

JANUARY 1

Owning Nothing, Enjoying Everything

I will settle things with You, Lord, once and for all concerning my rights and responsibilities. To accept Jesus as my Savior means I resign all rights to justify my sin before You; Jesus does that for me. But to accept Jesus as my Lord means I resign all rights to myself—my time, my talents, my future, my all.

That is where my difficulty is—resigning myself. To surrender my rights to myself means surrendering my rights to my reputation (He “made himself of no reputation,” Philippians 2:7, KJV); surrendering my rights to choose my place of service (He “set His face to go to Jerusalem,” Luke 9:51); surrendering my rights to my possessions (He had “no place to lay his head,” Luke 9:58, NIV); surrendering my rights to make demands (He “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,” Matthew 20:28, KJV); surrendering my rights to privacy and immunity from the needs of others (He said, “They need not depart; give . . . them to eat,” Matthew 14:16, KJV).

When I became a Christian I thought, *How wonderful to be rid of the burden of sin’s responsibility!* But when I became a disciple, Jesus put another burden upon me; the burden of others. The second burden took away all my rights, and a person without rights is a slave (He “took on the nature [form] of a slave,” Philippians 2:7, Williams).

Most of the time when I am touchy, irritable, or peevish (if it is not physical), it is because I have reclaimed what I thought I had surrendered to Jesus, for these are the feelings of one whose claim is threatened. My job then is to re-surrender as quickly as possible and quitclaim my possessions. I rejoice that I am an “all things new” person, made so because I have become a “new creation” in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17, Berkeley).

“Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes” (Psalm 37:7).

JANUARY 2

The Lord of What Is to Come

Lord, I know You can save me from my sins, but can You save me from myself? God can save me from the effects of my hate, but can He save me from being hateful? Can He change me so that I am no longer stingy, suspicious, jealous, cruel, and moody? If salvation means anything, it must work where sin begins, not merely where it ends.

Lord, that is what Jesus came to do—to change people, not just their record books. He came to erase the criminal's record; but, even more, He came to erase the criminal's repeatability. He not only came to clear the criminal in court, but to keep him out of court thereafter.

"Thou art Simon . . . thou shalt be called Cephas, . . . a stone" (John 1:42, KJV). By that statement Jesus showed Himself to be the Lord of what is to come. Changeable men are transformed into firm, rocklike men. He did not say, "You are Simon the sinner; you shall become Simon the saint." Simon became a rock.

That is the wonderful thing about Jesus—He sees us not as we are but as what we can become. Even more, He is able to change us from what we are into what He sees us capable of becoming.

I am a planned-for-the-future man. I am destined for God's eternal drama. The eyes of the all-seeing Sculptor have scanned me and set me aside for developing. Lord, now I see what You meant when You said, "He has . . . set eternity in their heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We are being made for tomorrow, for the future, for eternity. To look within ourselves now and be discouraged is to miss it all. God, You look at us in your tomorrow and rejoice over us as one finding great spoil.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

JANUARY 3

Formulas Are to Be Avoided

I will avoid the pitfall of being a formula Christian. I am surrounded by literature that promises me the secret of victory, as if God can be reduced to a method. Everywhere I turn I discover "steps to this" and "steps to that." Christians who are privileged to share a new insight of God are quick to build it into a formula.

I must avoid all that. I must keep in mind Paul's expression: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33, KJV).

God will not let Himself be boxed into a recipe. How often I have discovered that when I attempted to use someone else's formula, it did not work for me. God's dealings with us are strictly personal. There are general principles, of course, but the application is *ad hominem* ("to the man"). That's why someone else's spiritual secret is a mystery to me.

Neither can I say with Archimedes, "I have found it!" God's timely deliverance for me today will not necessarily be His deliverance tomorrow. God is constantly trying to tell me that He will not be nailed down. Yet I find something in my nature that keeps on trying to do that very thing. Why do I feel I have to manage God? Is there a little god within me who must have his property, his domain, his castle?

God will disappoint my every effort to corner Him, for He will be servant to no man. Even those who know Him best find Him a stranger at times. That is why my warmest prayer sometimes will meet the coldest response and my deepest need will go unsatisfied. Not often, of course, but often enough to remind me that God must be God. Yet, through it all, "I will never leave thee" (Hebrews 13:5, KJV) rings loud and clear. That is because God's stake in my salvation is great.

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Romans 11:33).

JANUARY 4

The Cult of Success

I will always allow God His sovereign right of refusal. I am sure God has promised me many things, but I also am aware that God's right to be God is greater than my claim on those blessings. When I read, "With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation" (Psalm 91:16, KJV), I am comforted. But when I read of those who were "stoned, . . . sawn asunder, . . . tempted, . . . afflicted, tormented" (Hebrews 11:37, KJV), I am confused. Jesus Himself did not enjoy long life.

The psalmist reminds me that if I delight in the Lord and meditate on His Word, "whatsoever [I do] shall prosper" (Psalm 1:3, KJV). The "cult of success" takes a promise like this and makes it absolute. Then I have problems, because believers in God are not always the richest, healthiest, most favored people on earth. In fact, they are the opposite.

My comfort does not lie in things, even spiritual things. I cannot rejoice in a miraculous answer to prayer today and think I will always get the same kind of answers. My comfort lies in the acceptance of God's right to do as He wills with me, even though what He wills may seem contradictory to His promises.

Since I cannot fathom God, I must trust Him. I am encouraged to trust Him, not because He promises me things, but because He is good, holy, fair, and does what is right. In other words, I can trust His Word because I can trust His character. Jesus is my example, for He trusted the character of His heavenly Father implicitly, completely, and thoroughly. That is why He obeyed His Father's will so unswervingly, even though it meant a cross. Yet I must remember that my trust in God will never be betrayed, misplaced, or denied. He who magnifies His Word above His name (see Psalm 138:2, KJV) will see that it is not.

"Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth'" (Exodus 34:6)

JANUARY 5

The Eternal Adventure

I will, by God's grace and power, keep the center of my life adjusted strictly to God's will, and let God keep the periphery any way He desires.

I will seek holiness (which results in wholeness), without which no man can see the Lord, at all times. Wholeness is God-centeredness, the "one thing needful," the "one thing I desire and seek after," the "one thing I do."

I will not pray for peace, power, success, or fruit, for they are by-products of a relationship, not its conditions. They are God's responsibility, not mine.

Neither will I seek promotion, honors, recognition, or acclaim, for they also are by-products and therefore outside my sphere. Nor will I resent others to whom God gives these tokens, but I will praise God that His will has been done in them.

I will no longer strive ambitiously for ends, for God's purpose is process, not destiny. I never hope to arrive but rather to continue with God in an eternal adventure, the result of which is a continual knowing of Him who is the "end" God seeks for me.

I will accept the fact that the self-life is not only displeasing to God; it is His enemy. When self reigns, I am at war with God, and that leads to frustration, anxiety, and misery. I will therefore crucify the self-life and be at peace with God.

I will realize that when all is said and done, I owe my daily overcoming to this one, solid fact: "Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Therefore, I can say honestly, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

JANUARY 6

The Shame of the Cross

I will learn to accept, and even enjoy, God's humiliating me. I must learn that God disciplines me by embarrassing me. He did that with Simon Peter. "Get behind Me, *Satan!*" (Matthew 16:23, italics added). If I do not shame myself, that is, if I do not sense my need to the point where I feel shame, God will do it for me. To feel shame is really to judge myself; and Paul says if I do not judge myself, God will have to do it for me (1 Corinthians 11:31-32).

To be ashamed before God is painful; to be put to shame by God is more painful; but the worst pain is to be put to shame by the world. God wants to hurt me to correct me, so the world will never be able to get a lick at me. Now I know what Paul meant in 2 Corinthians 7:8-10 about godly sorrow working repentance.

God put Jesus to shame and grief (Isaiah 53:10), but not for Himself; it was for me. There was nothing in Jesus that shame could improve. His shame was my shame, in order that I might improve. The shame of the cross is constantly being worked out in me daily. If I accept it, then I enjoy Isaiah's word, "He who believes . . . [on Him] . . . will not be ashamed" (28:16, Amp.).

It does me good to wear sackcloth occasionally. I need to sit in the ash pile. God has no spoiled children, and He applies the rod as often as I need it to learn. If He shames me, it is because He loves me. He decrees that good will come of me, that His image will be formed in me. To that end, He shames me into sonship, but only that His eternal glory may radiate from me, for what son is there who is not disciplined by his father (Hebrews 12:7)? God is treating me as a son (v. 6). Hallelujah for the rod!

"It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" (Hebrews 12:7).

JANUARY 7

Becoming Angry with God

I must realize that unless I get angry with God occasionally my dedication is not worth a wooden nickel. Jeremiah got so frustrated with God that he said God was like a "deceptive [changeable] brook" (Jeremiah 15:18, NIV). Further, he vowed he would not prophesy for Him any longer (20:7-9). The only person who never got angry with God was Jesus, and that was because He understood His heavenly Father so perfectly. Anger is a sign of two things: I do not understand, but I care. God would rather have me angry with Him than indifferent to Him.

I must be certain, however, that my anger is not peevishness, like Jonah's. Peevishness says, "God won't let me have my way." Concerned anger says, "I can't see the relationship between what God says He will do and what He is doing." David's frustration with God because of the death of Uzzah is a lesson to me (2 Samuel 6:6-20). David was angry because he sensed a contradiction in God, righteousness versus grace. That is the way it is with me. When God becomes angry with me, it is because of my sin and rebelliousness; when I become angry with Him, it is because of His righteousness, which I think is rigid.

God is not shocked by my occasional anger. But I must be quick to confess it. Chronic anger will lead me to cynicism, which God hates. Confessing my anger is a sign of faith. It says, "I don't understand any better, but I trust God anyhow." I must never assume that because I get angry with God I am a poor believer. On the contrary, it is a sign of a developing relationship with Him. If I am always correct with God, I do not know Him personally. When I am free to become angry, I am free to become myself. And being myself, I am free to grow toward Him. That is the key: to keep growing toward "the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13, KJV).

"Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools" (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

JANUARY 8

The De-nesting Process

I will accept God's "de-nesting" of me without remonstrance. To be de-nested by God is a sign that He feels I am reaching a level of maturity. As a new Christian I am given personal, fatherly attention by God for my growth's sake. A new convert receives the quickest, fullest answers to prayers of any Christian. Later on, God will seem to ignore my prayers. That is because He feels that now I am beyond the need for assurance; I can rely on His naked Word.

My first real shock as a Christian comes when I begin to feel the de-nesting process. I am like a child being weaned. God no longer seems close, familiar. The "joy of . . . salvation" (Psalm 51:12) dims and may return only periodically. Feeling must give way to faith; dependence to independence. God begins to put me in alien hands, even Satan's (cf. Job 2:6). He calls in other teachers to perfect my growth. Even Jesus was not exempt. He was put "into the hands of men" (Matthew 17:22), not for His own sake, but for mine. His de-nesting began with the incarnation and ended with His burial. But the process for Him was nothing other than self-sacrificial. Mine is always educational.

The de-nesting process goes on throughout life. That is why I can never have absolute tranquillity here. The moment I learn my lesson in one pair of hands, God farms me out to another. The important thing is my growth; what I *feel* is unimportant. God looks for the image of Christ in me, not for my comfort. I may feel very upset, decomposed, fruitless, and aimless, and yet He rejoices because He finds Jesus in me. It is a mark of tremendous growth when I see God rejoicing and can rejoice with Him. It is positively thrilling to realize I can rejoice the heart of God.

"The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

JANUARY 9

The Success of Obedience

I must learn what Jesus learned: to be "obedient unto death" (Philippians 2:8, KJV). All true obedience is unto death. That is a reversal of the world's standard. "I will obey *if*" is what the world says. The *if* means there must be a happy ending. Anyone will meet conditions, even drastic ones, if he gets his own way in the end. But that is not the obedience of Christ. His example was, "I will obey *regardless*." For Him, the "regardless" was not a heavenly deliverance but a cross.

True obedience is always successful. It always accomplishes God's will. It is immaterial to me whether my cancer is cured, my promotion achieved, or my loved one saved. If I have obeyed, that is enough. I am successful. Beyond that, it is God's business. If I insist on a happy, selfish outcome, then I am meddling. The instant I obey, success is automatic—God's success, not mine. Therefore, obedience carries in itself its burst of praise. I am jubilant, not because my ship has come in, but because it has gone out. Maybe I will never see it again, but that is beside the point. The point is, I have launched it unto God and now He is responsible. So I praise God because He is working and I rest in His activity.

I must be careful to obey for obedience's sake, and to love obedience for the Lord's sake. What a level to live on, loving it for His sake! In this I have the example of my Master, who said, "I delight to do your will, my God" (Psalm 40:8, TLB).

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

JANUARY 10

Justified Before God

I will realize that the war with my self-life is daily, even hourly. I cannot reach a state in which the war ends and I am permanently delivered. Not in this life. The self-life is natural to human beings, and after each victory over self, the old tendency begins to turn me back to the fleshpots. It is an everlasting war, a relentless struggle, a continuous fight. But it is not hopeless. Christ imparts His life to neutralize the self-life; and as I trust Him, He puts it to death. But I must keep trusting Him to keep putting it to death, or else it will return to damage me.

I will always be prepared to justify my attitudes, motives, and behavior before God. Instant confession is my means of keeping myself clean in the light. I must keep short accounts with God and be ready to give an explanation to Him on demand.

I will not demand that God explain Himself to me at any time, for this is characteristic of the unregenerate man. I must be willing to let God be unreasonable, in my view, if necessary, because He is not concerned with my understanding but with my faith. The unregenerate man sees contradiction in the world and demands that God justify Himself before him; the believing man makes no such demand but believes God supremely. He is only concerned with keeping himself justified before God.

I will endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. The soldier executes the will of his officer. This means the soldier must be other-directed and other-compelled. To look inward is fatal to the man of war, but to look upward is both his salvation and joy. I will at all times seek to "please Him who called me to be a soldier" (see 2 Timothy 2:4).

"So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; and He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth" (Hosea 6:3).

JANUARY 11

People Are Redeemable

I must learn to distinguish between "human nature" and "people." Jesus did not trust human nature, for "He Himself knew what was in man" (John 2:25). Paul said he had "no confidence in the flesh [human nature]" (Philippians 3:3). Further, he said he did not want to know people according to the laws of human nature (2 Corinthians 5:16). I must pattern my relationships to people as Jesus did.

But that is where I fail. How can I distrust human nature without rejecting people? How can I love someone whose nature I cannot trust?

I have to bring a third person into the relationship. It must be a triangle. I must never relate to anyone without including Jesus in the relationship. If I do, I will either become disappointed or suspicious. I must realize that while human nature is not redeemable, people are. God cannot save human nature, but He can save a person from his nature. "God so loved the world"—the world of people, not the principle of human nature.

If I expect too much of my loved ones and friends, I will be disappointed. But I can expect infinities of them if I am trusting Jesus in them. It is "Christ in you" who is "the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). I must always look at people—enemies, friends, family—not as "you" but as "Christ in you." Then my enemies will not become threats and my loved ones will not become snares.

Lord, I need to keep my temper and feelings out of the way and let nothing interfere with "Christ in them," which gives me hope for what would be a hopeless task otherwise. The potential person, not the real, is my goal; and the potential keeps me from groveling in despair.

"Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer" (2 Corinthians 5:16).

JANUARY 12

Good in Others

I will acknowledge that to be easily hurt, offended, intimidated, alarmed, or upset is really a manifestation of the self-life; it is because I am not getting my own way, or I am not accorded the place I think I deserve, or I am not given the share I think I am entitled to. To feel forever cheated, deprived, alienated, or isolated is to taste what the unregenerate man will taste forever—hell.

Christ died not only to forgive my sins but to break sin's hold on me. Why should He bind the strong man only to release him to renew his attacks on me? To indulge sin is to forfeit one of God's richest privileges, the personal power of the cross in my life. The power of the cross and the power of sin are mutually exclusive; one or the other dominates me.

I will look for good in others, but I will not be surprised if I find evil. If I find evil, I will not feel personally rebuffed, as in the case of a friend who has failed me, or someone who has not lived up to my expectations. To feel rebuffed or hurt in such cases is an expression of the self-life. I will accept human beings as I find them—persons capable of redemption but just as capable of evil—and I will accord them the same treatment as Christ did. He did not rely on them, but neither did He exclude them. He was not personally hurt by rejection, only sorry for the rejecter. He was not vengeful or vindictive toward those who hurt Him. He gladly forgave and kept offering forgiveness. When He saw a glimmer of faith and love, He rejoiced.

The glory of Christian discipleship is to see the miracle of the emerging person, "the new man in Christ," and to realize I have had a part in his newness under the hand of God. Then I am able to say with Christ, "I and the children God has given me" (Hebrews 2:13, Berkeley).

"Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:24–25).

JANUARY 13

God and Nothing

I will make You the basis of my trust, Lord. I will accept Your demolition of my security, even though it is painful. When I was a young Christian I thought everything was God—and. It was God—and blessing; God—and power; God—and fruitfulness. Now I see that everything is just God—and nothing.

Now I fully understand why God tested Abraham's faith by telling him to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22). God gives, but He also takes away. He *must* take away. God will not have me trusting anything other than Himself, not even a good, lovely thing like Isaac. God gives me vibrant health, then He takes it away and leaves me weak and clinging. Why? To show me where my ultimate trust should be. No sooner do I find something in which I can boast than God takes away the object of my boasting. Not bad things, but good things! Sermons, books, and articles tell me constantly that the Christian life is the greatest, the most exciting, the most rewarding life available. But they miss the point! They tell me God *adds* so much to me. As a result, my Christian life can become a shambles through false expectancy. What really happens is that God *takes away* so much. He continually removes from my life everything that would make me earthbound, self-dependent, or experience centered.

Why were so many of the Corinthian Christians "weak . . . sickly . . . and [dead]" (1 Corinthians 11:30, KJV)? Because a *thing* had come between them and God. God will tolerate no "thing" between Himself and me—even so dear a thing as my "Isaac." But He will take nothing away without adding the larger dimension of Himself to take its place. Once I have given my dearest to Him, I will hear Him say, "Now I will *really* bless you" (see Genesis 22:17).

"Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary" (Isaiah 40:31).

JANUARY 14

Using, Not Possessing, Things

I vow to my God that I will no longer practice *accumulation* but *dissemination*. The world and the flesh are always after me to gather in, to collect, to secure myself against illness, old age, catastrophe, and death. Jesus sent His disciples out with the word: "[Take] neither gold, nor silver, nor copper in your purses, nor a bag . . . neither two coats, neither shoes, not yet a staff" (Matthew 10:9-10, NSRB). Strange equipment for His spiritual army! And yet, how wise! The soldier who enters a battle overloaded is already defeated.

I must learn to use things without possessing them, as Paul did (2 Corinthians 6:10). I am to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, then I will not need to worry about my daily necessities. God gives me *things* to use and to enjoy, not to idolize.

When I can no longer use something, I must give it to someone who can. Jesus was the great "giver-upper." When He died He owned nothing.

I must beware the world's cry, "You need this or that or the other thing." The world is always telling me what I need; and if I listen to such talk, I will accumulate forever and yet never find satisfaction. How can the world tell the disciple what his needs are? Only the great Pioneer of all disciples can do that (Hebrews 12:1).

How true was Bunyan's picture of Vanity Fair. The main street was covered with stalls, each one possessing an attractive ware, and each stall keeper rushed out into the street to drag customers in to buy. The world cries, "Buy, buy, buy!" But the wise pilgrim will move right along, never daunted, never turned aside.

Only in Christ is there sanity, and only the pilgrim is wise. Paul's word to Timothy was: "God has . . . given us a spirit of . . . power and love and discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7). What a heartening word of healing in a broken world!

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

JANUARY 15

To Obey Is Better

I will realize that God expects only one thing of me—obedience. This obedience must be prompt and entire. I must leave no “bleating sheep” around. I must not try to develop faith, love, or hope, for these things are elements of obedience. Nor must I try to develop spiritual power, for this is the result of obedience. Obedience is my concern; the results of obedience are God’s concern. Obedience is God’s way of testing my discipleship; therefore, God’s commands may sometimes seem strange to the natural mind. I must obey God’s commands as literally as possible; there can be no “spiritualizing away” what God tells me to do.

I will accept Christ as my life as well as my Savior. He is the way, indeed, but He is also the way-shower. He shows me the life that pleases the Father, and thus I can avoid the mistakes of the opposite kind of life. He died for my sins, but this was only to make way for the goal He has for me—His life in me. It is life, not death, that God is interested in. Whenever death occurs it is only a means to an end, and the only life that pleases the Father is that which the Son exhibited on this earth. Being “saved by His life” (Romans 5:10) is literally and necessarily true. Christ’s life is the absolute antithesis of the self-life. As I lift up my life to Christ’s, I can immediately see my raggedness against His perfection. Then there must be confession of sin and surrender to that life. Then I please the Father also. “Christ who is my life” is more than a motto, a catchword. It is a glorious reality, for Christ makes me more alive than any other person can. And the life He gives me carries me forward with its inborn drive to glory (Colossians 1:27).

“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22).