

## MONDAY MANNA

28 December 2015

### THE END OF AN OLD YEAR CAN MEAN A NEW BEGINNING

By Robert J. Tamasy

It is never too soon – or too late – for making a fresh start. And something about the onset of a new calendar year inspires us to strive for a new beginning, either by redoubling our efforts to achieve a long-sought goal, or making needed changes because the old ways for doing things have not worked.

So with 1 January 2016 bearing down on us, many of us find ourselves thinking about resolutions and goals, along with decisions like, “This is the year I am going to...,” or “Starting the first of next year, I will no longer....” Maybe we feel stuck in a dead-end job, offering little fulfilment and no prospects for advancement. Perhaps there is an important educational step we have delayed, one that could open up new opportunities professionally.

It might be in the realm of relationships, determining to make an effort to strengthen a marriage or build bonds with other family members. Financial concerns could be our focus – needing to change spending habits, reducing or becoming freed from debt, or embarking on an aggressive savings and investment program to prepare for future needs or even retirement.

The list of areas where we could consider forging a new beginning can be long – physical fitness; eating habits; leisure activities; addressing emotional concerns such as anger, anxiety, fear, lack of motivation, impatience. Or spiritual growth, desiring to grow and mature in faith, especially in applying and living out what we believe in everyday circumstances and responsibilities.

Unfortunately, the road of good intentions sometimes leads to a dead-end, or can result in more frustration without having a clear plan for pursuing desired objectives. This is why goals should be more than idealistic desires; they should be expressed in terms that are specific, measurable and attainable. At the same time, a commitment to review these goals on a regular basis is necessary to evaluate progress. Some form of accountability can be helpful, inviting people we respect and who care for us to periodically ask how we are doing in an area where we wish to see change. Here are some principles to consider:

Seek God’s direction for your goals. We all have the capacity for developing ideas that sound reasonable, but it is always best to consult first with God, the Master Planner, who knows better than we what to do. We should be willing for Him to overrule and redirect as He sees fit. “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed” (Proverbs 16:3). “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).

Enlist help in achieving your goals. In our quest to reach important goals, we all need encouragement, support, and accountability from valued friends and associates. Wise counsel also can help us to get off to a good start and stay on track. “For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure” (Proverbs 11:14). “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).

Keep pursuing the goal. When a cherished goal takes much time and effort to achieve, it is not unusual to lose heart and focus, bowing to the weight of discouragement. So like a long-distance runner, we must keep the “finish line” in mind, ignoring the strains along the way. “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).

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## Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Do you set goals or try to formulate resolutions at the start of each New Year? If you have any of these for this coming year, what are they?
2. What do you think about new beginnings – how difficult is it for you to part with the old (jobs, traditions, habits, thought patterns, etc.), and engage in new ways and approaches for doing things?
3. Have you ever fallen victim to your own good intentions – starting off well, but failing to follow through to completion? If so, why do you think this occurred? And what can you do in the future to avoid failure to fulfil your desires?
4. What role – if any – do you envision God having as you seek to get off to a renewed start in a particular area of your life? How difficult do you find it to discern God's direction as you seek to formulate goals and plans?

## NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

- Isaiah 43:19;
- Ezekiel 36:26;
- Mark 2:22;
- 2 Corinthians 5:17;
- Revelation 21:5