

THE START OF A NEW YEAR... "2022"

We've already said our goodbyes to 2021, and some people are probably relieved that it's over. It might have been a very difficult year for them... But now, the question is, "What will 2022 bring us?" Only God knows, right? However, the start of a New Year may be a great time to make some changes in certain areas of our lives that need to improve; to better ourselves in some way or another, and perhaps to make resolutions or set goals to accomplish that.

In the dictionary, the word "resolution" is defined as "a firm decision to do or not to do something". There's no mention that resolutions are made to be broken!☺ However, according to a recent survey, only 10% of U.S. adults stick with their resolutions, and those who do will break nearly half of them (47%) by the end of January. Their reasons may vary, but it evidently requires motivation, commitment, self-discipline, and perseverance to follow through... It's certainly not for the faint of heart!

Setting goals is also something some of us will do. My husband is one of them. He always calls a meeting to set our goals for the year. He wants to know where we're at, and which direction we should take in different areas of our lives, as a couple. He wants to determine our priorities; to have a plan of action, and create a budget; to evaluate the list of repairs or projects to be done inside, and outside our home; to plan trips to visit our out-of-town families, and our personal vacation time; to find ways to reduce our expenses; and the list could go on and on... I'm one who understands the importance of such meeting, but I don't enjoy the undertaking. I may also add that at the end of it, which usually takes a couple of hours, I'm totally drained... Why? Because it's mentally exhausting, and when we're done, I just want to kick back. And that's exactly what I did this morning after we had our meeting. I went for a walk.

I was hoping to find the "preacher", an elderly man I met during one of my regular walks. As strange as it may seem, we never asked for each other's names. One day, I called him "preacher" because he sounded like one; in turn, he called me "young lady", probably because I'm a good ten years younger than he is! It suited us just fine at the time, and we left it at that... As I entered the grounds of the retirement community in my little neighborhood, I found him in a gazebo chatting with Granny, a sweet elderly lady with a southern flair that I also met quite unexpectedly one day. A double blessing I wasn't expecting! As usual, she was sitting in her wheelchair; her "Cadillac", as she likes to call it. I immediately headed up their way with a lightness in my step, and a broad smile on my face.

Granny spotted me first.

"Well, well... would ye look who's comin' our way on this fine mornin'!" she exclaimed.

The preacher turned around, and looked up in my direction.

"What a nice surprise, young lady! We were not expecting to see you this morning... Come, and join us!" he said as he stood up to greet me.

I made my way into the gazebo, and sat down next to him. As soon as I made myself comfortable, Granny didn't lose time, and asked me in a teasing way. "So, honey, how have ye been doin'? Have ye made yer New Year's resolutions yet?"

"Nope... How about you?"

"Well, I wasn't born yesterday ye know, so I suppose I did in my younger years... But now in my old age, I ain't got the desire no more to make resolutions, plans, goals or what have ya... All I'm waitin' for is my ticket to heaven, for the sweet by and by, if ye know what I mean! To finally see the good Lord face to face. To be in His House, cause ain't gonna be no more pain, no more sorrows, and no more tears as the good Book says! I'm gonna be praisin' Him with my arms up, stompin' my feet wherever I want, 'cause

I ain't gonna need my "Cadillac" no more! And I'll be havin' the best shindig with them holy angels!" she said, a bit out of breath with all the excitement. "In the meantime, I reckon I'll keep livin' one day at a time, prayin' for the folks God put on my heart to pray for... Oh, ye may find me snoozin' from time to time while doin' it, but the good Lord knows all of them needs, so I ain't worry none. He'll take care of them no matter what..."

I'm much younger than she is, but somehow I understand her. She probably wonders why she's still on this earth when her frail body can't function as it used to, and her mind isn't as sharp. She always says that as the years go by, she loses some of her "bearings", but I never really noticed. She's such a little firecracker, and a blessing to me! But God has His reasons for keeping her on this earth, and we don't know them. We just have to trust that His plans are always perfect... His timing is always right... His love never fails...

I then turned my attention to the preacher. "How about you? Have you made any resolutions for the New Year?"

"Well, young lady, as you know I'm not far behind Granny in age, so my answer would probably be about the same as hers... Instead, let me throw the question right back at you! You haven't made yours yet. Any reason why?"

"Well, I guess resolutions are mostly for self-improvement, and I won't necessarily make them at the start of a New Year. The time is right whenever I realize that I need to make personal changes in certain areas of my life; may they be physical, mental or spiritual. But I've learned to do this with the Lord's help, because I know that I might give up along the way, which always leaves me with feelings of frustration, and guilt... One thing I do know though is that He doesn't love me more on days I perform well, nor does He love me less when I don't..."

"You're absolutely right!" the preacher commented. "But I must add one important thing here... When we put God at the center of our lives, even our approach to making resolutions, and setting goals changes. When we include Him in our decision-making, He gives us His guidance, and wisdom to make the right choices."

"Well, ain't you preachin' to the choir! I don't know about ya, honey, but I sure cain agree with this young man! Travelin' in life with the good Lord sittin' in the driver's seat is always the best thang! It's when we want to switch place with Him that we cain get ourselves into a mess... Trust me, I know what I'm talkin' about. I reckon it happened to me too many times in my life... But the good Lord was always willin' to take back the wheel after I'd learned my lesson... I reckon He's a far better driver than me! I'm tellin' ya, He's so lovin', and merciful..." she said with a hint of sadness in her voice.

"I certainly agree with you Granny, and I'd like to share a little story with you both..."

"We're all ears, young lady!" the preacher said, while Granny pulled up her wheelchair closer to me. Being a little hard of hearing, I could see she didn't want to miss a word of what I was about to say...

"Well, it was sometime in 1982 when my dear husband suggested we look into the possibility of moving to South Florida. His primary reasons were that we both disagreed with the Province of Quebec political climate at the time; the fact that we had enough of our cold winters; and to be reunited with his family that had already moved to Fort Lauderdale in the mid '60s. All things considered, he thought it would be a great idea! But, I thought he had lost his mind! I couldn't wrap my head around this "great idea" of his to move some 2,500 miles away from my family, and our friends... I was also thinking about our children, who were then only eight, six, and two years old, and didn't speak English... Nevertheless, I finally agreed to sit down with him, and analyze the pros and cons of such a move. After we asked God for guidance, and discussed at length the logistics of it all, it became clear that it would be a great opportunity for our family. So, we began to plan what would be our most daring adventure of our lives!

"There was so much to be done aside from our normal, and busy schedule! First, we applied for our American visas which, to our surprise, were approved rather quickly. We then put up our house for sale. Our furniture, and household items we didn't want to bring with us were either sold or given away. We searched for a place to stay upon our arrival, and planned our road trip down south. These were very hectic months for us, and at some point the reality of it all hit me..."

"Oftentimes, I would wake up in the middle of the night worrying, and doubting I could go through with it... My dear husband, who was totally looking forward to it, encouraged me the best he could. But what really reassured me is this scripture I read one day in the book of Joshua: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." That was the turning point for me. I knew then that everything would be alright. And it has been... We've now been living in the beautiful sunshine state for almost thirty-nine years, and we love it!"

When I ended, they both stared at me, seemingly amazed!

"Ain't that a great story!" Granny exclaimed. "But let me tell ya, honey, it ain't for everybody to start a new life in a new country with three young'ns at yer heels like ye did!.. I reckon some folks, and yer kin must have been thinkin' if ye had lost yer mind or somethin'!"

"Well, some of our friends couldn't believe we would go through with it. Back then, we were considered real adventurers! As for my family, they had not much to say about us moving so far away... I could see they were saddened by it, but there was no turning back, and on June 23, 1983 we left our country, our friends, and my family behind... I must say that our new beginnings were not always easy, but God was with us, encouraging us through His Word, and opening doors for us. And by the end of the first year, we began to feel at home.

"I think it was the most important, and crucial goal we've ever set for our family. We had many more plans, and goals after this one. Some of them turned out to be real blessings, but others were not always made with God's guidance, and we suffered dire consequences... However, I can say with gratitude that even if we were the only ones to blame, God was always with us. He helped us in so many amazing ways that I like to call them "miracles". He pulled us through, and as a result our faith became stronger."

The preacher commented: "You know, in some ways your story reminds me of Moses when God appointed him to bring the Israelites out of Egypt to lead them into the Promised Land. God's goal was to set His people free from the bondage of the Egyptians which, in itself, brought great joy to the Israelites. But, because of the many struggles they encountered along the way, they complained, blamed Moses and God, and even wished they could go back to Egypt. But God never abandons His children... In this case, He also did miracles after miracles for them. This epic story of Moses is only one of many where we can see God appointing ordinary people, like you and me, to accomplish His goals."

As he ended, we both glanced at granny who looked about ready for a nap!

"Well, folks, not that ye are borin', but I'll leave ya to it... Now, behave yerselves while I'm gone, ye hear?" she said, winking at us.

"We'll do, Granny!" I replied, laughing. We both hugged her, and watched her drive away on her "Cadillac", hoping she wouldn't fall asleep on her way back!

The preacher and I sat down, and we resumed our conversation.

"I've got a question for you." I said. "You mentioned earlier that when we include God in our goals and plans, He gives us His guidance, and wisdom to make the right choices. I totally agree with you, but for the ones who think that our human wisdom is enough, what would you say to them?"

“Well, I would say exactly what is written in the book of 1 Corinthians 1:20: “Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” Let’s not deceive ourselves. God *is* the very source of wisdom... Actually, many scriptures give us instructions about following His wisdom, and not our own in every aspect of our lives. Off the top of my head, I can give you a few. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.” “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and He will establish your plans.” And, “Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” All these scriptures are found in the book of Proverbs. Did I answer your question, young lady?”

“Absolutely! And I’d say like David said in the book of Psalms, “Your Word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.” Amen?”

“Amen!” he answered, with a huge smile on his face.

Oh, I would have liked to keep on chatting with him, but it was already time for lunch.

On my way back home, I was thinking about my life as a young single woman, and realized that I very seldom asked God to help me with my goals or plans for my life. I was one of those who figured that I had a brain, and enough common sense to make my own decisions without getting God involved in what I thought were only trivial matters in His eyes? Oh, how wrong I was now that I know Him better...

In fact, God is interested in every aspect of our lives. What is of concern to us is also of concern to Him. Without being overbearing, He wants to be involved in our lives as a whole; not only in the bits and pieces we’re allowing Him to be part of... He’s our Creator. We’re His children. As a mother myself, I carried my children in my womb, I gave birth to them, and nurtured them. As I watched them grow, I was always there to love them, to teach and train them in the ways that were best for them. I was always there to help, and encourage them in their endeavors. I always had their best interests at heart, expecting nothing in return but their love... Even now that they are adults, and living a life of their own, I always hold them close to my heart... Who can put an end to a mother’s love for her children? No one. I then can say that I have a glimpse on how God, our Creator and Father feels towards us, His children...

As this New Year begins, my heart goes out especially to those of you, dear readers, who are now in your sunset years. You may be facing some very difficult challenges at this point in your lives. I pray that as you go through them, you will feel God’s loving, peaceful, and constant presence in your hearts. May you also hold fast to the hope of a brighter future without pain, sorrows or tears for He who promised is faithful.

I am closing with this inspirational, and beautiful Irish blessing. It is my prayer for all of you throughout 2022, and beyond...

May the raindrops fall lightly on your brow.
May the soft winds freshen your spirit.
May the sunshine brighten your heart.
May the burdens of the day rest lightly upon you.
And may God enfold you in the mantle of His love.