

# TITLE: **Five Goals for 2016**

SERIES: Stand Alone Message

TEXT: Various

Balboa Community Church

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5 goals that will help strengthen your relationship with God in 2016.

## 1. Pursue God with fresh vigor

(Fresh...not stale)

Most things are better when they're fresh.

Take soda, for instance. You stop by In-N-Out on the way home from work and pick up a burger, fries and a coke. At home, you manage to finish off the burger and fries but not the coke. The next day you see it out on the counter, so you pick up the cup, put the straw in your mouth... and yuch! It's flat! It tastes terrible!

Most things taste better when they're fresh.

Thirty years ago I was an avid stamp collector - a philatelist. More specifically, I collected First Day Covers. A First Day Cover is an envelope bearing a stamp which is cancelled on the day the stamp is officially placed on sale. The U.S. Postal Service will designate a single city as the "official" first day city, and that is where it is cancelled. The location is usually appropriate to the subject of the stamp. A First Day Cover will also have a cachet, a commissioned artistic drawing about the stamp.

In those years, I was committed to collecting stamps. It was a subject I knew a lot about and I passionate about First Day Covers.

But something happened over the years. It wasn't intentional, but gradually I became less interested, less dedicated, less enthusiastic about collecting stamps. Today I never think about them - except when we mailed our Christmas cards last month.

There are probably many things in your life that you were enthused about at one time: playing sports, gardening, learning a language or a musical instrument (Many people took piano lessons when they were little). But over time you became involved in other things, and your dedication and enthusiasm slipped.

The very same thing can happen to your relationship with God. It can become stale like week old bread or soda left out overnight. Your initial enthusiasm for God begins to wane. Oh, it's not intentional. You never imagined that your faith would grow cold.

But it happens. Slowly, over time, other things creep in and before you know it - your faith that seemed so fresh at the beginning is now stale, inert, and powerless. You're just going through the motions: passively attending church, saying a quick prayer before meals, and trying hard to keep up appearances.

Maybe you need to pursue God with fresh vigor in 2016. As the new year begins, resolve to recapture the joy of your salvation. Reawaken your relationship with God. Rekindle the flame of His Holy Spirit living within you.

**Psalm 63:8** - My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. NIV

Another version puts it this way:

**Psalm 63:8** - My soul followeth hard after thee. KJV

Pastor and author, A.W. Tozer, once said: "We pursue God because, and only because, He has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit. The impulse to pursue God originates with God, but the outworking of that impulse is our following hard after Him."

A vibrant Christian life is one that follows hard after God. God has put the impulse in us, the desire to have a relationship with him. But it is up to us to follow hard after him.

Have you noticed that when people are passionate about something they bring an energy to the table, an excitement... commitment... dedication. That "one thing" becomes what is most important to them and it has first priority in their lives.

Staying fresh in our relationship with God doesn't happen naturally. Over time our enthusiasm and commitment will diminish. We have to intentionally make the choice to pursue him - to go hard after God.

1. You need to determine why your faith is stale. Is there sin in your life that you are ignoring? Do you need to re-order your priorities so God is first? Are you wallowing in self-pity - feeling sorry for yourself? Are other people and things distracting you?

2. You need make the right choices. Commit to reading the Bible through this year. Give up things that are not building your faith and are keeping you from God. Re-energize your prayer life - make it less about what you want and more about what God wants. Begin journaling your walk with God - write down each day what he is teaching you.

Make it your goal to be FRESH, not stale in your relationship with God.

## 2. Become a grateful person

(Gracious...not bitter)

Think about someone that you don't like to be around. What are they like? How would you describe them?

Bitter, always complaining, grumbling, critical spirit, unfriendly, demanding, selfish

Now think about someone that you enjoy being around. What are they like?

Pleasant, gracious, kind, gentle spirit, generous, thoughtful, positive, encouraging

Your disposition permeates your home, your workplace, and your friends. It infects your children. It influences other people around you. It infiltrates the world you live in.

An ungrateful spirit does not reflect God or his followers.

**Philippians 2:14-15** - <sup>14</sup> Do everything without complaining and arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people. NLT

That describes people who accurately reflect God.

**Titus 3:1-2** - <sup>1</sup> Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. <sup>2</sup> They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone. NLT

Make 2016 the year in which you choose to be GRACIOUS, not bitter.

You can truly display a grateful spirit - grateful because God has chosen to save you, redeem you, forgive you, adopt you, and fill you with himself. When we live lives that reflect our gratitude toward God, then we will be the kind of people everybody wants to be around.

So when you wake up every morning, before you get all stressed out by everything you have to do, mediate on God's character for a few moments. As you lay in bed, think about how awesome God is. Let your mind focus on him. Your perspective on life AND your attitude will change dramatically.

### 3. Find ways to serve God

(Giving...not getting)

Getting is a natural instinct. A desire to acquire is built into us. Just look at your kids at Christmastime. Getting a present lights up their faces.

Giving, on the other hand, doesn't come naturally. It's something we grow into as we mature.

The same is true for followers of God. As we grow to become more like Christ, we have a greater desire to give of our selves.

Unfortunately, many Christians are only interested in receiving. They come to church for what they can get out of it. The preaching has to be something they enjoy. The songs are the ones they like to sing. The people are the ones they like to have as friends. There has to be lots of activities for their kids.

These are Christians who are focused on getting, not giving.

But a Christian who is growing in Christ realizes that God has saved them to serve. Jesus said that serving was his purpose in coming to earth.

**Mark 10:45** - For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." NIV

God intentionally planned for his people to serve one another.

**Ephesians 4:11-13** - <sup>11</sup> Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. <sup>12</sup> Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. <sup>13</sup> This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. NLT

God's plan wasn't for his people to come to church to be

entertained by a pastor or to be waited on by church leadership. His plan was for pastors and teachers to equip believers to DO the work of ministry. And when each one of you is serving where God wants you, then the whole body of Christ is built up and strengthened.

**Ephesians 6:7-8** - <sup>7</sup> Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, <sup>8</sup> because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. NIV

Becoming a follower of Christ is about GIVING, not getting. I want to encourage you to find ways to serve God this year. It's not about doing more - some of you are faithfully serving now. But it is about knowing WHERE God wants you to serve. And it is about being ready to serve at a moment's notice. You might hear his voice speaking to you when you're in a conversation with a co-worker. Or when you know a neighbor is sick and needs assistance. There is no limit to what God can do through you when you are more interested in giving, than getting.

### 4. Say "No" to something

(Purposeful...not distracted)

In today's world we are confronted with millions of options. Standing behind someone in the line at Habit Burger I was amazed at how many options there are for ordering fast food. From retail stores to television channels, our options seem limitless.

In a world filled with options, everybody has to make choices. You do it all the time. You choose what you're going to eat for supper, what car you're going to buy, what clothes you wear, what hair style you want, where to go on vacation, and which church you attend.

But a plethora of options makes the Christian life more difficult. It's easy to become distracted as we juggle: music lessons, kid's soccer practice, PTA, family reunions, shopping, sports, fitness routines, pets, children, work, etc. The list is endless.

**Matthew 6:33** - Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. NLT

**Luke 12:34** - For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. NIV

**Mark 12:30** - Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. NIV

**Matthew 16:24-25** - Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. NLT

It is clear from these verses that anyone who desires to follow Christ has to put God first in their lives... first in their choices. That means saying "No" to some things, so you can live fully for God. Some of the things you have to say "No" to may be good things, but not what God has called you to do with your life.

Many of the things we enjoy doing, like kid's soccer and sports events, keep us from doing what God wants us to do. Soon other things have a higher priority in our daily schedule.

Jesus said that we must "deny ourselves" in order to follow

him. That means we will have to give up some things we like in order to purposefully pursue God. We will have to say "No" to something that keeps us from going hard after God.

But that will look different for each of us. Here's what you need to do in 2016 that will help you live purposefully, and not be distracted.

1. It's important to know God's plan for your life.
2. Get rid of distractions. Cast aside anything that does not help accomplish that plan.

Focus on what God desires for your life and family, and say "No" to other things that are detours.

## 5. Share Christ with someone

(Sharing...not hoarding)

It's hard to keep good news to yourself. Like the birth of a baby. Or the wedding of your daughter. Or an increase in salary at work. Good news is meant to be shared.

The Gospel literally means "Good News." It is the good news

that Jesus Christ has paid for our sins, God has forgiven us, and has adopted us into his family.

Unlike other good news, Christians have a tendency to keep it to themselves - they hoard it instead of sharing it.

**Mark 16:15** - He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. NIV

**Matt 28:19** - <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. NIV

**Acts 1:8** - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." NLT

God wants this good news shared, not hoarded. He's not particular about how you do it - sharing spontaneously at the store, or meeting weekly with a friend who wants to know more. He just wants it shared.

Make 2016 the year that you share the good news of Christ with someone. Don't hoard it. Share it.