

Do It Now



In the 1993 comedy film ‘Groundhog Day’ actor Bill Murray played an arrogant weatherman who finds himself forced to re-live the same day over and over again until he is forced to re-examine his life and priorities, change his selfish ways, and become a kinder and better human being. Now, whilst this may be a novel idea on which to

base a film, it bears no resemblance to real life, where you get one shot, with no dress rehearsals. And let’s face it, we don’t always get it right first time, we make mistakes. It is therefore wonderful how each morning God presents us with a new start, a brand new day, unsullied, and full of possibilities. At this time of year, though, we especially think of new starts as we ponder the year ahead. With this in mind, let me suggest five things which, if done, will ensure your New Year has an impact for time and eternity – and which may change not only your life, but others, in 2016.

1. Sort what needs sorting. There is one thing above all others that, if not yet done, needs sorting ere you even cross the threshold of 2016. If you haven’t full assurance that it is well with your soul, settling this vital matter should be your top and most urgent priority. His Spirit will not always strive with man (Gen 6:3). You cannot say what will happen tomorrow, as none of us knows what a day may bring forth (James 4:14; Prov 27:1). Joseph A. Alexander rightly observed: ‘If men are prepared to die, they are ready for everything.’ You need to seek the Lord while He may be found (Is 55:6). The Bible is very clear on this. ‘... *Now* is the day of salvation.’ (2 Cor 6:2) ‘... Choose you *this day* whom ye will serve.’ (Josh 24:15) Him or her that comes in sincere repentance and personal faith to Jesus, He will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

Perhaps, though, you may have been saved from sin – but are still playing with it – if not worse. The hymnwriter Harper G. Smith made this telling observation: ‘We cannot be channels of blessing / If we consciously trifle with sin / We will barriers be and a hindrance / To those we are trying to win.’ If we desire others to turn from sin, mustn’t we do likewise? A wise man has said: ‘Take heed of secret sins. They will undo you if loved and maintained: one moth may spoil the garment; one leak drown the ship; a penknife stab can kill a man as well as a sword ... therefore take heed that secret sinnings eat not out good beginnings.’ The enemy may try to enslave, but never forget – greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world (1 Jn 4:4). The One who holds the keys of hell and of death (Rev 1:18) can break any shackles that may presently bind you. ‘If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.’ (Jn 8:36)

2. Say what needs saying. Men are often blamed for bottling up their feelings and not saying what really is on their heart. On that fateful day in New York on 11th September 2001, as the fires blazed beneath those trapped with no hope of escape in the upper floors of the World Trade Centre, many made a final phone call to their nearest and dearest to tell them that they loved them. Do those who mean the most to you know how you feel? When the Apostle John told his readers to love in deed and in truth, not merely in word or tongue (1 Jn 3:18), he was of course saying that true love will not be evidenced by empty words, but by sincerely meant, heartfelt words, backed up by loving actions. Is there someone today who needs to be told – and shown – that you love them?

3. Pray what needs praying. I can distinctly remember a fellow CSCU member sharing with me *how* the situation with their group's dwindling numbers had been turned around – 'Everything changed when we really started to pray about it.' We all know that prayer changes things – but do we always act upon that knowledge? Prayer changes our understanding (Eph 1:17-18). It changes fear (Ps 34:4-5). It changes humanly impossible situations (Jer 32:17; Luke 1:37). It changes lack (James 4:2; Matt 7:7-8). It changes weakness to strength (Ps 138:3; Eph 3:16). It changes stressful situations (Ps 107:27-29). It changes outcomes for the better (Ps 106:23). We all know of situations in our own lives, within our families, in our country and in the wider world which we are powerless to change – but which God *can*. Your prayers can make a difference in 2016 – so will you *pray what needs praying*?

4. Mend what needs mending. In the early church, onlookers observed how those first century believers loved each other. What has gone wrong? We seem to write others' virtues in the sand, yet carve their faults and failings in stone. Bickering, grudge bearing, and refusing to speak have become all too common, not only between brothers and sisters in Christ, but equally between those sharing blood ties. Were Jesus' words not amply clear? – 'Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; *first be reconciled to thy brother*, and then come and offer thy gift.' (Matt 5:23-24) In a nutshell, drop what you're doing, make things right, and *do it now*. Peter taught that disharmony in the home can hinder God answering our prayers (1 Pet 3:7). What applies in the home surely has equal validity in our churches – yet we wonder why God is not blessing as He once did. The Apostle John didn't mince his words either: 'If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' The implied answer is – he can't.

'I just wish I could have told him – *in the Living Years*' is the refrain from a poignant 1988 song, where a son expresses sadness that his estranged father had died without their having made up their differences and being reconciled. Two lines from that song speak so eloquently of the folly of feuding: 'So we open up a quarrel between the present and the past / We only sacrifice the future, it's the bitterness that lasts.' Someone may have treated you unfairly, disadvantaged or hurt you. But they, like you, will stand before God one day and, if they have done wrong, they *will* give account before God for this. Let God be the Judge. Unforgiveness is a cruel and

miserable prison that may actually hurt the offended far more than the offender. In the Old Testament, Joseph fully forgave his brothers who had so cruelly wronged him – but how different might the ending of that story have been had he been unwilling to do so. Jesus prayed that His Father might forgive those nailing Him to the cross. We're taught to love our enemies (Mt 5:44) and to forgive, even as God for Christ's sake forgives us (Eph 4:32). That *isn't* easy to do but, as Thomas Fuller observed: 'He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself, for every man has need to be forgiven' (see Mt 6:14-15). Don't we pray in the Lord's Prayer: 'And forgive us our trespasses, as *we forgive those who trespass against us*'? In Matthew 18:35 Jesus gave a solemn warning to those who would not forgive from the heart – but do we airbrush from Scripture anything that we may perceive as 'an inconvenient truth'? When anyone dies, their life and legacy will inevitably be discussed. Do you want someone saying of you: 'She didn't speak to her sister for 20 years' or 'He fought with his brother a lifetime'? Considering those two young women mentioned in the editorial, whose lives were claimed by cancer, isn't life really far too short and uncertain to be wasted fighting and hating? Why not expend your precious time and energy on something more positive and beneficial? So many who showed magnanimity and generosity of spirit in forgiving great wrongs are long remembered with affection, whilst others who seethed with bitterness, resentment and anger are forgotten. In which category do you belong? Will *you* heed the Bible's entreaties, go the extra mile, extend the hand of friendship and a heart of forgiveness, and seek to be reconciled with that one from whom you've been estranged? Hear Jesus' words: 'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.' (Matt 5:9)

5. Discover what needs discovering. After instructing the Ephesian believers to whom he was writing to walk circumspectly and redeem the time, the Apostle Paul followed these words with a further admonition: 'Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.' (Eph 5:15-17) There is surely a clear inference here – if we don't have a clear assurance of what God's will for our lives is, we are unwise, as we're thereby missing out on God's best for us, and not having the impact we might – were we exactly where He wanted us to be, and doing exactly what He wants us to do. Maybe you have felt God's call to do something, but have resisted? Will you seek His face as we launch out into another year, to discover what is that 'good and acceptable and perfect will of God' (Rom 12:2) for your life, resting in the comfort that, whilst the world and its fads will fade and pass away, 'he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.' (1 Jn 2:17)

As you face 2016, maybe you feel sadness and regret at the repeated failures and mistakes of 2015 (and other past years). You know you've got it wrong. Be encouraged dear reader – God is the God of the second chance – and of the third, fourth and fifth. His grace is still amazing, and still amazes me. Will you come as a sinner to Him, place the broken pieces into His hands, and ask Him to make something beautiful of your life? God still loves, cares for, receives, changes and uses imperfect people. And that is surely good news for us all!