

TO ENCOURAGE YOU:

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ESSAYS ON  
CHRISTIAN  
THEMES FOR  
HOPE AND  
WHOLENESS

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CHARLES A. BARRETT



*To Encourage You:*  
*Essays on Christian Themes for Hope and Wholeness*

Charles A. Barrett

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# A LETTER FOR YOU

Dear Friend—

I am excited to share this collection of essays with you. Central to everything I do as a musician, teacher, writer, and psychologist is a desire to help people grow and experience the joy of hope and wholeness. And because spiritual growth is a process, where we find ourselves at any moment is less important than continuing to develop into the person that God desires us to be.

As you read this book, don't think of it as an ordinary text that should be completed within a few days or even a few weeks. Instead, think of it as a resource to encourage you along your spiritual journey. Thematically aligned to a calendar year, the essays will encourage you throughout the inevitable seasons of life. As you allow God to set your pace, take your time to read, and perhaps re-read, the entries as many times as you like. Most importantly, open your heart and mind to what the Lord will show you. At the risk of sounding cliché, I am confident that there is something uniquely for you in each piece. You will see that scripture references have been included throughout the collection; I encourage you to read these passages in a version of the Bible that you can easily understand. Unless otherwise noted, I have used the New Living Translation (NLT).

To support spiritual development, questions for personal reflection and meditation follow each of the relatively short entries. After reading each piece, I encourage you to spend a few moments in quiet reflection and perhaps journal your responses to the questions posed. While the corresponding questions have been designed for self-paced individual study, they can be easily adapted for use in small group settings. Such intimate gatherings are not only helpful for our own accountability, but learning and growing is also more fun when shared with others in authentic community.

As you read, reflect, and meditate, I pray that you will not only experience God's unwavering and unconditional love for you, but that you will learn more about yourself as you are becoming more like Christ.

Be encouraged.

We are in this together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'C', 'A', and 'R' in a stylized, cursive font. The 'C' is a simple loop, the 'A' has a horizontal crossbar, and the 'R' has a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

HAPPY  
NEW YEAR



# THE YEAR IN PERSPECTIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIVING

*For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD.  
They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*

Jeremiah 29: 11

It was November 1994, and the Reverend DeForest *Buster* Soaries, Jr. preached a simple, yet profound message based on the account of David and Goliath recorded in 1 Samuel 17. *The Power of a Proper Perspective* challenged believers to consider David's triumph over the giant as being inextricably connected to his perspective on God and the situation (vv. 45-47). In other words, David's perspective—one that was focused on the All-Powerful God and not intimidated by Goliath's physical presence—ultimately led to victory.

And so it is today. Having embarked upon a new year, in all that we do, let's develop and maintain the proper perspective by being mindful of these things.

## **INVITE THE LORD TO DWELL**

At the beginning of the year, and each new day, it is fitting to intentionally invite the Lord to abide with us. As Paul reminded The Church at Corinth that their bodies were the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6: 19), this is the most important place where God should be welcomed to take permanent residence. Further, The Church is more than man made structures of brick and mortar, but individuals—you and me—who comprise the living and breathing Body of Christ.

## DECLARE AND LIVE BY FAITH

Make a declaration for what, by faith, is already done. And as we make these declarations, know that faith is not predicated on what can be discerned by our senses, but what is found in the Word of God. Fundamentally, living by faith involves believing what's been written in the pages of Genesis through Revelation although we might not understand everything. Further, because we believe God, our declarations aren't only reminders of the necessity of faith (Hebrews 11: 6), but also testaments that regardless of what we might experience throughout the year, we are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ who loves us (Romans 8:37)!

## COVER EVERYTHING UNDER THE BLOOD

Exodus 12: 13: *But the blood on your doorposts will serve as a sign, marking the houses where you are staying. When I see the blood, I will pass over you...* Later in verses 24 through 27, the Israelites were charged to obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for generations following. Because of this, there is no better way to place the year in proper perspective than by applying the blood—not of slain animals during the first Passover, but the final Sacrificial Lamb who died on Calvary—over our lives. Though weapons might be formed against us, they won't prosper. Why? Because we, and therefore every situation that we will face, have been covered under the blood!

## REMAIN IN THE WILL OF GOD

One of my favorite passages of scripture is Luke 22: 42: *“Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”* This verse shows that Christ was honest with God: “Father, I don't want to go to the cross. And if there is any way that you can let me avoid this painful experience, please do it! But because I love you, and what you want is more important than anything—including my own comfort—what I want really doesn't matter. Whatever your will is, and whatever you want me to do, I will do it!” Coupled with being completely honest with God, more importantly, the text shows that we must ultimately grow to the place of total surrender and obedience to the will of God. For those of us who earnestly desire to please the Lord, wholeness and fulfillment will only be found in the will of God.

## COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

Thank God, in advance, for what you believe he will do throughout the year. Deliberately recalling the specific things that God has already done should lead to an eruption of praise and saying, “Thank you!”—two words that are not uttered enough in a culture of give me and give me more. But as we count our blessings, let’s also establish a new precedent: a year in which our thanksgiving to God far outweighs our petitions of him.

## MOVE FORWARD

Philippians 3: 12 through 14: *I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.* In order to accomplish our goals, we must forget the mistakes, disappointments, missed opportunities, and setbacks of last year. Move forward knowing that each of those things is a distant memory.

Each of these principles will help us to place the year in proper perspective. Regardless of the circumstances and situations that we will inevitably encounter, we will be more than conquerors because we believe God can do exceedingly and abundantly above all that we can imagine (Ephesians 3: 20).





*Thank you for another day. Thank you for everything that you will accomplish through me this year. Help me to remain focused on what you want me to do. When things are uncomfortable and inconvenient, and doubt tries to discourage me, thank you for increasing my faith to trust you more.*

*Amen.*





# NEW YEAR, NEW SEASON: BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

*Then the LORD said to me, Write my answer plainly on tablets, so that a runner can carry the correct message to others. This vision is for a future time. It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed.*

Habakkuk 2: 2-3

There is nothing magical about 12:00 on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Without purposing in our hearts and minds that our lives will be different, we run the risk of pouring old wine into new wineskins (Mark 2: 22). To this end, some of us might be familiar with *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by noted businessman, Steven Covey (d. 2012). While each of his habits is important, Habit #2: *Begin With The End In Mind* is especially meaningful for this time of year.<sup>1</sup>

## **WRITE THE VISION AND MAKE IT PLAIN**

Psalm 37: 4 could be one of the most misunderstood passages of scripture. Though the psalmist writes (paraphrasing) that if we delight ourselves in the Lord (spend quality time with God) he will give us the desires of our hearts, this does not mean that we will receive whatever we want. Instead, the text speaks to God giving us what our hearts should desire. In other words, he will place within us the things that we should pursue. Friends, this is central to our success this year.

Habakkuk 2: 2 & 3: *Write my answer plainly on tablets, so that a runner can carry the correct message to others. This vision is for a future time. It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed.* These verses are critical to all that God desires to accomplish in and through our lives. Specifically, before we can expect to do anything worthwhile, we must know what we are trying to accomplish. If we seek God—if we ask him to show us what he wants us to do—he will answer us. Further, he will give us instructions. Our responsibility, however, is to record everything that he says. We can't rely on our minds because we are prone to forget. And as the text suggests, the vision that the Lord gives us will have implications for others. Therefore, in order to effectively communicate the Lord's plan, write it down—literally. In a journal. In a notebook. In your phone. In your tablet. And after you've written it down, although it might take some time to be fulfilled, know that it will come to pass.

According to Covey, one of the best ways to incorporate Habit #2 into our lives is to develop a personal mission statement that focuses on what we want to be and do. Essentially, who am I? What am I about? What do I want to accomplish? If you haven't already, seek the Lord; wait for his response; and when he speaks to you, write what he says. Moreover, allow your life's mission statement to become the blueprint by which your aspirations become reality.

## **WORK BACKWARDS**

As a school psychologist, I'm often involved with helping parents and teachers respond to a variety of academic and behavioral difficulties. Related to beginning with the end in mind, at times this means working backwards. Said another way, it includes establishing a goal and then identifying benchmarks that can be used to measure progress towards the goal. For example, if your goal is to write a book by the end of the year, what specific steps must be taken that also provide evidence of progress towards completing this project? Perhaps it's identifying a topic (January); outlining chapters 1, 2, and 3 (February); and drafting chapters 1, 2, and 3 (April). Parenthetically, not only does working backwards provide the accountability associated with specified due dates, but we are also less likely to be overwhelmed with having to complete a seemingly insurmountable undertaking at once.

## BE FAITHFUL TO YOUR PLAN: IMPLEMENT IT WITH FIDELITY

In working with families and schools, there are often many good, if not great, interventions that have been developed to help children succeed. Why, then, aren't they achieving better outcomes? The answer, at times, is rather simple: the plan is not being implemented with fidelity. This is to say that there is nothing wrong with the plan but the manner in which it has, or has not, been carried out. Before discarding your plan because you think it is ineffective, consider this: have you been faithful to its design?

Success is not only about working harder, but smarter. And the best way to work smarter is to know precisely what we are working towards. If we know what we want to accomplish, all that we do necessarily rests on our response to the following question: Will doing this/these things bring me closer to accomplishing my goal(s)? If the answer is no, I pray that we will have the strength, courage, and discipline to no longer engage in these activities and/or with certain individuals. While there may not be anything inherently wrong with a certain activity or person, if they are not helping us to move closer to what we are trying to accomplish, they inevitably become distractions. In the words of Covey, *“If your ladder is not leaning against the right wall, every step you take gets you to the wrong place faster.”*<sup>2</sup>

Rather than wishing you a Happy New Year, I commend you to God, the Alpha and Omega—He who knows the end from the beginning.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION AND MEDITATION

1. After spending some moments in reflection and meditation, identify 1-3 goals that you would like to accomplish this year.

a. Goal #1

b. Goal #2

c. Goal #3

2. Identify a date (month, year) by which you would like to accomplish each goal.

Goal #1	Completion Date (month, year)
Goal #2	
Goal #3	

3. What specific steps do you have to take in order to accomplish your goals?  
The table below may help you organize your goals and action steps.

Goal	Completion Date (month, year)	Quarter 1 Activities: January through March	Quarter 2 Activities: April through June	Quarter 3 Activities: July through September	Quarter 4 Activities: October through December

