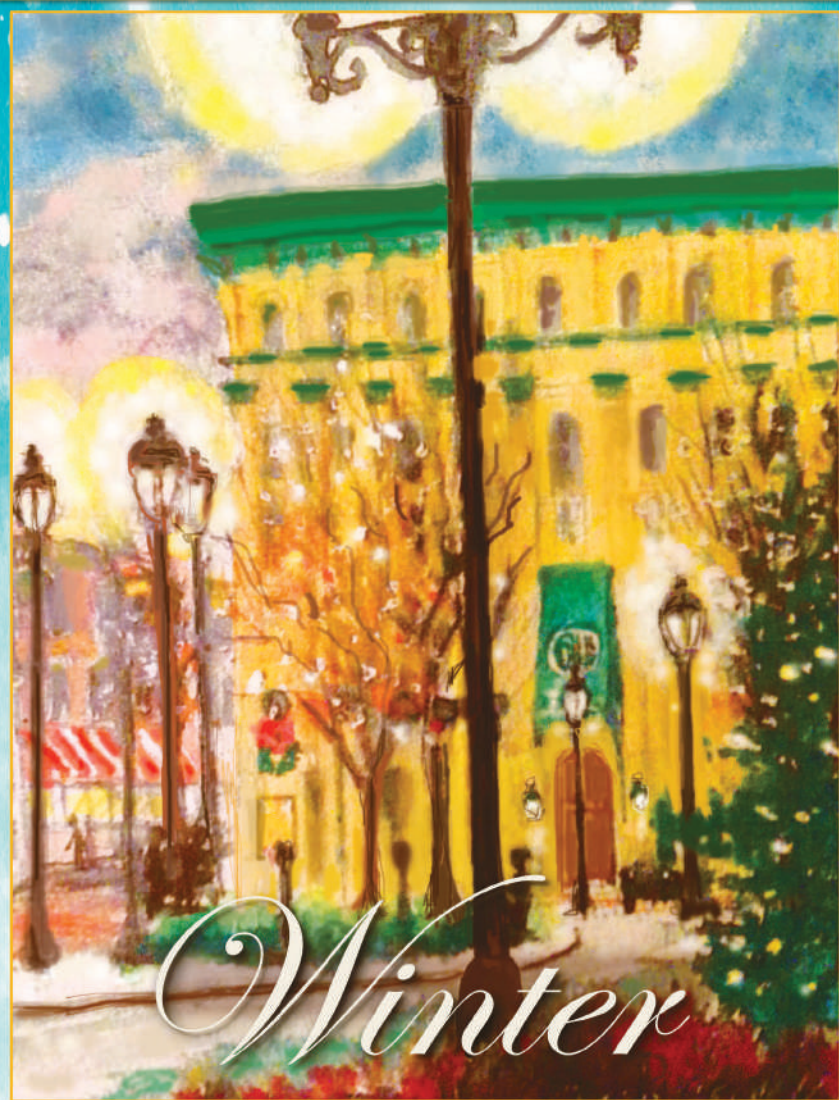


Grace Lines
Faith for All Seasons



Meditations on Finding God All Around You

Grace Russell

Grace Lines Series

A Maranatha Book

2014

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Grace Lines

Faith for All Seasons

Winter

Grace Russell



maranatha  publications

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January



1

Happy New Year

eople must be basically optimistic no matter how bad it seems. Have you ever heard anybody run around proclaiming “Miserable New Year,” “Ugly Year,” “Terrible New Year”? Of course not! We claim what we hope for, not what we’re afraid we’ll get.

It is altogether fitting that with one voice the world’s people shout, “Happy New Year,” when January rolls around, or if they operate on another calendar they shout “Happy New Year” in their own languages whenever the new year is ushered in.

We and our feeble, finite fellows need a new start, a fresh beginning more often than not we get one. We have a built in aptitude for messing things up. If we didn’t have erasers to rub out our mistakes, paint to gloss them over, the claw end of a hammer to remove the nails we bend, needles and thread to mend things, and glue to use when things fall apart, where would we be?

Soap, scouring powder, Windex, wax, spray, and even wastebaskets are musts for us. We bumble a lot, don’t we?

A new year gives us a chance to start our song over again and try to sing it right this time. A new year gives us a fresh start on a new bunch of months and days, and a time to sit still and look at the direction in which we are going and decide if we still want to go down that path.

A new year is a good time to see just *how* we are traveling. Are you walking barefoot through life and not getting anything but stubbed toes and scratched feet? Put on some shoes, the shoes

of the One who “brings good tidings,” who “publishes peace.” You will be amazed at how much better your daily walk will be.

But, must you merely walk under your own steam and effort? This is a day of automation. With the proper currency and power you can even fly. Don't try to live this year out limited by your own energies. Plug into the power of God and let Him take you where you want to go.

To stubbornly do alone that which you need to is stupid.

Ask for help from your Heavenly Father.

Happy New Year!


I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him.

This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.

- Paul

Ephesians 1: 19-20

Welcoming a New Year

s I personally enter into this fresh, new calendar of days, I look forward to the adventure this new year will bring. We need to remember as we warmly welcome a sheaf of days, not yet scribbled over with our errors, that this year, too, will be scribbled over once we get our hands on it.

Yet, we cannot concentrate on our errors nor let our failures be what we choose to keep in store. Instead, as we make our resolutions, let's put at the top of the list:

I will be thankful for the good things and remember them. I will be sorry for the errors, but I will throw the memory of them away in the forgiveness of Almighty God.

If we want this to be a better year, we need to get rid of our excess baggage. Don't take last year's troubles into the new year. Turn them over to God. He can solve them for you. When you think you have suddenly figured out how to cope with them, remember who gave you the solution, act on it, put the past behind you, and give Him thanks!

I know many people who have been able to accept only a tiny part of what God had in store for them because they kept their hands and hearts and minds too full of their worries to be able to hold them out to God and accept the material blessings, the love, or the inspiration and ideas He was eager to give them.

Life is not a static thing. Situations change, often for the better. God gives us a New Year, but He gives it one day at a time.

Learn to write on each day only what can possibly be done in that day. Don't try to live yesterday, today, and tomorrow all at once. You will be amazed at how much easier life will be if you don't try to turn back the calendar or leap too far ahead.

Time moves in one direction only - forward - by seconds, minutes and hours. We have to move with it.

Happy New Year!

May this new year surprise you with its joy!

I am the Lord, your Holy One,
Israel's Creator and King.
I am the Lord, who opened a way through the waters,
Making a dry path through the sea.

I called forth the mighty army of Egypt
With all its chariots and horses.
I drew them beneath the waves, and they drowned,
Their lives snuffed out like a smoldering candlewick.

But forget all that—
It is nothing compared to what I am going to do.
For I am about to do something new.
See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?

I will make a pathway through the wilderness.
I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

Isaiah 43:15-18

3

Unwrapping the New Year



The gift we have all received as we unwrap this New Year is the gift of time, straight from the heart of God.

Each day of the new year holds twenty-four golden hours set with sixty diamond minutes. Each hour must be used as it comes or be gone forever as soon as it passes. The wisest minds on earth have found no way to get it to return to be used differently and better on the second try.

Most creative people know that in any endeavor, one must try a thing over and over to get exactly the right word, exactly the right note or chord to make a tune ring true, another stitch line to straighten a crooked seam, another touch of color in a painting to transmit to canvas the expression on a subject's face, a little more sanding to smooth a bump in wood, another turn to tighten a screw.

Whatever we create, we can remake, but time is not like that. What we do is done. The finality of it is almost frightening.

The fork we choose to take in life's road often determines our destiny. Many of us have entered the New Year burdened with the disappointments of last year weighing heavily on our shoulders. Some will try to carry the extra load with the devices they have chosen to help them. Look at those vehicles. Some can't carry the weight. If you are trying to carry your load on the wagon of drugs or alcohol, trade yours in fast. Neither of these vehicles is strong enough to get you where you want to go.

Trade them in for a new faith in the forgiving power of Jesus Christ that can heal your memories and lift you above the clouds of your defeat where you can see endless reaches of

possibility. Meet your Pilot. God is there to take you through your new year, not pushing a wheelbarrow of last years defeats, but flying you into the city of promise. Trust Him to know the way and to get you there. Then, relaxed in body and mind, you can think clearly as you plan for the future and become a co-creator with Him.

When you get to your destination, you will have what you need with you and step into your opportunity with your Pilot as your Guide.

May your New Year stretch clean and white before you,

May the pen you use to write the plans for every day be full of ink,

May your Teacher and Friend be the One who invented the University of Life, and

May all that you learn fit you for a place in Heaven.

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

- Robert Frost

1874-1976

4

Why Do We Say,
“Happy New Year?”



Most of us have been wished a Happy New Year over and over again during the last few days. Have you ever wondered why this is, and why we don't wish each other a Happy Tomorrow, or a Happy New Week, or New Month all during the year?

Perhaps it is because if we had the chance to contemplate a fresh start, too often there would soon be nothing new about it. All of us need a chance to turn over a new leaf, to put our shortcomings and mistakes behind us, and to take a deep breath and make a fresh start. A new calendar or date book is welcome because it is so fresh with no marks on it to either obligate or condemn us. It is an open road to adventure, and we can choose what to write there.

Pretty neat, don't you think?

Not being particularly orderly, I don't actually list my resolutions and keep the list to check up on myself frequently, but I do seriously consider what those resolutions should be and earnestly ask God to help me keep them. I think it has helped me over the years to overcome at least a few of my shortcomings.

Before I can expect to improve much myself, though, I know I have to ask forgiveness for the mistakes of the past and I know, too, that a part of finding forgiveness, whether at the beginning of a new year, or any other time through the year, requires that we forgive those who have hurt us.

That isn't always easy. Sometimes we even have to forgive them of the habits that irritate us if we are to live happily

together. Sometimes we have to do this silently without confronting those whom we love and appreciate the fact that we, too, have some imperfections. If we will instead examine ourselves, we will probably find more flaws in ourselves than we even knew we had. Jesus explained it this way, “Take the plank out of your own eye and you will see clearly to take the spec out of your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:5)

It is quite possible to forgive in silence, to encourage those qualities we admire, and when we do this, to discover wonderful changes in their attitudes that make life better all the way around.

The older we get, the more obligations we seem to accumulate. Almost everyone who retires wonders how on earth he or she ever had time to work. We need to take a little conscious time to prioritize our activities. Otherwise we find that we are scheduled beyond the hours of the day by others and their agendas.

We need to make time for the really important things, but first we need to consider what these things are. Contrary to what you might think, I have found that if I make time for the big things, the little details fall into place more easily. I am a detailed person by nature and sometimes I find that I have frittered away a lot of time trying to do unimportant things well. I don’t harbor the illusion that life doesn’t have necessary details that must be attended to on a daily basis, but I do know that those details don’t have to overwhelm us and crowd out more important pursuits.

Like Martha, we have to be careful that we aren’t busying ourselves trying to cook up a lot of lunches Jesus never asked for and miss out on the important thing that Mary chose - sitting at Jesus’ feet, listening to His word.

Some details of life, promptly attended to, simplify life in the long run. Putting stuff away in the same place so it easily can be found later is a simplification. Washing the dishes promptly

before the food hardens on them makes the job easier. Exercising regularly develops muscles that make all your actions less tiring.

Telling the truth saves a lot of taxation on the memory to remember what you said to this person or that. It also makes you dependable so people can count on your personal integrity.

Developing your faith so that panic doesn't overtake you when disaster strikes is time well spent.


Try to schedule some time at the beginning of the day for prayer and study and choosing the better part of sitting at Jesus' feet, listening for His Voice, receiving spiritual strength, courage, and life for the day.

It will make the rest of your day go better and the rest of your life as well.

And while it was still dark, Jesus rose up and went up into the mountain to pray.

Mark 1:35

My Personal Resolutions

 I have never been one to sit down with pen in hand and mull over New Year's Resolutions. I'm always too busy taking down the Christmas tree, entertaining the last of the Christmas guests, and trying to wind up the loose ends of the year that is passing.

This year, however, I thought it would be wise to make a few resolutions. So here are mine:


1. I resolve to try not to live this year in such a hurry. The "hurrier" I went last year, the "behinder" I got.
2. I will try to take time to do things right the first time.
3. I will start each day with prayer to discover that day's real priorities and not let my time be frittered away on lots of little nothings.
4. I will not schedule my time so completely that no time is left for those little spontaneities that make life worthwhile.
5. I will commit to habit boring household routines so my mind can enjoy more lucrative pleasures, even while my hands are busy in soapsuds and dishwater.

6. I will quit cramming more into my schedule than will fit. At my age, I should accept the fact that no day will have more than the allotted 24 hours.
7. I will seek God's grace for navigating my way through the troubles and look at them as a time to draw closer to God and see His mighty power and guidance at work in my life. And, I will rejoice as much as I do as when I sail through life with ease enjoying God's blessings.
8. I will fulfill all the roles that are mine without allowing them individually or in-mass to drown out my own individual spirit.
9. I will take some time to do those things I want to do as well as all those things I ought to do.
10. I will rely on the forgiving love of God to make up the difference when I fall short in these endeavors and express the overflow of His love to others when they fall short in theirs.

Having only 10 fingers with which to remember these resolutions, I will stop with these.

6

Resolutions for a New Year

s you open the door to this new year, you will discover that a new year and a new door are a lot alike. We can never be sure what is on the other side. Some of us almost fight the passage of time to avoid change. What joys we miss by playing it too safe. Open the door to this year with enthusiasm.

Isn't a new year a blessing? It is like reaching out and accepting forgiveness from our Heavenly Father for the times we have failed to measure up in the past and a chance to start the whole race of life all over again.

As this new year has crossed into our time zone, and we begin thinking about resolutions for the year, don't throw away the pencil before you make any resolutions at all. The broken ones from last year don't guarantee that some of those you make this year may not be kept.

In those character changing resolutions we seem to make with futility year after year, maybe the reason we miss out is that we try to accomplish them all ourselves. The greatest support is the support we find when we take out shortcomings to God and in prayer, believing, ask Him to remove these tenacious cockleburs from our hearts. Some things we need to do and some changes we need to make can only be successfully handled in this way.

We have Jesus' word for it, "With God all things are possible." (Matt. 19:26) He didn't say that a few things are possible if they fall into certain categories, but *all* things are possible.

Try this system. It works better than anything else. The only catch is that when God clears out one trash pile in your life,


it lets the light shine on some other trash piles you didn't know were there. That's all the better. Once He clears out one pile of rubbish, you know He can do it again.

Your resolutions just give Him the key to enter the place where you live. He brings His own cleaning tools. We aren't trying to change ourselves. He has promised to change us, if we will let Him.

As we behold His glory we are transformed into the same image, from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord.

- Paul
2 Corinthians 3:18

Who Messed Up My New Calendar?

ave you ever received a brand new calendar for the new year and planned to use it to write your schedule on as each day unfolded? Has a child ever gotten to it first with his crayons and messed up a bunch of its days so that you just felt like trading it in on another one?

This happened to me. It was not my paper calendar days that were scribbled over - that would have been easy enough to replace. It was not a child who did this - the mistake would have been easy enough to remedy. Outside forces beyond my control did this. The days themselves were marked up for something that I did not have in mind, even before the new year had barely begun.

Before the New Year bells rang out the old, we received news that my husband was needed to serve as a District Superintendent in one of the Methodist districts in West Tennessee. The changes that were forcing me to give up my whole lifestyle were rung in. I knew all too well that my familiar surroundings must be left, and we must move on.

It helped a little to know that we would be going back to a town where we had lived before. But, I wondered if we would feel like Rip Van Winkle? Would the absence of our children, who had filled our lives with so much joy when we had lived there years before, make us feel bereft now that they were grown and gone off to start lives of their own? Would the absence of so many of our friends who use to live there but had now made the trek to Heaven before we did leave holes in the music of our memory so

that our hearts could no longer hear the tune? Would passing our old church where my husband use to be the minister and know that that church congregation was no longer our familiar place of service bring a lump into our throats to choke out the gladness?

Well, I knew it all depended really on Who it was that made those marks on what promised to be brand new days. If God, the Great Artist had embellished the time in advance, I knew it would be more beautiful day by day because His schedules are etched there rather than the scribbles of my own.

But, I was not sure. I finally reconciled myself to the forced change this way. If the Great Artist did not make the original marks on the clean tablet of my upcoming days, then I would take refuge in His promise, "All things work together for good to those who love the Lord, who are called according to His purpose." And, I would trust Him to do for my year what the European artist I once read about did for an ugly splotch on a mural he was painting on a the wall of a banquet hall.

Viewing the mistake that marred his work for a while, the artist finally took up his brush and transformed the spot into a deer, added majestic mountains and a waterfall, and made the wall so lovely that people came from miles around to admire the magnificent painting.

God can do this for everyone's year no matter what splotches are already on it. He can take innumerable circumstances and work them into a thing of beauty for His glory and our blessing. The faith that says, "All things work together for good to those who love the Lord and are the called according to His purposes" is the only thing I know that will conquer fear every time. (Rom. 8:28)

Never forget your life is a living painting, the work goes on despite obstacles - it is a work in progress fashioned by the hand of the Creator, regardless of how many human errors, self -

inflicted wounds, or curve balls the ill-will of man or the enemy can send your way.

It will also be the empowering agent to give us strength to go forward, to pack and to unpack, and all the while to be about our Father's business.

I clung to that promise like a lifeline, and I assure you that it worked for me like it always has before.

It will work for you, too, because God has promised it.

Why not lay down your worry, grief, and negativity about the future and put your trust in His promise.

It is amazing the magnificence He can bring out of what we fear might be a disaster!

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not to your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct you path.

Proverbs 3:5-6

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About the Author

GRACE RUSSELL has been a popular columnist for newspapers in the South for over 25 years. Her column *Grace Lines* offered meditations and practical ideas on how to make spiritual living a reality in everyday life.

By popular request from her readers, Grace has gathered her columns into a more lasting format so another generation can enjoy her spiritual insights. As one of the remaining members of America's "Greatest Generation," Grace shares the simple, sacrificial devotion to the love of Christ which that generation knew so well - a spiritual philosophy of life that made our nation great.

Grace served as Tennessee State President of the National League of American Pen Women for many years. She is the wife of retired

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Now Grace's insights are being made available to you through her new devotional series, *Grace Lines*.

Faith for All Seasons:

- *Book 1 - Spring* *Book 3 - Fall*
- *Book 2 - Summer* *Book 4 - Winter*
- *How to Have an Old Fashioned Christmas*
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