



President Walton's January 2021 Message

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Remembering the Past, but Looking Forward



It's a brand New Year! Most people are eagerly anticipating a better year ahead. However, we know that it is still filled with many unknowns. What does 2021 hold for our Nation? For God's Church? For you? While we may not be able to predict what the future holds, we can be confident of the One who holds our future. Our Lord Jesus is totally aware of everything His people need, and He has promised He will never leave us nor forsake us. He has promised if we ask, He will not only hear us, but respond according to His grace. While 2020 presented a challenge for many, it was no surprise to the Lord of

Heaven and Earth! Even when things seem out of control, we find peace in knowing that we have a God of order, who has our best interest in mind—always!

As we look to this New Year, I am reminded of one of my favorite comforting passages of Scripture, which comes from Jeremiah 29:11-13. It is likely familiar to many of you. ***“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.”***

I have often shared this passage with congregations going through a call process. During a time of vacancy, a congregation can often feel abandoned. What we sometimes fail to comprehend is God has us right where He wants us to be. It's not as if He says, “Oh no, what am I going to do about this?” He already knows. Unlike me, He plans ahead! However, often in this process, God is using the surrounding circumstances to prepare us for the future—a future filled with hope.

In the movie, “A Few Good Men,” one of the most iconic lines comes from the character played by Jack Nicholson. When he is on the witness stand and asked for the truth, He declares, ***“You can't handle the truth.”*** I believe that there are times in our lives when God, in His grace and love, takes what I might call “precautionary steps” to get us ready to receive His plans—whether for us as individuals or for a congregation or ministry. I call it the “baking process.”

Years ago, when my children still lived at home, we used to bake a lot in the weeks leading up to Christmas. We always baked way too many Christmas cookies, and then, of course, had to eat them. There are four steps I remember

following. First, we had to gather all the right ingredients, and often they had to be mixed in a specific order. Secondly, we had to prepare the cookie sheets and preheat the oven. Thirdly, we had to scoop the dough onto the cookie sheets, spacing it out correctly. Finally, after we placed them in the oven we had to wait for them to bake at the correct temperature for the correct time. We would anxiously wait as the delicious aroma filled the house. Even then we were not done. Once the cookies were removed from the oven they had to cool before we began to eat them. I cannot tell you how many times I burned the roof of my mouth because I couldn't wait for the cookies to be ready! Patience is a virtue which I am yet to acquire. Apparently I am not alone in this!



God places us in the “baking process” for many reasons. Often, for a congregation or ministry, it is because He has things to teach us in order to make us ready. Time spent in prayer and the Word is far more productive than trying to circumvent what God is trying to accomplish among us. If we fail to pay attention we end up paying the price for our impatience. We may not burn the roof of our mouth, but God’s Word is filled with examples of what happens when His people didn’t listen and acted on their own. It is not as if God is punishing us, rather we are punishing ourselves by trying to out-guess God. He has a plan for you. He has plans for your church. He even has a plan for our nation and those who do not yet know Him as Lord! Blessings flow when we wait on the Lord, trusting His promises. In fact, Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 40:28-31: ***“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”***



Perhaps someday we will look back on the year 2020 with gratefulness for all the good God did, even in the midst of the darkness of a pandemic. Good things have come from this strange new world. Many churches have embraced technology in ways never before imagined—and, in many cases, have reached people who would have never stepped foot in a church building. This past year has taught us to not

simply go to church, but rather to be the church in the world, right where God places us. We have learned that we can be present in different ways. Some have rediscovered the power of letter writing. Families have spent more time together. Many have learned the value of relationships in new ways, and when we are fully able to come back together as God’s family, few of us will take it for granted. These, and so many other things, were the good things coming out of 2020. There will come a time hopefully, when we look back on this past year with a nostalgic reminiscence of how God got our attention and began preparing us for a new time in the life of His Church.

I learned the hard way if you want to move forward, but keep looking back over your shoulder, you risk running into a wall. In many ways 2020 has been a hard year. It is now behind us, and we look with eagerness and trust to the God who has planned out our 2021 in His love. Honestly, I thought I knew what 2021 would hold for me and my family. Now I know I simply have to trust Him to guide me day by day. And so do you! Trust Him as He leads us forward, and may it be with our eyes fixed on Jesus, because we can be confident that our **future** is fixed on Jesus!

All of God’s blessings in this New Year!

Peace,
Greg

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