

GROWTHguide

"Made New"

January 1, 2017



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

Psalm 51:10-12, Matthew 11:28-30, Psalm 143:8,
Mark 1:35

DAY 1

In [Psalm 51:10-12](#) King David asks God for a fresh start. The Message puts it this way, *"God, make a fresh start in me, shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life. Don't throw me out with the trash, or fail to breathe holiness in me. Bring me back from gray exile, put a fresh wind in my sails!"* Life can be chaotic even in the best circumstances. We live in a society where the norm seems to be constant busyness which can cause us to give in to temptation. We all have time in our lives when we lose our way - even after accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord. Whether you are a long-time believer or someone who has never made a commitment to Jesus Christ, the new year is a good time to do as King David did by asking God to make a fresh start in your life.

- Quietly reflect on 2016 and identify unconfessed sin for which you need forgiveness.
- Identify the sources of "chaos" in your life and ask the Holy Spirit to help you discern ways to reduce unhealthy and disruptive behaviors that contribute to that chaos.

Pray the verses of Psalm 51 listed in the Day 1 text above. Ask God to forgive the sins you identified and for help to overcome the points of conflict and chaos in your life.

DAY 2

As we begin a new year thinking about a fresh start or a clean slate, we sometimes allow burdens, failures, sorrows, or memories of what we remember as a better day prevent us from letting go of the old. It's hard to grasp new possibilities with hands and hearts that are clinging to the baggage of the past. [Read Matthew 11:28-30](#). The Lord knows our burdens and asks us to surrender them to him. We all have baggage that we can leave at the foot of the cross.

- Are you carrying around baggage that prevents you from living a new life in Christ?
- Are old addictions, memories, or relationships causing you to live in the past?
- Do you resist change - even when change would be healthier for you, your family, or your church?

Make a list of the baggage that's been weighing you down. Thank Jesus for his willingness to shoulder your burdens. Pray for freedom from the baggage that holds you back. Bring your list to church next Sunday and leave it on the chancel rail.

DAY 3

Two weeks ago we learned about John Ortberg's suggestion that being "rich toward God" is a way of living our lives doing righteous and eternal things like "growing a soul that is increasingly healthy and good." Pastor Pam encouraged us to love ourselves by focusing on our spiritual health and our relationship with the One who created us and who redeems us. [Read Psalm 143:8 and Mark 1:35](#). The Psalmist reminds us to begin our day with hearts turned toward God. Jesus set an example for us.

Even during his busiest times of ministry, he withdrew to spend time with his heavenly Father and pray.

- How do you nurture your relationship with the Lord? Perhaps you could take part in a Bible study or read the scriptures from a different translation or paraphrase such as The Message.
- When you pray the Lord's Prayer, do you think about what it means to live into the words "Thy will be done" and what it might take for you to practice what you pray?

Talk to a spiritually mature Christian friend. Ask him or her to share his or her practice of spiritual disciplines. Ask your friend to become your accountability partner in the year ahead. Make a commitment to the daily practice of spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible study, fasting, or silence. Develop a plan with your friend to share your progress.

DAY 4

Read a favorite scripture in your Bible and then again in a very different version or paraphrase. You can find many Bible versions and translations at [biblegateway](http://biblegateway.com). The words can differ greatly from a traditional version like King James to a contemporary paraphrase like The Message, and yet both teach us the same thing using different words. The choir music of a traditional service and the music offered by a praise team also differ. Some people come to church dressed up in dresses, suits and ties, while others worship in jeans and t-shirts. Sometimes pastors wear robes and albs - other times they dress in casual clothing. Too often we focus on worship style and personal preference instead of the way our worship glorifies God and helps us to grow in faith. God loves it when we make a joyful noise to the Lord and when our worship is focused on glorifying him rather than pleasing ourselves.

- Be honest with yourself. Are you sometimes prone to pass judgement on others here in our church over different preferences in music, dress or choice of Bible translation?
- Are the practices you prefer tied to generational, socio-economic, or cultural differences between you and others in our church family?
- Do you find yourself saying, "but we've always done it that way" or "that's so old-fashioned and out-of-touch?"

Ask God to help you accept that people in our St. Paul family connect with God in different ways. Pray for the Holy Spirit to teach you how to travel together differently. Make a commitment this year to choose a week and attend the Sunday service you don't normally attend, or to attend a Wednesday evening Handicapable worship. Open your heart and mind to being part of one church family with a wide variety of preferences, styles and habits. Make a commitment to accept the differences between us and to celebrate our common love for the Lord!

DAY 5

New Year's Day arrives with a sense of hope, renewal and promise - and New Year's resolutions! Too often we aim too low with our resolutions or focus on things that are about physical rather than spiritual health. Physical health is a great thing - our bodies are our temples, but a New Year's resolution to love a neighbor in a tangible way each and every week would not only change your life and help you to grow spiritually, it would also be a gift to a neighbor that could have an eternal impact for both of you.

- How could you have a life changing impact on a neighbor in need?
- Is there a child you could read to or tutor, an elderly neighbor who could benefit from a weekly visit or

home cooked meal, or a co-worker who has no church home to whom you could offer a ride and some companionship during worship?

Pray for the Holy Spirit to begin a process of discerning a real and meaningful New Year's resolution oriented on your spiritual health and your relationship with God. Let 2017 be the year you make a resolution to prepare yourself for eternal life!

DAY 6

Today is your "Sabbath" and a time for reflection. How has God been speaking to you over the week? Use what the Lord has said to you to remold and reshape your life. If you are having trouble hearing God's voice, slow down or even stop what you are doing so that the busyness of life's demands do not squelch the whispers of God's language of love upon your heart.



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