

LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK: FINDING FOCUS FOR THE NEW YEAR

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Preparation: You will need to set aside a couple of hours for this exercise, and ideally, separate it out into two or three sessions of solitude. If you have journals, calendars or organizers for the previous year, gather them together. You will also need a notebook or paper, your Bible and a pen.

Session One: Settle your mind and heart by doing some deep breathing and focusing on the Lord. Then read the following verses aloud, breathing in and out slowly as you do.

Hebrews 13:20-21

Pause and reflect on the promise in this prayer. Turn it into a request that you offer back to God for this time. Open your heart to him and ask the Spirit to speak and guide.

Read the following quote from Parker Palmer's *Let Your Life Speak*:

Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am. I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I must live—but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life. (p. 4-5)

What does this say to you? What is the central truth in this quote that will help you as you complete this exercise?

You will be completing four lists for this exercise, although there will be some crossover between them. These are: Significant events, meaningful experiences, painful struggles, important changes.

For this session, try to list 3-5 significant events and 3-5 meaningful experiences from the past year. You may want to look back over your calendar, journal or organizer. Jot these down on paper or in a journal and spend a few minutes re-living them.

End with a time of thanksgiving over these things. If you are doing all of this at once, take a break—stretch, make a cup of coffee etc. before starting the next session.

Session two: If you are doing this on a different day from session one, repeat the first part of that session, touching in with God's heart for this time. Glance back at your list of significant events and meaningful experiences, adding anything that has come to you since then.

Now make a list of 3-5 painful struggles and 3-5 important changes.

When you have finished, take a minute to give thanks, even for the painful struggles, acknowledging God's presence in all things.

Take a fresh sheet of paper, and as you read through your four lists, ask God to speak to you through the life you lived last year. The question forming in your heart first is: Lord, *what do you want me to know?* Begin to jot down words or phrases that come to mind.

If you are doing this exercise in one setting, take a break once again before beginning the final session.

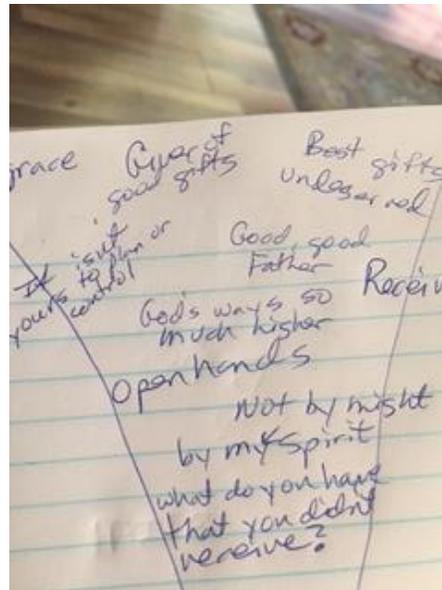
Session three: If you are doing this on a different day, take some time to settle your heart, reviewing the Scripture and quote from the beginning.

Look back over your four lists, reviewing the words and phrases that came to you in your last session.

Now look over them again, asking, *Lord, How do you want me to grow?*

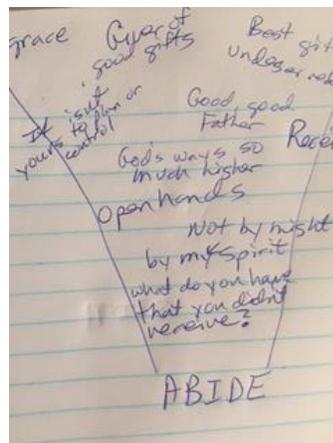
Jot down simple words or phrases as you listen.

Next, take a fresh sheet of paper and draw a funnel on it. At the top of the funnel, jot down the words and/or phrases you have received in prayer. Here is a sample:



Now, take some time to ponder this funnel, praying through and asking God what your focus for the coming year might be, based on what your life has taught you from the previous year. Write this in journal form, using as many words as you want.

Read back over what you wrote, and condense it into one to three words, or a phrase. Write that at the bottom of the funnel.



Sit quietly with your word or phrase, asking the Spirit to enlighten your heart. Process what this might mean, and what it will look like. Here are some things you might do now or in the next several days:

- Look for passages that address this and prepare to do an in-depth study of them
- Memorize a verse or verses that address this.
- Establish reminders on your phone or around the house to focus on this
- Journal about how your life might change as you embrace this focus
- Share with a friend or small group, asking for prayer and accountability

While you may not focus on this the entire year, you will sense when God has done what he desired in your heart and life. Until then, try to find a way to focus on this at least once a day.