

“A Sweeping Survey at Year’s End”

Today’s message references a helpful practice to follow at the end of something (day, year, era), as something new is about to begin. Philippians 3:12-14 contain great words to consider at this time of the year: *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”*¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” I want to invite you to join me in surveying your life at year’s end in five areas.

First of all, I would like to invite you to ***take a look behind***. Whenever we come to the end of something (day, year, era), we can all admit that we’ve had some successes and we’ve had some failures. Instead of using the word, “failure” maybe we should use the phrase, “lesson learned.” *It took Thomas Edison hundreds, if not thousands of attempts to reach a working design for an electric light bulb. In response to a question about his missteps, he said, “I have not failed 10,000 times—I’ve successfully found 10,000 ways that will not work.”* There is some potential danger in looking behind because there’s nothing we can do to change the past, and it’s foolish to try and live in the past. Certainly we don’t want to give the enemy an opportunity to condemn us for a forgiven past that is under the blood of Christ. But to benefit the days ahead it can be helpful to reflect and evaluate. As you look behind, what are some things you did right that bear repeating? What are some things that you should do differently?

Secondly, I would like to invite you to ***take a look ahead***. While none of us know what the future holds, the believer in Jesus Christ knows the One who holds the future! And we do have this moment, this day and the next step. Once you’ve taken a brief look at what is behind then you can apply those learned lessons to what lies ahead. We all stumble and fall, but wise are the ones who learn from their missteps. *If Edison hadn’t recorded his experiments, he might have lost track of what adjustments he could make to try another angle.* It’s so easy to get discouraged at failure after failure after failure. We are all prone to succumb to the temptation to quit when we’ve been battered and bruised. But with the dawning of something new comes another opportunity to try again.

Before I share the next three areas that I would like to invite you to survey, let me read these words that are recorded in Mark 12:28-31: *“Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, ‘Which is the first commandment of all?’”*²⁹ Jesus answered him, *‘The first of all the commandments is: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.”’*³⁰ *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment.*³¹ *And the second, like it, is this: “You shall love your neighbor as Yourself.”*

There is no other commandment greater than these.” Here we have a summary of all of Scripture. The greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. The second greatest commandment has two parts: a) love yourself, and b) love other people as you love yourself.

So **third**, I would like to invite you to ***take a look in***. This would be the “loving yourself” part. The greatest way we “love ourselves” is by becoming the kind of person that God wants us to be. Use Scripture as your guide to discover what the Bible has to say about the way God sees you. Come over to God’s way of thinking if you see yourself differently than He does. Use Scripture as your guide to discover how you should live, what you should do, what you should be like, and what things should characterize your life. Take a look in and learn to love yourself. **Fourth**, I would like to invite you to ***take a look out***. This would be the “loving others” part. How have you been treating other people? Do you see other people the way God sees them? Use Scripture as your guide and apply Scriptural principles in your daily relationships with other people. **Fifth**, I would like to invite you to ***take a look up***. This is referencing our vertical relationship with God. How are things with God? Are you following His prescribed standards, or your own desires? Abel followed God in the way God required, and he was accepted; Cain followed God in a way that was convenient for himself, and he was rejected—that should alarm a lot of Christians today. Learn what the Lord requires so you can strive to honor, love, obey and follow the Lord in ways that are pleasing to Him.

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Give God the glory for your successes.
2. Don’t let your failures be fatal.
3. Be determined to try, try again.
4. From what you tried in 2025, what adjustments can you make to give success a fighting chance in 2026?
5. What adjustments do you need to make in who you are and who you are becoming (as God has revealed the kind of person He wants you to be)?
6. What adjustments do you need to make in the way you treat others?
7. What adjustments do you need to make to keep growing in your relationship with God?