

This was the title of an Open University leaflet found in my newspaper yesterday (31st December 2011)

“MAKE 2012 THE YEAR YOU CHANGE YOUR LIFE.”

January the first is a good time to speak about new things.

I remember staying up with my mother, listening to Big Ben strike 12.00 midnight on New Year's Eve on the BBC Light Programme about seventy years ago. My father and brother Michael were fast asleep and saw nothing different on that day to any other day. I thought at the time that they lacked imagination. I was always looking for something new in my life.

I wonder, how many times in your life have you made a New Year's resolution? You were really going to change your behaviour altogether or act differently to a particular person or stop a habit like smoking or drinking too much. Alter your language or accent? You know, drop the Birmingham accent. That is the one thing I tried to achieve when I was 18 years old having heard a recording of myself. I did not believe that it was my voice. The accent was so broad I thought to myself that I would get nowhere in nursing with a voice like that. Your worst enemies to you changing are often members of your own family. I remember saying at home one day the word garage when trying to improve my accent. My mother interrupted to say, 'the word is garidge you sloppy date.'

How about going to bed earlier, eating less and go on a sliming diet yet again. Refuse to eat chocolate. Pluck up courage and try and form a new relationship with someone you are attracted to.

Perhaps decide to take an education course you have always promised yourself for years but done nothing about it. . Change your career desires. Get promotion. Be kinder to your wife or it may be that wives may decide to stop nagging, sorry, advising your husband on a daily basis about his shortcomings and blaming him for being so self centred.

The list is endless. The endeavours however, often fail by February because we have gone back to what we know and what we are comfortable with. We have reasoned with for instance, the important issues like a new relationship, I would not succeed anyway so why try. It is really a lack of self-will or confidence to initiate change. Some men told me recently that their wives rarely expressed their love for them but did it regularly to their friends. It caused some discomfort to them.

No, what we lack is something bigger than ourselves to come along and support us from the inside.

The Bible has much to say about New things.

Jesus spoke of the danger of putting new wine in old wine skins. The old wine skin has already had its day. The New Wine will just ferment and burst the old wine skin. Jesus suggested putting the new wine into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved." So something else has to change and it has to happen on the inside.

New wine needs new conditions. When we decide to become new in some area of our lives we need new conditions or the old will spoil the new wine.

My car is gently moving into its twelfth year. It could have been stored for a year before it was sold. To make that car like new I would not get a reconditioned engine but a new one. That is the problem with us. We try and recondition the old self and it rarely works. Our New Year resolutions just evaporate within days or at the most weeks because so often we lack the power to change what we are,

What we need is a completely new beginning.

The Apostle Paul becomes very personal when he says

Rom. 7:5-6

While we were living in the flesh, (our natural life uncluttered by thoughts about God) our sinful passions, aroused by the law,

were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. Our resolutions die.

He was saying that without the Holy Spirit in our lives we are not working at anywhere near our full potential that God had planned for us. The reason is that we are living in the natural called in the Bible "The Flesh".

When we have an encounter with Christ our lives are completely changed. So Paul continues, (speaking to Christians)

But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

He had just been speaking about the resurrection of Jesus bringing to people new life. Every time we try and change the past life it convicts us by the Law of God that we are sinful. We tend towards wrong rather than right. In fact we can become slaves to sin. He however, offers a new hope. New life in the Spirit that frees us from the Law of sin and death.

Often there is a longing to be different in so many ways. We know we foul up every so often but do not seem to have the mechanism to do anything about it. Paul again says

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!

My new year's resolution happened 63 years ago on the first Sunday in 1949 which is for me 63 years ago today by the day and tomorrow by the date. I came to see that if Christ had possession of my life I would live a fulfilled life.

I was poorly educated and working in a factory. School was a nightmare because I did not attend regularly and my writing was poor and was caned often for blotting the paper being left-handed. I rebelled against the English teacher and refused to write from about the age of 12. The anger I felt about this man remained with me for 14 years.

That afternoon I came into a living relationship with Jesus. The Bible became a personal letter to me from God. I could read it and make sense of it. My whole life changed and this was noted at work even on the next day at work. I had received a new life from Christ. This has remained and helped throughout the rest of my life.

At 18 I began training as a general nurse. Met Alice at Selly Oak Hospital and we married. Each step of the way my Saviour led me. Even giving me a principal's position in a private Management Residential college with no formal education.

Meantime Alice was eventually bringing up five children and brought them up well. They in turn often use the skills they saw Mom using to bring up their own children. She has left a great legacy in our family and I cannot praise her enough for all her commitment to me and them over the years. Truly as a Jewish doctor once said to me having met Alice for the first time "She what we call a mother of Israel."

God gave me an opportunity to forgive that English teacher by making him my patient when I was a district nurse. I cared for him for several months. Had the privilege of laying him out when he died and attending his funeral. If God had not given me that chance I would still be angry with that teacher today 51 years later. Do you have something like that bugging you in your life? Come to Jesus and get rid of it.

It all starts by God reconciling us to himself through Christ, (meaning made us friends again) and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We desperately need a new life in Jesus to answer every life-time problem. He came for the poor not only in money terms but poor

in spirit. He is more than willing to give you such an encounter with God that your life will be changed for the better and for ever. Not only in this life but in the life to come. He goes further and promises eternal life to all who believe on his name.

John records that for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever believes in him shall have everlasting life and will not perish but have everlasting life.

Once we have come to faith in Jesus Christ by asking God to forgive us our wrong doing called sins and believe on Jesus dying for that sin we receive the a new life from God.

From then on we behave like this.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.