

Getting Ready for 2025

1. Warm up: What's your favorite way to celebrate the New Year?
2. On Sunday we studied some of Jesus' final words to his disciples, as recorded in John chapter 16. There Jesus begins by warning his disciples that he's about to leave them to return to the Father and that once he's gone they will experience a lot of persecution and challenges. He sums it up by saying, "In this world you will experience tribulation." John 16:33. Jesus says he's telling them all this so that when it happens they won't think life is spinning out of control and stumble in their faith. In fact, Jesus says, "It is to your advantage that I go away." In this we find the first of three key lessons Jesus teaches in this passage: Most every season of life will be a complex mixture of both celebration and struggle. **Trouble is a normal part of our life, and it can serve a powerful positive purpose, i.e., the growth and development of our eternal soul.**
 - a. What's something you're celebrating as you move into the New Year?
 - b. What's something that's really challenging you as you move into the New Year?
 - c. Psychologist Jonathon Haidt challenges us to do a thought experiment. Imagine you're the parent of a newborn child. An angel gives you a script of your child's life that includes many points of hardship and struggle, yet each hardship will offer your child a chance to learn something really important. If the angel gave you the power to alter the script to remove some or all of the hardships from your child's life, would you? Why or why not?
 - d. Think back to a great hardship in your life or the life of a loved one. What's something important that you (or they) learned from that hardship? If you could turn back time, would you eliminate that hardship from your life or theirs?
3. In John 16, Jesus tells the disciples it's to their advantage that he leave them, so they are no longer constantly dependent on him and instead will be forced to look inside themselves to discover that the same power that was in him is now in them – to the point that they will be able to do the same things Jesus did and even greater things. John 16:7 and 14:12. Hardships in our life are meant to teach us the same thing. Our natural tendency is to look up and ask God to swoop down and solve all our problems for us, but God doesn't usually do that. Like a loving parent, God usually holds back so that we will be forced to look inside ourselves and discover that God's power is actually within us – the power of the Holy Spirit. From this we drew a second key lesson: **We have a tendency to look up too much when we should be looking within.** Instead of always looking for God to helicopter in and solve our problems, instead we should look inward to discover the power of God within us.
 - a. What do you think Jesus meant in John 14:12 when he said, "The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact will do greater works than these, because I am going to my Father."

- b. What do you think Jesus meant in Luke 16:21 when he said, “The kingdom of God is within you.”
 - c. Tell us about a time in your life when you had to look inward and draw on the power of God within you and, in the process, discovered that you had far more power than you ever thought.
4. At the end of our Gospel passage, Jesus sums it all up by saying, “In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” John 16:33. I John 5:4 states the same promise in slightly different words: “Whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.” The promise of these verses is the third and final key point: **We can overcome any earthly challenge we ever face through the power of Christ within us.** Overcoming our challenges can happen in one of two ways. Sometimes it means that the obstacle we’re facing can be completely removed – blown away by what we do through the power of God within us. Other times it means that the obstacle we’re facing remains, but we’re able to transcend it (and triumph through it) through the power of God within us. Tell us about a time when you (or someone you know) found the strength to transcend a terrible challenge.

Closing Exhortation: With whatever challenges you’re facing as you move into 2025, don’t look for someone or something to swoop in from the outside and make it all better. Instead, look within! Practice tapping into the power of Christ within you! And you will, one way or another, overcome. Because the promise of Jesus is that there’s more power in you than you have ever begun to imagine!

John 16:1-33, selected verses

1 I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling.
2 They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. 4 I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.

I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. 5 But now I am going to the One who sent me.
6 Because I have said these things, sorrow has filled your hearts.
7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send the Helper to you.

33 In this world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

16 A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me.