



Bulldog New Year

(I wrote this four years ago, but find that it is even more applicable this year, after the craziness of the past year!)

Around the world, a new year is cause for tremendous celebration. Whether you're following the Julian or Chinese calendar, the day brings about parties, special food, fireworks, and most of all a sense of renewal.

At the Starkville church of Christ, while we mark calendar days just as the rest of the U.S. does, our true new year falls during the third week of August. Decades ago, this congregation made the decision that our unique opportunity is to serve the students at Mississippi State University. From the location of our building to the University Student Center downstairs in the newest wing of our building, from having a full-time campus minister to spending a substantial portion of our budget on the campus ministry, we have purposely set out to take full advantage of the opportunity that God has provided to us. While we enjoy less traffic and the ability to get in a restaurant during the summertime, we also miss our college student family members. Thus, the celebration we have is as genuine as any New Year's Eve celebration, and our emotions are even more intense – it's like our family is **finally** all back together.

As we enter the Bulldog New Year, I'd ask the following of each group:

New Students:

- Give us a chance to get to know you! We try to go out of our way to make you feel at home, care

about you as an individual, and show you the love of the Lord.

- Take full advantage of the spiritual growth opportunities we offer. From the freshman retreat to devos, from prayer group to Bible classes, there are a multitude of opportunities that can meet your needs, whatever they are.
- Develop a close relationship with your Christian brothers and sisters. Friendships you develop now will have a huge impact on your spiritual direction for years to come. Make sure that you surround yourself with those who will help you draw closer to God, not draw you away from Him.
- Connect through Life Groups. Our small group Bible study program provides a wonderful opportunity to connect with Christians of all ages. Try a group for a few weeks, and if it doesn't quite fit you, feel free to try another. Our resident members are quite accustomed to college students getting a feel for a couple of groups before they settle on one.

Returning Students:

- Remember all of the encouragements above!
- Don't allow the additional responsibilities of being further in your education to pull you away from your first priority – serving God.
- Connect with someone new. Remember that unsettled feeling when you first came – not knowing hardly anyone, unsure of a new setting, and completely away from your family and home church family? Well, someone else is in that same situation now. You can make a huge impact on someone new by being a friend and Christian brother/sister.

Resident Members:

- Go out of your way to connect with our college students. Being a young adult in society today has never been more challenging, and older Christians can play a vital role through friendship, mentoring, and teaching Christ through our lives.
- Remember what it's like to be in a new and different place. Find ways to be a source of encouragement.

- Let your light shine! As disciples of Christ, we have the opportunity to show our college students what belonging to Him can really mean in all that we do, all that we say.

Let's all pray that this is the best (new) year ever in the history of our congregation. And then let's go about making that happen, using the gifts that God has given to us.

-David Shaw