

**Russell Kelfer**

# **How Would You Like to Start Over?**

**# 1201-A**

**Series: Starting Over**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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# How Would You Like to Start Over?

*To everything there is a season,  
A time for every purpose under heaven:  
(Ecclesiastes 3:1 NKJV)*

## HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO START OVER?

How would you like to start over  
Free from all guilt and all sin?  
How would you like to begin to live  
Your life all over again?

How would you like to be able to say  
That bondage that's swallowing me  
Beginning today will be under control  
Beginning today, I'll be free!

How would you like to start over?  
Not bound by the sins of the past  
Beginning to grow in His Likeness  
Ready to blossom at last!

You say, "Well, I'd like to do that!"  
"I'd like God my joy to restore"  
Then open your eyes to what time it is...  
That's what a new year is for!

That little poem captures the essence of how most of us feel about life...and it serves as a reminder that January is the touchstone of that hope that lies deep within us...the hope that somehow it is *possible* to start life all over again.

Whether you like it or not, every twelve months it happens. All over the world, grown men and women put on ridiculous looking party hats, and then proceed to behave as though the hats were their natural attire. A little charade takes place, and an old, old man with a long gray beard (a man about my age and in my condition) makes a dramatic exit, never to be seen again. Then a tiny baby in diapers makes an equally dramatic entrance, symbolizing the end of one era and the beginning of another.

The entrance of the little child represents the desire of man

## How Would You Like to Start Over?

to begin again...to start over. The exit of the elderly gentleman symbolizes the putting away of the past, with its bad memories and its unfulfilled dreams. We call it “New Year’s Eve.”

For many, the celebration goes on into the night, and finally at twelve o’clock sharp, bells ring, confetti flies, and people embrace; but often the partying goes on, and well-meaning men and women make resolutions all of which say in one form or another, “*somehow, this year will be different!*”

For many, the next morning comes late, but seems early, and those new dreams and aspirations become instantly clouded by bad headaches, fuzzy memories, and the death of that great desire to change or be changed.

Even those with more determination, who wake up January 2 with their resolutions still intact, so often find that as the pages of the calendar melt into February, those noble objectives have all too often already passed away.

The problem is often not one of intentions, either. Those resolutions are not always made flippantly. But nevertheless, man’s desire to change seems to evaporate in an ocean of unfulfilled promises, until another year passes, and it’s New Year’s Eve again.

The problem is universal: the problem of wanting to make a fresh start. But man seems to have some natural innate barriers when it comes to starting over.

1- We seem to be plagued with the problem of guilt that binds us to ourselves.

2- We are plagued by the problem of bitterness that binds us to the past.

3- We are plagued by the problem of weakness that binds us to our habits.

And yet in desperation, well-meaning men and women once a year set their sights on starting *all over again*.

While that cry to start all over that echoes so from the corridors of human history is somewhat pathetic, it is at the same time haunting, because it leaves its imprint on the human spirit, as though there were some divine promise waiting to be fulfilled. (And indeed there is!) It’s no wonder we often cry: “If only I could start over!” Have you ever felt that way? If so, I have good news, Beloved, from the one whose very name is Good News, Jesus Christ. That

## How Would You Like to Start Over?

good news is this: *God intends for us to start over.* And every time those bells peal, and we unwrap that new calendar with its fresh blank pages signifying the start of a brand new year, you and I have the perfect opportunity to see our lives begin again.

So I ask you today, “How would *you* like to start over?”

In case you haven’t noticed or haven’t been around that long, about every 2 or 3 years at the beginning of the year, we stop to address this issue in one form or another. I realize for many, it may seem redundant. For me it isn’t; because I have a need personally, and I see a need generally in the body of Christ, for a time of spiritual inventory and a time of spiritual awakening. I fear some of us have been lulled into thinking through the year that because we have experienced some measure of spiritual blessing or growth (either as individuals or as a church), that we have arrived. I also fear that others of us have slipped into an apathetic stupor that says “I give up; I just can’t find the level of victory I know I’m supposed to have.” Both thoughts are lies straight from the enemy’s camp!

So I believe at regular intervals, Christians ought to take inventory just the way a businessman does. When you take inventory, you look to see what’s missing and attempt to find out why, then you clear the books and make the necessary corrections and start over. You just can’t run a successful business without taking inventory, and you can’t run a successful Christian life without it either.

There’s nothing mystical about New Year’s, but as we shall see, it is an ideal time for taking inventory, both in business and in the business of the Spirit.

Our title for this lesson and for this series is: “How Would You Like to Start Over?”

This will not be a one-time pep talk, but rather an eight-lesson journey through the warehouse of our hearts for the purpose of taking serious, life-changing inventory. In searching for some cornerstones to put down to make this the most spiritually rewarding year we’ve known, I would like us during these next few weeks to help each other take inventory. Here are some of things we’ll be counting:

1- We’ll take a look into the storehouse of false guilt. It ought to be empty. It’s kept right next to true guilt, or conviction, and it’s easy with a little satanic assistance to confuse the two. Let me ask

## How Would You Like to Start Over?

how many of us think we really know the difference between the two? It makes all the difference in our spiritual walk.

2- Then we'll take inventory of our personal supply of bitterness. We'll see who it is we're really blaming for life's unfortunate turns, and attempt to move that bitterness into those bins reserved for "joy".

3- We'll also have to be sure that there is a number "0" by the category marked unresolved conflicts. If not, it must be emptied immediately, if a new year is to bring new victories. It may mean building some bridges where walls now stand, but if this column isn't blank, Beloved, the books won't balance.

4- Then, of course, that confusing inventory item marked besetting sins must be counted. They are always buried beneath something else; so we need to dig them up and dispose of them before they ruin all they touch.

5- Fifthly, we'll take inventory of our basic disciplines, and have a chance to make some hard commitments to God along with a backup system of checks and balances to keep us from waiting a whole year to find out that we've lost count again. Once-a-year inventories are not enough where this item is concerned.

6- Sixthly, we're going to inventory our emotions. They seem to get moved around occasionally to the wrong place in our operating system, and instead of responding to the commands of the Word, they take over and become the commander-in-chiefs of our spiritual pilgrimage. We won't seek to throw them away, but rather to quietly move them to the place on the shelf where they belong.

7- And finally, we must take a serious look at that item in our storeroom marked first love, with an eye to recapturing that totality of commitment that makes crucifixion a joy, and compromise an enemy we would not court on any terms. Some of us may have some inventory adjustments to make, but what an appropriate time it is to make them!

Our objective is very simply to recapture the intensity of first century discipleship by stopping at the start of a new year and weeding out the garden so the harvest can multiply. Jesus said it very clearly in Mark, chapter four. He said some of us keep on "hearing" the Word, but "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things entering in, choke that word, and it becomes unfruitful." In other words,

## How Would You Like to Start Over?

without our even realizing it, we become less effective in our walk. Let's inventory the garden together, pull out the weeds that hinder, and allow God to make this the most exciting year ever in our Christian lives.

### I- THE CLOCK, THE CALENDAR, AND THE CREATOR

We will begin at the beginning by searching the mind of God to find out just why He bracketed, in the midst of that perfectness of eternity, segments of space divided into equal parts and called them "time". We need to look at the clock, the calendar, and the Creator, and see the relationship that exists between them. This just may help us understand why "starting over" is so necessary.

In Genesis, chapter one, our first recorded manuscript of the works of God, we read this:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.

God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

(Genesis 1:1-5 NKJV)

God's creative work, in essence, began with the creation of time. He created light, and the first task He assigned to that light was to separate segments of time He had named "night" and "day".

In John, chapter one, we come to see quite plainly that this division of time into those segments was a portrait of what the world would experience because of sin, which represented darkness, and what would happen when Jesus, who represented light, would come into the world to extinguish the darkness.

So God began by creating time to foreshadow the coming of

...the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

(John 1:9 NKJV)

But God had additional reasons for creating time, and He further defined those reasons in verse 14:

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for

## How Would You Like to Start Over?

signs and seasons, and for days and years;”

(Genesis 1:14 NKJV)

God etched a brilliant portrait of His Son in the heavens and called it the sun. Then He fashioned a magnificent mirror to simply reflect the glory of the Son and He called *it* the moon. It was to be a perfect picture of the Church, having no light in and of itself, but rather reflecting the light which comes from the sun. So the sun and moon, representing the Savior and the Church, were painted by a sovereign God on the canvas of this newly-created backdrop called time, and our wonderfully practical God from the outset defined the reasons for their existence in verse 14. They were four-fold.

First of all, they were for signs. They were road signs to prepare man for the great conflict that would ensue (between light and darkness) and of the coming of the SON of righteousness, Jesus Christ.

Secondly, they were for seasons. They were to highlight the changes in God’s universe as He, through the progression of the climates, created a picture of life as it passes through its logical stages, giving us the perfect balance between His faithfulness and His sovereignty.

For example, we knew in October that winter would follow fall, not because we were masterminds in meteorology or physics or geology, but because God said that’s the way it would always be, and because it has never failed to happen. Winter has always followed fall. Always has; always will, until Jesus comes again. But we cannot control or even predict what God will do within the scope of that season. Even the most noted prognosticator of weather may forecast the mildest winter in decades. He may have all the data, all the computers, all the knowledge; but he isn’t God. Should God determine to release an icy blast upon planet earth to simply once more demonstrate the severity of man’s existence apart from the warmth of His Son, Jesus Christ, He will do so. The constancy of the seasons is a sign of God’s faithfulness, but the unknowns of each day within that season are just as well a reminder of His Sovereign control. He is Faithful; but He rules.

Thirdly, the lights in the heavens were for days. They were a plan to dramatically demonstrate that God would limit life to practical 24-hour segments, which He knew was all man could handle. In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus said that God gave us 24-hour



## How Would You Like to Start Over?

days for that reason. The Living Bible paraphrases it:

So don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time.

(Matthew 6:34 TLB)

God designed days to give us a workable time frame of trust. But that's not all! In Lamentations 3:22, you remember, God gave us another reason for 24-hour days. It was to give us bite-sized chunks of faith to experience God's mercy. It says this:

Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed,  
Because His compassions fail not.

They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

(Lamentations 3:22,23 NKJV)

God had once again, foreknowing the limits of our ability to receive His forgiveness and in His Spirit begin again, divided life into days, and promised to airmail a fresh batch of mercy to every child of His at the start of each of those days. So every time we see the sun come up, we know that the SON is waiting within us, with all of the grace and all of the mercy we will need for that day. God arranged time for signs, for seasons, and for days.

Then lastly, God arranged time and ordained the sun and the moon as the sentinels of that time to regiment for man a unique commodity known as Years. He so arranged the days to fit them into larger units known as Months, then knit those Months together into the fabric of a pattern that would serve a variety of purposes in His scheme of things, and called it a "Year".

One of its basic functions was to become a frame of reference in the larger scope of time. In Isaiah 6:1 for instance, we read, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord...". That gives us a specific place in the overall scope of the broad expanse of time to position that event. Perhaps an even more valuable reason for years, however, is that it gives man a regular time-frame in which to re-evaluate his walk with God, and re-confirm his relationship to God.

For that reason, God ordained yearly feasts, and other yearly events, that forced His children to take inventory, to worship, and to commit themselves and their families to a fresh walk with God. The Scriptures abound with the principle of keeping that day yearly.

To establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar,

(Esther 9:21 NKJV)

## How Would You Like to Start Over?

This man [Elkanah] went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh.

(I Samuel 1:3a NKJV)

His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

(Luke 2:41 NKJV)

...the high priest went alone once a year... (Hebrews 9:7 NKJV)

You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed [each year] in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty);

(Exodus 23:15 NKJV)

God ordained the division of years to create stopping places for man in his pilgrimage through time on the way to eternity by which in recognizing the passing of a year, he would be forced to take a look at what his God had done, and to regularly celebrate God's great victories.

As the New Covenant was unveiled, the significance became even more practical. The believers met on the *first* day of every week to worship at regularly-scheduled intervals. The use of days, weeks, months, and years now ceased to be legalistic yardsticks of spirituality, and became God-divided time frames which spiritually alive Christians could use as measuring sticks, stopping places, times to take inventory. Now the division of time became a tool for us to use for the same basic reasons God created that division in Genesis 1:14. For signs, for seasons, for days, and for years!

Making the spiritual switch, then, the first day of each week, the first day of each month, and the first month of each year serve as signposts for each of us that say, "Stop! God is giving us a new chance to begin again." Thus, the Christian life is not one long expanse of uninterrupted time from conversion to glory. It is a series of blocks of those wonderful units called "time", each of which gives us a fresh place to start.

So the clock, the calendar, and the Creator all say, "Happy New Year" to every born-again child of God. They say, "How would you like to start over?" Here's a new day with new hope; a new week with new opportunities, a new month with new challenges; a new year with all new pages to fill with Jesus. When Christians say "Happy New Year", it's not an empty phrase to be ignored; it's a full, rich promise to be acquired.

I've thought a lot about the Christian life lately, and about the

## How Would You Like to Start Over?

pitfalls we seem to fall into just about the time we think we've turned the corner. Three things seem to have been riveted in my mind. The first is *the longer we live, the more we ought to realize how little we know*. That's right, spiritually speaking, the older we get, the more mature we become, the more awed we ought to become at how little we really know, and how much more there is to the Christian life than what we have yet experienced. Evangelical Christianity, with all of its "steps to growth" and rules for discipleship, has fostered the lie that by doing "this" or "that" we are in the process of arriving. The truth is that the more we learn of God, the more we learn of how inexhaustible is His supply of Grace; the more boundless His Mercy; the more needful we are. If that thought has not touched your heart lately, maybe it's time to start over.

The second thought God has reminded me of these past few months is how clearly *success breeds apostasy*. As we sit in beautiful buildings filled with people, brimming with programs, meeting budgets, viewing performances, we can easily forget what it's all about. Beloved, *that's not success*. But because we have been led by the world to believe it is, we tend to relax and begin enjoying the Christian environment as though we had achieved some measure of stature in the kingdom. And the minute we do, we lose that sense of humility, that sense of awe, that sense of utter depravity and dependence that lets God be God. When we lose that, we've lost it all. You say, well, what is the church all about? *Beloved, the church is all about Jesus*. Not activities, or decorations, or programs. It is people bowing before a Cross, trading our lives for His. It is people taking up a cross daily, living to meet the needs of others quietly, unselfishly, without fanfare or applause. Success will be that "well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord." It is people becoming so "Christ-conscious" that they cease being "self-conscious", which means reducing to nothing the value of all of those outward manifestations we have come to glory in. It may be time for some of us to start over. We're not a success story. Neither is the church. There is only one success story. And there will ever be only one. His name is Jesus.

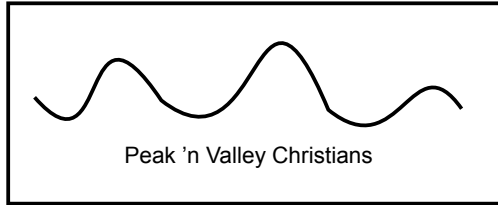
The final conclusion I've come to is that we as Christians let our lives fall into patterns and assume that *because the patterns repeat themselves, they must be God's will for our lives, when what the patterns ought to do is serve as a measuring stick to show us we need to start over*. Like the image on a scope that tells about the condition of a car, or a piece of electronic equipment, or the

## How Would You Like to Start Over?

condition of the human heart, the patterns that emerge tell us a lot.

Let's just glance at a few of those patterns. You may even see someone *you know*.

First, there's the Peak 'n Valley Christian. He will set goals for the New Year, begin to live a disciplined, obedient Christian life, and see fruitfulness he never dreamed of. His pattern looks like this:



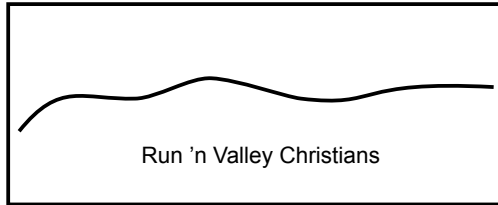
He buys notebooks, puts verses on 3x5 cards, makes today sheets, yesterday sheets, and someday sheets. He schedules every second of his life for the month of January. He's "on fire for God". Then along about February, a few of the disciplines begin to slide. The quiet times go to every other day, and the time in the Word becomes less frequent; besetting sins begin to set in again. He even loses his coveted notebook. Satan deceives him into thinking that disciplines are legalistic anyway, so why not just wait until he "feels" more like being faithful. Down, down, down, he goes. Little by little, he slips back into the old molds. Then suddenly, a crisis looms on the horizon, or a stab of conviction awakens him. He recommits himself to being faithful, sets new goals, and starts again.

Unfortunately, the peak 'n valley syndrome is all too common among twentieth-century Christians. We are not a persecuted lot, so we don't seem to have the constant pressures that persecution brings to demand of us our best. So we compare ourselves with others who are less faithful, and wait for the next surge of conviction or time of testing to spur us on to new spiritual heights. The trouble is *they're not new heights*. We keep traveling the same roads, making the same mistakes, riding the peaks and the valleys as though God intended the Christian life to be a roller coaster ride rather than a steady climb to victory.

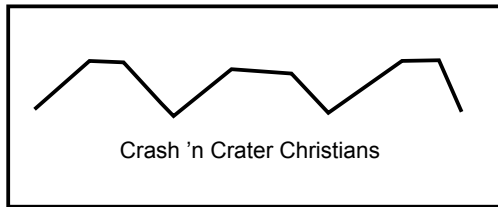
The second syndrome is a little more productive. It's indicative of the Run 'n Rest Christians. Run 'n Rest Christians live life in

## How Would You Like to Start Over?

spurts. They think the Christian walk is a relay race rather than a marathon. They run a while and rest awhile. Any new spiritual victory is followed by a plateau experience that tries to live in the afterglow of that victory. Plateau Christians usually continue to grow, but waste years of valuable fruitfulness while they are waiting for the next big push.



Next there are Crash 'n Crater Christians. As you can see, the image they form on the scope is quite similar to the peak 'n valley group, but the drops are much more drastic because, instead of the absence of disciplines leading to gradual apostasy, these guys ride their way through the Christian experience on the waves of their emotions. A happy church service, a neat experience witnessing, an answered prayer, and they are higher than a kite, spiritually. Every other word is "Praise the Lord".

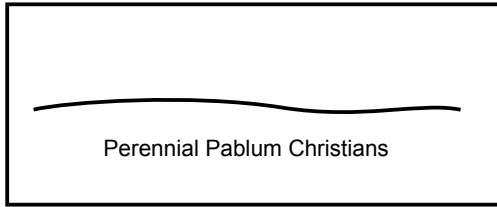


Then along comes a hurt, or persecution, or a bad day at the office, or some kind of rejection, and they crash and burn. Their spiritual life had been predicated on an emotional experience, so when their emotions fell, so did they. We'll get to the root of that problem later in this study. Suffice it to say, crash 'n crater Christians lack consistency, and continuous growth seldom occurs.

A fourth kind of image that appears on our scope is indicative of Perennial Pablum Christians. These are the guys who come to Christ, and once securely in the door of the Kingdom, they resort to their old life style, compromise basic Biblical principles, and pretend it really doesn't matter. Real growth never takes place. Their goal was to get in the door and fall on the floor and feel secure. Needless to say, they never develop a taste for strong meat.

## How Would You Like to Start Over?

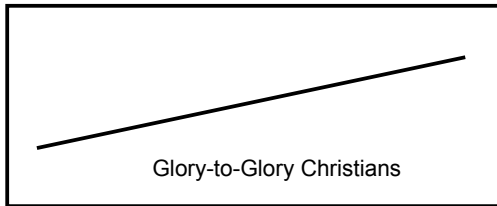
Pablum is all they can handle.



The last kind of Christian we'll diagram for you is what I believe God wants us to be. These are Glory-to-Glory Christians, who, using II Corinthians 3:18 as their life message, follow its pattern to steady, consistent growth. That passage says this in the Amplified Bible,

And all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transfigured into His *very own* image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit.

(II Corinthians 3:18 AMP)



That's what God wants: men and women who spend such quality time alone with God, and such continuous time saturating their lives with His word, that their very faces are aglow with His glory. Daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, they are slowly being transformed into *His likeness*, until little by little they become more and more like Him, because more and more of Him is flooding their very souls in ever-increasing splendor, from one degree of glory to another.

Beloved, I don't know if you're a peak 'n valley Christian, a run 'n rest Christian, a crash 'n crater Christian, a perennial pablum Christian, or a glory-to-glory Christian. But I do know what God wants you to be. I know what God wants me to be. He *wants* us to be Glory-to-Glory Christians. I also know that there is no better time than right now to call life to a brief stop, close the shop for a few hours, and take inventory.

Our God has lovingly divided life into segments called time. He

## How Would You Like to Start Over?

established the sun and the moon as signposts, as reminders, and formed the seasons, the days and the years as gentle brackets that call life to a brief halt and allow us to start over. It's that time again!

Some of us need to make fresh commitments in the weeks to come concerning the basics we've let slide. Some of us need to humble ourselves before God and admit we've become calloused and self-satisfied with our spiritual lives, living as though we had arrived, when in effect we've just arrived at a plateau and stopped growing.

Some of us need to get a day alone with God and just worship Him for who He is. We've been so busy talking about our faithfulness we've forgotten it's how faithful *He* is that matters.

Some of us will need to make some things right with some other people and with God so we can move the boulders that have been blocking our paths and get on with the race.

Some of us may need to start giving our lives away to meet the needs of others instead of spending all our time in self-pity or self analysis at the expense of ministering.

Some of us will certainly need to deal with some habits that have taken over our lives. Some of us need to go on a diet today and stay there. Some of us need to make some other changes. Not resolutions. Those are man's ways of saying, "I can do it". I'm not talking about resolutions, I'm talking about commitment. Commitment is man's way of making a decision to obey, knowing that the power to obey comes from God.

Some of us have lost our evangelistic burden. We can live and work right alongside unbelievers without so much as a twinge of responsibility to either pray or witness.

Some of us have lost our sense of awe in the presence of God. He's come to be our "buddy" instead of the divine Creator and sustainer of life and breath.

Some of us have lost our first love. We've gradually slipped into the routines of Christianity and allowed the sheer repetition of it all to rob us of the freshness and excitement that once was ours. We've bought the lie that love is *supposed to grow cold*. Some of us have made promises to God we haven't kept, or received things from God that we've never said "thank you" for. So we've been unfaithful or ungrateful, and not even been sensitive enough to realize it.

I don't know about you, but I know about me. It's time to start

## How Would You Like to Start Over?

over. I'm going to start a list of the things in my life that God and I have got to do something about and thus begin the process, and then make another list of things I have to thank Him for, but am always forgetting to do. And I'm going to write on my calendar, "It's time to start over". I'm not necessarily talking about an emotional experience. I'm talking about a series of decisions that will put God back on the throne of my life, so I can continue to grow in "ever increasing splendor from one degree of glory to another."

I'm excited! God has given me another chance. He has done the same for you. He has asked us if we would like to start over. So we'll close this lesson just the way we started it, by asking the question:

### HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO START OVER? (Stanza 2)

How would you like to start over,  
Beginning your whole life anew?  
How would you like to know that God  
Had a fresh, clean slate for you?

How would you like to be certain  
That even this very day  
God has a brand new life prepared,  
The old one passed away?

He does! What God has planned for us  
Is growth so real we'll know  
That we're becoming *just like Him*  
As into His likeness we grow.

And all He wants is all of us  
With nothing in between  
And He'll give us a New Year  
Like we have never seen.

Happy New Year, Christian!  
Today is the day to begin  
For by God's Grace even today  
We can start all over again.

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