of the new year. You should say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

(S) Fourth. A Christian should depend on God's victory in his life.

An important commitment every Christian should make before he makes a new beginning this New Year is to depend on God's victory in his life.

When people read newspapers or listen to the news over the radio, they often just hear "bad news". Nations go to war against one another; people tell lies, steal, rape and murder. Businessmen and politicians are often corrupt. Policemen and judges often do not defend the poor and helpless, but show partiality for people who can give them bribes. However, when people read the Bible or listen to the Christian radio, then they hear "good news"! In Romans 8:28-39, God teaches that the final victory belongs not to the wicked and corrupt people, but to God's people! It says, "If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors!"

No matter what happens to you as a Christian during the new year, you already know that you will have the victory! Whatever happens in this world is not the end. The final end is the second coming of Jesus, the resurrection from the dead, the final judgement and condemnation of the wicked and the renewal of heaven and earth in which only righteousness will dwell! Therefore, when you make a beginning this new year, depend on the final victory you will have with Jesus Christ at the end of all your years on earth!

(T) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Teach new believers how Christians celebrate the New Year's Festival.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".