

Set Goals to Grow in the New Year

800 Words

This time of year, many of us reflect on the condition of our lives. We may evaluate the health of our bodies, our relationships, or our work situation. We may even “resolve” to change things. But if we’re really serious about improvement, we will set some goals and establish a plan to move forward. But have you ever considered doing the same with your spiritual health? The New Year is the perfect time to do some “spiritual evaluation” and set some spiritual goals for growth.

For several years now, as each year draws to a close, I spend time reviewing the previous 12 months and planning for the year ahead. I evaluate my progress, or lack of progress, think about where I want to go in the new year, and set some goals and strategies to get there. This evaluation and planning, which is primarily for my spiritual health and relationship with God, also includes things like work, relationships, professional development, and service. Each year I meet goals in some areas and fall short in others.

You may think this sounds a bit too analytical to be “spiritual.” But Scripture is full of directives for us to be purposeful in our spiritual growth and discipleship. While only the Holy Spirit has the power to transform us into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18), God does expect our obedient and active cooperation (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

For instance, Paul told Timothy to “train” himself for godliness ([1 Timothy 4:7-8](#)). Planning and goal setting doesn’t mean God is not in it. God both prompts and directs my evaluation and planning. I pray over each step. Haphazard discipleship will always yield haphazard results. But purposeful discipleship, guided by God, will yield spiritual growth and deeper intimacy with God.

Looking Back

Before we look ahead, it’s helpful to reflect on where we’ve been. Although not an exhaustive list, the following few questions can help us evaluate our current spiritual health and the quality of our relationship with God in the past year. Consider these questions:

- What did I learn about God?
- In what ways did my faith grow?
- How did I purposefully cultivate my relationship with God?
- Was I disciplined in Bible study?
- Was I vitally connected to my local church?
- In what ways did I serve and minister to others?
- Do I have relationships that are strained or need to be repaired?

The evaluation of the past year is important because in order to know where you're going, you need to know where you've been. Try using this ["Discipleship Evaluation"](#) form to honestly evaluate the quality of your relationship with God and your commitment to serving Him. This tool covers 17 different key discipleship areas. Your weakest areas can be great growth areas in year ahead.

Planning for the New Year

After your evaluation is complete, you're ready to look to the future. I use this ["Spiritual Goals Worksheet"](#) to set goals and strategies. It walks you through specific areas of discipleship such as time with God, ministry, service, and Christian education. When I look back at my previous year's goal planning worksheet, I see which goals I met and where I fell short. The missed goals give me a good starting place for the new year.

When setting spiritual growth goals, keep in mind that resolutions are often hard to keep. Statistics show that, at best, only 46% of New Year's resolutions are still kept six months into the year. People lose their resolve quickly because they set unattainable goals.

The following five tips will help you set realistic personal discipleship goals that will keep you growing through the year:

1. **Concentrate your efforts.** Set just one, two, or three goals at a time. Don't spread yourself too thin. When you experience success then add another goal.
2. **Be realistic.** Set *attainable* goals. If you don't read your Bible regularly now, don't set a goal to read the entire Bible in three months. Instead commit to read it 3 to 5 times per week.
3. **Think concretely.** Set goals so progress can be measured. For instance, this goal is too ambiguous: *I'm going to spend more time with God.* Instead be concrete: *I will read one Bible chapter and pray for 10 minutes five times a week.*
4. **Include strategies.** Develop strategies designed to move you toward your goals. If one goal is to memorize Scripture, determine *how* you will do that. What verses you will memorize? How often you will tackle a new one? What memorization techniques you will use?
5. **Create manageable steps.** Break your overall goal into a series of smaller goals that are doable and will foster success.

What about you? Will you do any planning for spiritual growth and service for the year ahead?

A new resource to help you foster a daily habit of getting in the Bible:

Deep-Rooted: Growing through the Gospel of Mark

Want to foster a delight for God’s Word that keeps you rooted and growing? *Deep-Rooted*, a 40-day devotional through the Gospel of Mark will help you get in, delight in, and apply God’s Word. Learn how to interact with and respond to Scripture, not simply read it. These meaty, daily devotionals will increase your hunger for God’s Word, encourage spiritual growth and stability, and lay the groundwork for a life-long, spiritually-healthy habit.

Kathy Howard

A former “cultural Christian,” Kathy Howard now has a passion for God’s Word that’s contagious. With more than 30 years of experience, Kathy has taught in dozens of states, internationally, and in a wide range of venues including multi-church conferences and large online events. She has a Masters of Christian Education from the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary. Kathy is the author of 10 books, including the new “meaty” devotional *Deep-Rooted: Growing through the Gospel of Mark*. She writes for multiple online magazines and devotional sites. Kathy and her husband live in the Dallas/Ft Worth area near family. They have three married children, five grandchildren, and two accidental dogs. Kathy provides free discipleship resources and blogs regularly at www.KathyHoward.org. She also connects with women at [Facebook](#), [Pinterest](#), and [Instagram](#).