

Year in Review
Delivered December 30, 2012

Talk 1

Today is going to **flow just a little differently** than a normal Sunday morning. One of the things I find happening in my life is that as we get to the end of the year, we start looking forward to the new year without really taking time to reflect on the past year. And while I stay pretty connected to what we've talked about all year long here at New Life, the reality is that **most of you have probably forgotten many of the series** that you have heard this year.

So as we close out 2012 this morning we are going to do so by **looking back over some of the key themes** we have touched on during the year by reminding ourselves of some of those series. For some of you it will be a reminder, for others of you it will be some new information but for all of us our hope is that it will bring this year to a close and also prepare us for what lies ahead in 2013.

We actually **opened 2012 with a series we called "Dashboard"**, which was an opportunity for us to **check various "gauges"** in our lives. We talked about the spiritual gauge, the emotional gauge, the physical gauge and the relational gauge and essentially asked God to take a look inside of our hearts to see how we were doing in all of these areas. **Some of you took the time to set up a meeting** with me to talk about where you were and where you wanted to be in those areas.

That series opened with the Scripture I want to read to you this morning: **Colossians 1:9-14**. I said at the time that I wanted to make sure we started the year **focusing on and prioritizing our spiritual growth**. It is a prayer that Paul prays that I have gone back to repeatedly throughout the year to **shape the way I have prayed for myself, but also how I have prayed for you**. I have prayed that God would fill you with the knowledge of his will, that he would cause you to be fruitful in every good work, and that his strength and power would be at work in you as you work out your salvation.

As we talked through that series, we touched on the idea that **all the other gauges in our lives are measured off of this spiritual gauge**. If we don't get that relationship right, then all the other ones are going to suffer. But **when we prioritize our spiritual growth, then we find God's power is at work in that area as well as every other area**. When we try to fix our relationships, or emotions, or even our bodies without paying attention to the spiritual climate of our lives, we end up working on those by ourselves in our own strength.

But **imagine if you tapped into the power of God that is at work in you to transform your life**. I know some of you made great strides this way in the last year, and others of you are well on your way towards allowing God to transform your life in the year to come in ways that you couldn't have foreseen a year ago. Either way we want to take a moment in **reflection and prayer** that we would allow the words of this text to come to pass in our hearts this year.

Talk 2

Of course the point of growing spiritually and having God's power at work in us is not simply so that we can say we have grown spiritually and point to God's power in us as somehow making us anything special. The point, if you will, of all that power in us is to transform our lives so that we look more like Christ.

One of the best places we could look to talk about what it would mean to be more like Jesus is the passage we settled in for about two months following Easter: **Matthew 5:3-12**. In this passage we talked about the way that Jesus was articulating, in very broad, bold strokes, the heart of his kingdom as it was coming to earth.

Indeed, as we read those verses, we find that it doesn't sound like anything we are familiar with. Jesus takes all that we would expect and turns it over on its head, letting us know that as he shapes our lives in his way, we will end up looking quite different than we might want or expect to look. As God's kingdom comes to dwell in our hearts Jesus pulls us into alignment with a certain kind of character and quality of life.

The fundamental move in that whole passage comes from the very first blessing Jesus pronounces – on the poor in Spirit; the ones who recognize that they are spiritual beggars, and as spiritual beggars, they stand desperately in need of a King who would freely give him his spiritual riches. Once we've established that, we can be sure to remind ourselves that the beatitudes are not a new law of sorts, but the evidence of God's work in our lives by his power.

Mourning, meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking and even persecution are all being produced as God's grace moves inside of us, bringing a blessedness we cannot contain.

Blessedness in this case does not translate to ease of life, or just to having more stuff, which is the equation we often want to write. Instead it translates to God's approval of the life that we are living. When his kingdom takes root in our lives, and we begin to transform into the men and women who reflect his character in the world, then God is extremely pleased with that transformation.

I don't want us to forget that this is a significant part of what God was doing in us this year as we opened up to his work in us. We put energy into our spiritual disciplines because the end result is God working his character into us. This is not an overnight process, and certainly not something that we finished just because we finished a two month series on the beatitudes. In fact, reminding us of them now may prove to be a poignant reminder that there is still work for God to do in these areas of our hearts. Let's take some time to reflect here, and invite God to continue to make these statements true of us in the coming year.

Talk 4

If God's glory is the proper end of our lives, it brings us back full circle to remember that it is also the beginning of all that we could possibly hope to have in our lives. This last series wasn't that long ago, but I thought it really was one of the most challenging series we've walked through in the last several years. We started the "Glue" series with the fundamental premise that all of our relationship to God is based on his intention and action towards us.

I'm going to read again from **Psalm 103** this morning as we allow these words to remind us of God's glory, but also his invitation for us to relate to him based on his kindness, patience, and forgiveness. And as we understand and embrace those as true in our lives, it sets the stage for God to cause us to grow again. When we get that it's not about our ability to perform for God, or our ability to do enough to please God but that it's just about his compassion towards us, then we really don't have anything to do but to submit to his process in us with complete conviction that what he's going to do will always be good for us.

The challenge inherent to this series was that as God establishes our relationship with him based on kindness, patience, and forgiveness, he then expects us to establish the framework of our relationships with others based on those same characteristics. We begin to represent Christ, being imitators of God in the other areas of our lives, which ultimately brings us back to the beginning, back to the place of growing spiritually and becoming more fruitful in every good work. This is the fundamental priority from which everything else grows naturally.

We are going to close our time this morning with the sharing of communion, because there is no greater reminder to us of God's kindness, patience, and forgiveness than the bread and cup which embody the sacrificial love God has for each one of us. As we celebrate what God has done in Christ, we celebrate what he has done in us through the year that was, and we look forward with anticipation to all he will do in us in the year to come. He will be glorified in us, his people, as we submit ourselves to his purpose and good pleasure. His power will be at work in us accomplishing the redemptive plan in our lives and shaping our character to be more like his.