

*I Want to Live These
Days with You*

A Year of Daily Devotions

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JANUARY



A NEW BEGINNING

Every new morning is
a new beginning
of our life.
Every day is
a completed whole.

FROM NOW ON?

The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” This saying, which is found in a broad variety of lands, does not arise from the brash worldly wisdom of an incorrigible. It instead reveals deep Christian insight. At the beginning of a new year, many people have nothing better to do than to make a list of bad deeds and resolve from now on—how many such “from-now-ons” have there already been!—to begin with better intentions, but they are still stuck in the middle of their paganism. They believe that a good intention already means a new beginning; they believe that on their own they can make a new start whenever they want. But that is an evil illusion: only God can make a new beginning with people whenever God pleases, but not people with God. Therefore, people cannot make a new beginning at all; they can only pray for one. Where people are on their own and live by their own devices, there is only the old, the past. Only where God is can there be a new beginning. We cannot command God to grant it: we can only pray to God for it. And we can pray only when we realize that we cannot do anything, that we have reached our limit, that someone else must make that new beginning.

THE NEXT STEP

People who want to live solely by their good intentions have no idea where those intentions actually come from. It's worth a closer look. Our so-called good intentions are nothing but anxious byproducts of a weak heart that fears all kinds of evils and sins and now arms itself with very human weapons in order to go against these powers. But whoever is afraid of sin is already in the middle of it. Fear is the net that evil throws over us, so that we become entangled and soon fall. Those who are afraid have already fallen. If we are on a difficult mountain climb and are suddenly consumed with fear, we will surely stumble. Hence, such anxious good intentions do us no good. We can certainly never make a new beginning with them.

How can we make a fresh start? "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back . . ." (Luke 9:62). One who guides a plow does not look back—or into the immense distance—but to the next step that must be taken. Backward glances are not a Christian thing to do. Leave fear, anxiety, and guilt behind. And look to the one who gives you a new beginning.

FOR EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON

For those who find and give thanks to God in their earthly fortune, God will give them times in which to remember that all things on earth are only temporary, and that it is good to set one's heart on eternity. . . . All things have their time, and the main thing is to stay in step with God and not always be hurrying a few steps ahead or falling behind. To want everything all at once is to be over-anxious. "For everything there is a season . . . to weep, and . . . to laugh; . . . to embrace, and . . . to refrain from embracing; . . . to tear, and . . . to sew . . ." (Eccl. 3:1a, 4a, 5b, 7a), "and God seeks out what has gone by" (3:15b). Yet this last part must mean that nothing past is lost, that with us God again seeks out the past that belongs to us. So when the longing for something past overtakes us—and this happens at completely unpredictable times—then we can know that this is only one of the many "times" that God makes available to us. And then we should not proceed on our own but seek out the past once again with God.

MORNING BY MORNING HE WAKENS ME

Every new morning is a new beginning of our life. Every day is a completed whole. The present day should be the boundary of our care and striving (Matt. 6:34; Jas. 4:14). It is long enough for us to find God or lose God, to keep the faith or fall into sin and shame. God created day and night so that we might not wander boundlessly, but already in the morning may see the goal of the evening before us. As the old sun rises new every day, so the eternal mercies of God are new every morning (Lam. 3:22–23). To grasp the old faithfulness of God anew every morning, to be able—in the middle of life—to begin a new life with God daily, that is the gift that God gives with every new morning. . . .

Not fear of the day, not the burden of work that I have to do, but rather, the Lord wakens me. So says the servant of God: “Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught” (Isa. 50:4). God wants to open the heart before it opens itself to the world; before the ear hears the innumerable voices of the day, the early hours are the time to hear the voice of the Creator and Redeemer. God made the stillness of the early morning for himself. It ought to belong to God.

DO NOT WORRY ABOUT TOMORROW

Possessions delude the human heart into believing that they provide security and a worry-free existence, but in truth they are the very cause of worry. For the heart that is fixed on possessions, they come with a suffocating burden of worry. Worries lead to treasure, and treasure leads back to worry. We want to secure our lives through possessions; through worry we want to become worry free, but the truth turns out to be the opposite. The shackles that bind us to possessions, that hold us fast to possessions, are themselves worries. The misuse of possessions consists in our using them for security for the next day. Worry is always directed toward tomorrow. In the strictest sense, however, possessions are intended only for today. It is precisely the securing of tomorrow that makes me so insecure today. "Today's trouble is enough for today" (Matt. 6:34b). Only those who place tomorrow in God's hands and receive what they need to live today are truly secure. Receiving daily liberates us from tomorrow. Thought for tomorrow delivers us up to endless worry.

THE HOUR OF SALVATION

The curious uncertainty that surrounds the feast of Epiphany is as old as the feast itself. We know that long before Christmas was celebrated, Epiphany was the highest holiday in the Eastern and Western churches. Its origins are obscure, but it is certain that since ancient times this day has brought to mind four different events: the birth of Christ, the baptism of Christ, the wedding at Cana, and the arrival of the Magi from the East. . . . Be that as it may, since the fourth century the church has left the birth of Christ out of the feast of Epiphany. . . . The removal of the birth of Christ from his baptismal day had great significance. In gnostic and heretical circles in the East, the idea arose that the baptismal day was actually the day of Christ's birth as the Son of God. . . . But therein lay the possibility of a dangerous error, namely, a misunderstanding of God's incarnation. . . . If God had not accepted Jesus as his Son until Jesus' baptism, we would remain unredeemed. But if Jesus is the Son of God who from his conception and birth assumed our own flesh and blood, then and then alone is he true man and true God; only then can he help us; for then the "hour of salvation" for us has really come in his birth; then the birth of Christ is the salvation of all people.

THE FIRST SIGN

The story of Jesus at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1–11) reports “the first of his signs” that reveal his glory, a highly miraculous and, to our way of thinking, almost unnecessary sign of his divine glory, in view of the modest nature of the occasion. What is crucial, however, is that even this sign of Jesus’ divine power remains hidden from the wedding guests, the steward, and the bridegroom. It instead serves only the faith of the disciples. Jesus does not want to force his recognition as the Son of God, but he wants to be believed as such: “And his disciples believed in him.” The glory of Jesus is hidden in his lowliness and is seen only in faith. Here the content of the feast of Epiphany is again closely joined with the Christmas story, and so we understand that the day of Epiphany was once the same as the appearance of the One who “had no form or majesty” (Isa. 53:2). In this way Epiphany points to the time that follows in the church year: the passion.