

RENEW 2012

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Our church's theme for 2012 is "Renew."

It is time for renewal!

We cannot rest on what we have learned in the past, or believed in the past, or done in the past.

It is time to renew our knowledge of God, renew our faith in Christ, and renew our works done in His name.

Renewal is also what we can expect to receive from the Lord!

His mercies are renewed every morning, so our hopes can be renewed every day.

Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength and soar like eagles.

The Word of God renews your mind, and the Spirit of God renews your inner being.

This is our year for renewal!

Out of the pain of defeat, out of the rubble of collapse, out of the ashes of destruction comes renewal. Rising up from apparent failure and ruin, even death—like the young redwood (in our annual theme illustration) sprouting from within the burnt out trunk of its ancestor—God renews His people for fruitfulness and victory.

We all must taste failure at some point or points in our lives, for sin has made us failure-bound and self-defeating. But that is not the end of the story—not your story or mine—it is only a passage of discipline and discovery.

Each of us has to learn by practice to discern the voice of the Lord from our own wishes, and to fully rely on God's counsel instead of past experience, and to depend on God's power instead of our own ability to manipulate people or circumstances.

Your family, your friends, your knowledge, your skills will all fail you at some point. At some point you will reach your last thread. At *that* point, you will either turn *to* God in faithful abandon, or turn *from* God in reckless self-protection.

Renewal is all about *preparing* for that moment, so that you will not be caught unaware or unprepared.

What I just said is really important; don't miss it! Listen to this:

Many people have the idea that renewal is about receiving a transcendent experience from the Lord—getting zapped by the Spirit. That is spiritual shock therapy (nothing more). Those effects don't last; they were never intended to. Their sole purpose is to shock your spiritual system back to a proper rhythm. But they cannot sustain it.

The only thing that can sustain your spiritual life is the practice of spiritual disciplines. Without them, your faith will wane and your spirit will die a sure, if gradual, death. And personal spiritual renewal is about restoring the practice of spiritual disciplines.

This is the year for such renewal!

Renew Your Spiritual Life

Prayer and worship are two of the disciplines we need to renew in 2012.

God has declared, *“The people whom I formed for Myself will declare My praise.”* (Isaiah 43:21; NASB)

The Apostle Paul urged, *“In every place of worship, I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy.”* (1 Timothy 2:8; NLT) And also, *“I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them.”* (1 Timothy 2:1; NLT)

On the first Friday of each month, I want you to plan to gather with me for an evening of worshipful prayer. I know that’s the end of your work week and the beginning of your weekend, and so I’m only asking for one Friday night each month.

One evening to set aside extra time to meet with God and His people. One evening to develop your own spiritual passion. One evening to make your requests known to God and to lend your faith to the needs of others.

We’ll be done by 8:30, and then you can get out for ice cream or a late dinner or a movie—and maybe take some friends from church with you.

We’ll begin this Friday at 7:00pm. Our focus will be on God’s saving grace and those who are lost (without Christ).

We’ll sing songs of faith and rejoicing. We’ll pray together and we’ll pray individually. We’ll pray aloud and we’ll pray silently. We’ll read the Scriptures to boost one another’s faith. And we will be blessed! You can read more about it in today’s bulletin insert.

Renew Your Spiritual Connection

Now, you may not think of fellowship as a spiritual discipline, but indeed it is. And we need our fellowship renewed in 2012.

The Lord Jesus taught us, *“Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples – if you have love for one another.”* (John 13:35; NET)

Whether it is gathering to share a meal, as we do before our church business meetings, or getting together for a bike ride, or a cup of coffee, or a game night, or a work project—or for prayer or worship or Bible study—fellowship is what happens when our gatherings spotlight our common faith in Jesus Christ and extend courage to one another.

Fellowship is the translation of a word that means “partaking together”—whether food or faith or service, or joy or sorrow or hope. Fellowship is the outgrowth of the spirit of hospitality. It is the arena of

mutual respect and encouragement. It is the experience of shared joys and struggles, and shared discovery of God's grace.

To be renewed in the area of fellowship, you must make some plans of your own. Plan to get better acquainted with at least four new individuals or families of the church this year. Invite them to dinner, or meet for breakfast before work. If your home doesn't feel large enough, or you don't like to cook, go out somewhere together (besides church) on the weekend.

When you're together—and this is important— inquire about their story, their spiritual journey—no judging or advising, just listening and encouraging.

Renew Your Spiritual Growth

Jesus instructed us, *"So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to do everything I have commanded you."* (Matthew 28:19-20; GWT)

The knowledge of God and His Word are also disciplines to be renewed this year.

This is why we hold Bible Study every Sunday morning and Bible Inquiry every Tuesday night. Nothing sparks your imagination and boosts your faith and confirms your understanding like discussing what you may find in the Bible with other seekers and believers.

Just hearing other perspectives of new or familiar passages can deepen one's faith and joy.

Testimonies of walking with God illuminate truth and heighten spiritual awareness.

That is also why we have established a Berean Study Center here at Trinity. The Bereans were seekers of truth—disciplined seekers, who listened to Paul's teachings and then diligently studied the Scriptures to see if he was handling the Word accurately.

Just as Bible discussion is a level beyond listening to Bible preaching, so Bible study is a level beyond discussion. It is the discovery of tools that can open up the revelation of God's Word, and the development of practices (using the tools) that deepen knowledge of the God of the Bible.

Two other courses will be offered later this year. I know that at least one of them could help you significantly. Please think about it.

Sometimes, it takes intensive investigation—a prolonged look in one direction—to gain a grip on spiritual truths that can set you free. So, once each quarter, we plan to offer a FOCUS seminar on topics the Holy Spirit wants to highlight for us. The first one will be later this month. Watch for news of it.

Renew Your Spiritual Outreach

I have heard it said, "Impression without expression leads to depression."

A vital spiritual discipline that we must renew together this year is our personal outreach.

Jesus promised, *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* (Acts 1:8; NLT)

Then He said, *“Go everywhere in the world, and tell everyone the Good News.”*(Mark 16:15; GWT)

For the last several years, on a Saturday near Valentine’s Day, more than a dozen local churches across Marin have banded together to express our care for God’s creation and for the interests of the people of Marin County, by engaging in a day of clean-up activities.

This year, on February 11, this Gift of Love will be given once more, including service in Marin’s open spaces, and San Rafael parks, and Fairfax open spaces. While Martha and I will be out of the country on another mission, Mike Ardito has agreed to coordinate our participation with the Gift of Love. Expect to hear from him.

San Rafael Santa Cop wraps up thousands of gifts for needy children in the area and is a great way to wrap up the year: generously. I hope even more of you will participate next Christmas

These are examples of the church, serving the good of the community.

Even though we intend to remodel this building this year (plans are already being drawn for our building permits), we hope to host several special events that will be attractive to neighbors and friends of yours.

Independence Day will again find us in the Redwood Grove of Samuel P. Taylor State Park for worship, a picnic, and a water baptism.

Guest music artists, like Bob Kilpatrick and Dan and Carol Fryer, will again join us in our worship, as will missionary guests and other speakers.

Multiple Saturday Breakfasts, a Day of Gratitude following Thanksgiving, and our annual Christmas Luncheon—all offer opportunities for you to be an active (and prayerful) inviter—to reach out to those God has put in your circle of influence and bring them into the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe you want to focus on one or two people this year, and mount a campaign of loving deeds to win their attention and their favor. A series of encouraging cards on significant occasions, a plate of cookies, helping out with a task, or just spending time together can pave the way into their hearts for God’s words.

Is there someone where you work who needs God’s loving attention? Is there someone Jesus has put on your heart, nudging you to become His hand extended? Tell the Lord you will do it, and begin formulating a plan. You may only know the first move, but if you make it, the Holy Spirit will work with you and guide you through the rest.

But all this takes preparation—prayerful preparation. Our efforts will be futile if the Holy Spirit has not plowed the soil of people’s hearts, which He does when we pray for them. So commit yourself to pray—especially for that one or two He puts on your heart. Join me this Friday evening to get it started in a significant way.

If you absolutely cannot make it on Friday, but you would like us to lift their names to the Lord in prayer, send us an email and we will remember them with you on Friday.

It's No Accident

Renewal is a process, not an event. It is intentional, not accidental. It is a miracle, but the kind for which you can (and must) plan and prepare. So, I urge you, set your sights on 2012 as the year of your (and our) renewal. Give yourself to the Lord for that purpose.

If you stumble or fall along the way, don't stay down; get up yourself, and help others along the way. If we walk this road together our footing will be firmer and our pace will be swifter.

If you will *believe* in the power of God's grace, He will make you a place to *belong*, and you will *become* more than you have ever dreamed. This is His plan and our purpose.

This is your year. In Jesus' name, be renewed!