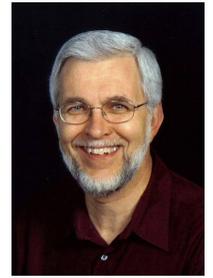


Looking Forward In the New Year

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For some, the beginning of a new year brings joy and anticipation of new opportunities – a “clean slate.” Others face the year ahead with some anxiety or dread. Many of us come off the holidays somewhat emotionally drained and physically filled. How can we begin the new year in a positive, forward-looking way?

- Count your blessings from the past year. Go ahead – make a list of the good things you accomplished or unexpected blessings you experienced last year. Put some positive fuel in your emotional cup!
- Be prepared to be flexible. As stress rises, our inflexibility may increase. You can’t control everything and everybody, so give yourself permission to quit trying. Ask yourself, “*Am I making a bigger deal of this than I should?*”
- Deal positively with changes which come your way. As long as we live, things change. Rather than allowing circumstances to overwhelm you, decide what elements you **can** deal with and tackle them.
- Relax your expectations of self and others during difficult times. In addition to flexibility, compromise may be needed to create win-win situations. Be prepared to engage in some give-and-take.
- Engage in appropriate self-care. Decide what you can do and what you want to turn loose of. Remember that “No” can be a complete sentence! Resist people who want to label your self-care as selfishness.
- Surround yourself with understanding, supportive people. Realize that communication is key, even with our best friends and supportive family members. People can’t know what we need if we don’t tell them!
- Evaluate your ability to cope with various situations. Self-care may include avoiding some draining people and circumstances, while asking others to support you through difficult times. Remember to incorporate compromise. Engaging in **part** of an event or limiting your involvement in worthwhile activities may be the healthiest thing you can do for yourself.
- Look for what brings you joy and pleasure, even in the midst of challenging circumstances. Pamper yourself. Take a laughter break! Get up and move around. Drink in the beauty of nature; experience the benefits of good music; delight in people-watching – especially children!
- Do something for others and feel the “lift” in your own spirit. When you feel yourself slowing down and withdrawing, reach outside yourself with “gifts” of kind words, handwritten notes of encouragement, or a plate of muffins or brownies delivered with a smile.
- Remember the value of routine and tradition, but be prepared to launch into new territory. Stability and routine may help keep us moving forward, but we don’t want our path to turn into a rut. Build some excitement and acceptable risk-taking into your life!
- Live **in** the present, but live **for** the future. It’s dangerous to try to drive a car while focused on the instrument panel! Don’t live in the past or let the past hold you down. **Nourish your hope for the future and anticipate great things for the year ahead!**