

“At All Times”  
Pastor Wally Contreras  
January 1, 2023

“Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word. Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. I am a sojourner on the earth; hide not your commandments from me! My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times. You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones, who wander from your commandments. Take away from me scorn and contempt, for I have kept your testimonies. Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes. Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors.” (Psalms 119:17) (Emphasis added.)

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Pastor Wally spoke of New Year’s resolutions and pointed out that Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines the term to mean: “Fixed purpose or determination of mind; as a resolution to reform our lives; a resolution to undertake an expedition. The effect of fixed purpose; firmness, steadiness or constancy in execution, implying courage.” Though many view resolutions as “wishful thinking”, Pastor Wally said we should consider them to be a “soft vow” reminding us that, as James said, “...let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.” (James 5:12b) From where do such feelings of a need for me to make some resolution or vow come from?

According to an Insideoutmastery.com article dated November 15, 2022 “38.5% of US adults set New Year’s resolutions every year. 59% of young adults (18-34) have New Year’s resolutions, which makes it the largest demographic that sets these goals. 48% want to exercise more, making it the most popular New Year’s resolution. The top 3 are all health-related. 23% quit in the first week, and only 36% make it past the first month. 9% successfully keep their New Year’s resolutions.” The author of the article, Mick [no last name], is “on a mission to inspire people like you to unleash their full potential and create a more meaningful life!” Pastor Wally, on the other hand, suggested that if I am faithfully reading my Bible daily, I’ll discover that Scripture will do the exact same thing...that it’s God’s desire that I have “a more meaningful life” and with the aid of the Holy Spirit, He will “unleash [my] full potential”. So, who do I trust to “unleash [my] full potential and create a more meaningful life” and why?

How difficult is it for me to have a “[f]ixed purpose or determination of mind” when it comes to reading my Bible and why?

Why do I need to continuously read the Bible? Pastor Wally's answer is so that I will know the truth. In Robert Bell's 2011 book, "Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived", Bell states that "It's been clearly communicated to many that this belief (in hell as eternal, conscious torment) is a central truth of the Christian faith and to reject it is, in essence, to reject Jesus. This is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus' message of love, peace, forgiveness and joy that our world desperately needs to hear." In this book, Bell outlines several views of hell, including the doctrine of universal reconciliation which is the "belief that everyone will be saved. There are many people today who hold to universal salvation and believe that all people eventually end up in heaven. Perhaps it is the thought of men and women living a life of eternal torment in hell that causes some to reject the teaching of Scripture on this issue. For some it is an over-emphasis on the love and compassion of God—and the neglect of the righteousness and justice of God—that leads them to believe God will have mercy on every living soul." (Gotquestions.org) In one review of Bell's book, it was pointed out that "[t]hough he does not choose any one view as his own, he states "Whatever objections a person may have of [a universalist view], and there are many, one has to admit that **it is fitting, proper, and Christian to long for it.**" – Love Wins, p. 111" (Emphasis added.) Amazon describes Bell as: "...an electrifying, unconventional pastor whom Time magazine calls "a singular rock star in the church world," with millions viewing his NOOMA videos. With searing insight, Bell puts hell on trial with a hopeful message—eternal life doesn't start when we die; it starts right now. And ultimately, Love Wins." Amy Mozombite, guest writer for The Christian Broadcasting Network, regarding Bell's Nooma videos said that "[Bell] must have had a call to take this production company, Nooma, and make videos with a deep message in a new way that would speak to the hearts of those watching. He must have envisioned that simple scenes with effectual lighting could produce the desired effects to wrap his words around -- that watching a mundane activity like a walk around a lake or the planting of trees and just chatting while attending to these pursuits would be enough." With such resounding accolades from Amazon and The Christian Broadcasting Network, why wouldn't I not want to run out and buy his book and ruminate in all that Bell has to offer about "Jesus' message of love, peace, forgiveness and joy that our world desperately needs to hear"?

Does it take "a new way that [will] speak to the hearts of those watching" for me to understand some "deep message" being presented? Is it the message or the wrapping that tends to impress me more? Explain.

Pastor Wally said that truth tends to act as a brick wall on the "my way highway". Have I seen that played out in my life in some way(s)? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Regarding truth, Pastor Wally read John 17:14-19. In John 17:19 (ESV), Jesus says, “And for their sake I consecrate myself, **that they also may be sanctified in truth.**” What does being “sanctified in truth” mean?

In reading Psalm 119:20 (My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.”), Pastor Wally pointed out that “consumed” meant “crushed and ground down”. So, this is not a sweet, “isn’t that nice” moment in Scripture. It’s a description of the intense passion for God’s rules...His Word expressed by the writer of this passage. When was the last time that my passion for something was so intense that it felt like my soul was being “crush”? Describe it.

In conjunction with his exhortation that we need to resolve to reading through the Bible as a community, Pastor Wally referenced Philippians 2:1 (ESV) “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” The MacArthur Study Bible explains: “**one accord**. This may also be translated “united in spirit” and perhaps is a term specially coined by Paul. It literally means “one-souled” and describes people who are knit together in harmony, having the same desires, passions, and ambitions. **one mind**. “Intent on one purpose” is an alternative translation.” How can the statement “I guess we’ll just agree to disagree” ever come out of mouth? Explain.

So, if I’m not “being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind”, then what do I think happens to my “encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy” and why?

Wally encouraged me to “say yes to giving testimony to God’s grace in us”. To be able to do this, I must first have an acute awareness of His grace in my life. My testimony can be as simple as:

God helped me through \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank).

God eased my grief by bringing \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) into my life.

God made me laugh today by \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank).

God provide me with \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank).

What are some other examples of my testimony of God’s grace in me?

Do I think that when someone asks me to share my testimony with them that it is referring solely to my testimony regarding my salvation?

Did I catch the part of the closing song we sang, "Behold Our God" that asked: "Who has felt the nails upon his hands? Bearing all the guilt of sinful man God eternal, **humbled to the grave Jesus, Savior**, risen now to reign?" Recall from our previous discussions regarding Jesus' incarnation that this "kenosis" according to GotQuestions.org: "refers to the doctrine of Christ's "self-emptying" in His incarnation...The kenosis was a self-renunciation, not an emptying Himself of deity. Nor was it an exchange of deity for humanity. Jesus never ceased to be God during any part of His earthly ministry. He did **set aside His heavenly glory**. He also **voluntarily refrained from using His divinity** to make His way easier. During His earthly ministry, **Christ completely submitted Himself to the will of the Father** (John 5:19)." Andy Stanley also said in his book "How Good is Good Enough" that "The ultimate question each of us must answer for ourselves is not whether Christianity is fair. The more important question is "Is Jesus who he claimed to be?" In other words, "Is Christianity true?" What testimony can I share with my "Who's Your One" that lets them know that Christianity is true?

When will I share a testimony with my "Who's Your One"?