NEW YEAR, FRESH START

God is a God of new beginnings. Not just for others. For you.



Berni Dymet

NEW YEAR, FRESH START

by Berni Dymet

LIFE APPLICATION BOOKLET

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CHAPTER 1

New Strength

Sometimes the beginning of a new year is exciting, as we look forward with a sense of anticipation. Sometimes though, it can also be daunting – especially if last year was a tough one. We can feel weak, tired and even exhausted.

The daily grind has a way of grinding us down, doesn't it? That's not because we are losers. It's something, in fact, that so many people are going through right now. And if you're feeling a little less than enthusiastic about the year ahead, then you certainly are not the only person on the planet that feels that way. Even the strongest among us sometimes feel tired and weak.

How easy it can be to start the year off feeling drained – not ready to face the challenges that lie ahead? Along with the stresses and strains that life brings, last year just might not have been what you wanted it to be. Maybe you had some hurts, failures or losses that you weren't anticipating and you're still struggling to get over them.

And that's why we're kicking this year off with a booklet called 'New Year, Fresh Start', because God is a God of new beginnings. And one of the things He wants to do for you is to renew your strength by His Spirit and through His Word.

'Renew' is a word that I love. It's an amazing word that has two parts: 're' and 'new'. I'm sure we all know what 'new' means. Something that's new is, well ... brand new. A new experience. A new mercy. A new love. A new hope. A new life.

Newness is fresh, it's exciting and it's all about a new start.

But that 're' part of 'renew' is about doing something new – again. Most of the time in the English language when we start a word with the prefix 're', it means 'again'. Repeat, review, reactivate, reaffirm... and on and on it goes with all of those 're' words.

Let's think about the word 'renew' for a moment. It means to do that new thing again; to enter into newness a second time, a third time, a fourth time ... a thousandth time. That's the understanding with which I'm asking you to come to this amazing passage of Scripture:

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God? 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. Listen to me in silence, O coastlands; let the peoples renew their strength; let them approach, then let them speak.' (Isaiah 40:27-41:1)

What exactly is God saying here to His people through the Prophet Isaiah? Well, this message which is found in the Old Testament, was first delivered at a time when God's people were weak and exhausted. Almost seventy years earlier, the Babylonians – acting as an instrument of God's judgement – had come and destroyed Jerusalem and taken God's chosen people into captivity as slaves. That's the time when this Scripture was written, they had been living in slavery for almost three generations – as long as most of them could remember; a lifetime and then some.

They were tired. They'd had it. And they had lost sight of their God. So He speaks to them through Isaiah to remind them that it's God who renews our strength, as we wait expectantly on Him, even in the worst times of our lives. Especially at those times.

I believe that if you're tired today, if you've had it, if you've lost sight of your God, that He is also speaking to you today through His Word, to remind you of the very same thing.

Don't you get it? He's saying: "I am the God who created the whole universe. I haven't run out of steam, I'm not tired or exhausted. In fact, I have so much power – such a deep, inexhaustible store of strength – that I am going to give power to the faint and strength to the powerless ... to you!"

Are you feeling faint and powerless?

Well, by His Spirit and His Word today, God is giving power and strength to you. And just in case you're feeling inadequate – or guilty about feeling the way you do at the moment – remember that even youths will faint and be weary. Even the young and the fit will fall exhausted. It happens to all of us. The daily grind grinds us down and it drains us of our strength. It's just the reality of life on this earth, right?

But it doesn't have to be that way for you, because here comes the turning point in what God's saying to us today. Here comes that amazing little word – 'renew'.

Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

When we go to God and wait expectantly for Him to act; for Him to renew our strength – that is exactly what He will do.

The sense of the original Hebrew word used there for 'wait' does mean to wait expectantly. Not to grumble, lose faith, or flap around in despair but actually to expect God to act! It's a picture of going to God in prayer, of putting your trust in Him, and of waiting at His feet with the sort of expectation for good that a child has of its father.

When you and I wait expectantly on God, with a sense of anticipation, *He will renew our strength with His strength*, but not in a way that you and I might try to do it. You see, when we try to do it in our own strength, we always end up taking a break, having a rest or simply running out of steam (just as the strong youth does).

But God's strength takes us to heights that we never thought possible – 'they shall mount up with wings like eagle's' – and His is a strength that never, ever, ever runs out – 'they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not grow faint.'

Time and time again, I run out of my own strength ... even though it's in my very nature to be a strong person. It used to frustrate me that I'd hit a wall, that I of all people, would run out of steam. How could I – a naturally strong guy – be left feeling drained and listless and ineffectual?

When you feel that way, you end up heading down a spiral – it's easy then to enter into depression.

Look, I'm no shrink or physician. I have no expertise in dealing with clinical depression ... except that I know that I've been there a couple of times in my life. And what I know is that when I took this passage of Scripture to heart, I mean really to heart, I started to experience a strength that I just can't put into words. Seriously. God has taken me higher than I ever imagined in my walk with Him – and that's despite the many low points I've experienced. Each morning, as I take the time to speak with Him, to hear from Him, to open His Word, to wait on Him, I end up receiving strength from Him that defies description.

It's a strength that comes from His peace; from His joy. After all, His Word says that the joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). It's a strength that comes from experiencing His Presence – from waiting silently with my heart and my mind, my whole being focussed on Him.

And I can tell you, it's absolutely true that those who wait quietly, believing in Him to act, WILL have their strength renewed. They WILL rise up on wings like eagles. They WILL run and not grow weary; walk and not faint.

God wants to renew your strength today, tomorrow and forever more. He wants you to enter back into that new experience of freshness and strength again and again, so that you can live your life in the victory that Jesus died and rose again to give you.

When the Apostle Paul was lying in a Roman dungeon on death row, chained to a guard, he wrote this to his friends in Philippi:

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

God's strength is for you. It is ready and waiting. He means for you to renew your strength, to drink deep from His well, as you wait quietly, expectantly on Him.

READ MORE

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God? 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. Listen to me in silence, O coastlands; let the peoples renew their strength; let them approach, then let them speak.' (Isaiah 40:27-41:1)

GOING DEEPER...

QUESTION 1

What situation were God's

people in when Isaiah brought this message to them - how does that compare to where you're at now?

List the things that God says about Himself to remind His people of who He is. How does that impact you right at this moment?

Who does God give His strength to, and why?

What is the impact of receiving God's strength?

How does this Scripture help you to understand what true strength is?

Think of ways you can wait on God to renew your strength, and then put them into practice.

PRAY

Want to stop relying on your own strength that cannot last? Pray with me that we wait expectantly on God; to be renewed by HIS strength ...

Dear God, Creator of the ends of the earth, You know how faint and weary I become because everyday life can be tough. Please help me to not fool myself into thinking that my own strength and abilities will carry me through. Help me to remember You are the everlasting God and You want me to quietly, eagerly wait on You to renew my strength. May I run and not grow weary, through trust in You through Your powerful Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen

CHAPTER 2

New Spirit

Okay so God wants to renew your strength. That's great news! But as the advertisers would tell you, wait ... there's more. More good news! God also wants to give you a new Spirit. So let's dive in and take a look at what that really means.

Have you ever wondered how life begins? Science has come such a long way in helping us understand our bodies, even our minds, but the one thing it can't explain is how new life begins. How did the first person come to life? That's something science simply can't answer.

However, the moment you and I believe in Jesus, we become a completely new creation.

And that is a fact:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

A new creation! Or you can think of it as a new identity or a new start. What an appropriate thing to be talking about as we set out on a new year in our lives, having already taken a look at where we can all find new strength.

So many people have come to the conclusion that they're worthless. Maybe it's because of their failures or losses. Perhaps it's because of abuse that's been inflicted on them. But what the death of Jesus on that Cross tells me is that God was prepared to pay the highest price possible in the universe – the price of His Son's life – to give you and me a fresh start.

No matter how you see yourself, the evidence of Jesus' death on the Cross proves that you are worth so, so, so much. Look at what God was prepared to sacrifice, to give you a new identity and a new life.

When Jesus was talking about this, He put it a little differently. He talked about being 'born again'. He was chatting with one of the religious leaders, Nicodemus, who secretly visited Him one night:

"Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born

of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

(John 3:5-9)

No wonder Nicodemus was confused. To be 'born again' is a very strange concept. But that's exactly what God wants to do for you, to give you a new life; as if you were born all over again and given another go at life. And the only way that can happen is by the Holy Spirit entering you. After all, that's how the first man was given life:

The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)

There are a few different words used in the Old Testament for 'breath' but they are generally synonymous with 'spirit'. So the idea here is that God breathed His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, into the first man. That's where life comes from. Matter itself cannot produce that. Energy itself cannot produce that. Only God can – through His Spirit.

But the problem for you and me is that we have all gone astray and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). That's why we need to be 'born again', as Jesus put it. We need a new life and a new start and, as Jesus reveals, a fresh breath of the Spirit. Although we were made in the image of God – both men and women – we have all rebelled against the way

God created us to rightly live with Him. We are corrupted, somewhere deep down inside us. And that is a problem with only one solution.

As we head into this New Year, what an amazing thing to be talking about a fresh life, a fresh start and a fresh breath of the Spirit! And that's exactly what God promised us:

I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 11:19)

Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live. (Ezekiel 18:31)

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

Three times God promises to deal with our hearts that have been hardened through our rebellion. He promises to breathe new life into us – a new Spirit, which is the very presence of God dwelling in us.

That is absolutely mind-blowing, isn't it?! A new heart AND a new spirit, something Jesus also promised would come:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. (John 14:15-17)

All He is asking us to do is to turn away from all the things we know are wrong, turn our lives back to Him and God's Spirit will fill us full to overflowing. Fill us to excess with new life, a new identity and new power - the very ability to live our lives for God, rather than continue in the old ways that hardened our hearts.

Once God's Spirit has made us new, we can go on being filled with His Spirit. That is exactly what Paul the Apostle encourages us to do:

> Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:18-20)

There's a clear choice here about how we live life. We can keep on in our old ways. We can continue to rebel against God or we can be filled with His Spirit. By the way, the tense of the verb that Paul uses here means literally 'to go on being filled' with the Spirit. That ongoing fuel of the Spirit is ours in order to empower us to live the life God wants us to live - worshipping Jesus and living our lives for Him.

I don't know how last year played itself out for you, but I'm certain that you're looking forward to something better this year. You're looking for something more. Something that fills that hole inside you that nothing else and nobody else seems capable of filling. If that's where you are right now then, with all my heart, I know what you have been looking for is the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit – God Himself – dwelling in you, giving you the strength to be holy, filling you with joy unspeakable, guiding you into what He has ready and waiting for you.

Starting the new year with a new Spirit won't just change things in the near future. Things will never be the same again when the radical, powerful change of being 'born again' happens to you.

READ MORE

"Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. (John 3:5-9)

GOING DEEPER...

QUESTION 1

What does Nicodemus think that being 'born again' means?

If you were Nicodemus, how would you have initially responded to Jesus?

What does Jesus say being 'born again' means?

What is the outcome of being 'born again'?

Re-read the passages from Ezekiel and Ephesians. How do you know if you have been 'born again'?

Consider ways your life will be different with a new heart and Spirit.

PRAY

If anyone wants a fresh start this New Year, here it is in this powerful prayer to God:

Lord God, please forgive me. I want Jesus. I want to put all my faith and trust in Him. I want to be filled with this new Spirit, to have the joy and the peace and the power to live for You. So today, I want to fully accept Jesus into my heart. I know that'll mean changes and I know that'll be hard and I know some people may laugh at me but, from this day forward, I belong to You – through what Jesus did for me. I also know that right now, this moment You have filled me with Your Holy Spirit. Thank You. Thank You. Thank You. Thank You.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

And that's the truth. If you prayed that prayer with me, you are forgiven, you belong to Jesus and you have received God's Spirit. What better beginning could there be to your fresh new start for this year?

CHAPTER 3

New Purpose

So, God wants to renew your strength, He wants to give you a new life by filling you with His Spirit. Is that good news or what?! But there is still more that God wants to do for you. He wants to give you a new purpose; a new direction; a new sense of meaning ... for the rest of your life.

And that's what we're going to take a look at right now.

I don't know how many years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes or seconds you have left before you breathe your last breath on this earth, but we can safely assume that it's a finite period of time ... because it is! So, think about this:

How are you going to spend that finite time? For the rest of your days on Earth, what is your purpose?

It is a sobering thought, isn't it? The time that you and I have left on planet earth is finite. One day it will come to an end, probably when we least expect it.

I keep a busy diary. I use an electronic one that's available on my computer, tablet and smartphone. No matter where I am, I can check my diary, add tasks and appointments, or move things around. I really don't know how I managed my life before I had this diary that replicates itself instantly and automatically across all my devices.

This week and next week are pretty much all taken. You certainly wouldn't get a meeting with me this week. There are a couple of slots left next week for emergencies, and even the week after next is starting to fill up.

And there are diary entries for all sorts of other things that reach out over the next 18 months. All in my diary. All colour coded – broadcasting dates, administrative data, meetings, personal schedules, even the odd holidays – put in my diary way ahead of time, so I don't book anything else. And it's all good stuff.

But today, the Lord could demand my life of me. Maybe it will be tonight or tomorrow morning. I don't know when. But I'm still planning and working as though I have a long time left on Earth. I feel like I have ... but really, none of us knows. I don't and neither do you!

A few years back, when I had an equally busy diary, I fell quite ill and ended up in hospital. I was very sick. Do you have any idea how

irrelevant that diary was to me as I was lying in that hospital bed with tubes sticking out of me? All the things that I thought were so incredibly important became completely unimportant. All the things that I thought I had to get done this week and next week were left undone, as I recovered.

I know this is going to shock you but, NO, the world didn't come to an end because Berni Dymet didn't get done the things he had planned to do.

And I'm imagining on that day when the Lord does demand my life of me, that that diary – with all its appointments and tasks that were so important – will just get deleted off the computer; off the tablet; off the mobile phone. And that ... will be that.

It's going to be exactly the same for you. All the things that you thought were so important won't get done, will be no more and will be completely forgotten. So, now I want us to think about what really is important.

In the time you and I have left on planet Earth, what is our *principal purpose* for being here going to be? Because it's that purpose that will start to guide the things we put into our diaries. It's our purpose that'll tell us which tasks and meetings are important, and which ones really aren't. It's that purpose that will decide how exactly we spend the years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes and seconds between now and when we breathe our last breath.

If your purpose is just to live this life, to get the things done here and now that you need to get done, to make money, to put food on the table and to enjoy life then ... well, that seems to me to be a pretty narrow, short-sighted view. It really is a recipe for a short-term life, a life that stops dead when your heart stops.

People asked Jesus about purpose in life; how best to live and what to focus on. When He was asked which of the commandments (all 613 of them in the Old Testament) was the most important to live by, this is what He said:

The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:29-31)

Now let's imagine for a moment that you were to take that to heart. Let's imagine that with every breath that you take between now and your last one, you decide (if you haven't already) to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. That's with every fibre of your being. And, in a similar way, you also decided to love others as you love yourself.

If that did become your true purpose for living, how would it change the things you put in your diary? How would it change your priorities? How would it change what you spend your time on, your energies on, your resources on?

What I've always found in my life (and I'm pretty sure it's also true for you) is that nothing changes in what I say or do, until something changes in my heart. The reason I know this to be true is not just that it's true in my own experience, but because it's precisely what Jesus said:

The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. (Luke 6:45)

There are many people today whose life isn't going in the right direction. Often we don't know why, we just know it's not right. There's a lack of joy and fulfilment. Or perhaps there's the pain of regret. And often we don't know what the right direction even looks like.

Perhaps you sense that that's what's going on in your life, and you're looking for a fresh start in this New Year. If that's you, let me encourage and implore you to have a change of heart. Rather than the direction you were headed in, head in the right direction. Establish your life's purpose on what Jesus said was the most important thing: 'To love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength ... and love your neighbour as yourself.'

When that truly becomes your purpose for living, God sets a new life before you. With the new strength and new Spirit He gives, your new purpose-filled life always will be heading in the right direction, even when life is hard or sad or stressed.

God's Word says that:

While we, in our minds, plan our way, the Lord orders or directs our steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

That's an interesting relationship being described there. That's God giving you and me a clear role in choosing the direction in which our life heads.

You can choose today to make your most important things the same as Jesus's most

important things. Or you can choose today not to do that and, instead, continue to make your own agenda your most important things.

In the long run to your last breath, which one of those two do you think is going to work better for you? Just a few verses earlier in Proverbs, God says this:

When the ways of people please the Lord, he causes even their enemies to be at peace with them. (Proverbs 6:7)

Would you rather have peace or strife? Would you rather have the Lord ordering each step, or be tripping over yourself as you head in the wrong direction? This is why so many people's lives are such a mess. We can't go off and do it our way, and expect God to come along and dance to our tune and clean up our mess.

No, God loves us more than that. If we head off in our own direction, according to our own priorities, He will let us suffer the consequences. He does that to bring us to our senses.

So then, back to your choice. What will it be? What will you make the guiding purpose of the things that go into our diary? The things that you sacrifice your time for? The things that you will spend the rest of our life doing? Because make no mistake about it. Time is short. Time is running out. I don't care how far you've planned ahead, those tasks in your diary will be gathering cobwebs on that inevitable day when you lie in a box in a funeral home somewhere.

Do you want a new start this year? Then perhaps it's time to grasp the new strength, the new Spirit and the new purpose that God wants to give you.

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The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:29-31)

GOING DEEPER...

QUESTION 1

What would you say is the most important thing in your life, right at this moment, really?

What does Jesus say is the most important thing in life?

What would it mean, what would it look like, for you to love God and other people as Jesus calls you to?

How can you develop ways to live out Jesus' great commandment that don't feel like you're just following a bunch of rules?

Identify priorities in your life that clash with Jesus' priorities, write them down – and consider what exactly you need to change.

Challenge yourself to work with God on changing your heart, rather than only talking about making changes to your behaviour.

PRAY

At the start of this new year, ask God now to help you make Jesus' most important things ... your most important things.

Dear Heavenly Father. You know that I can fill my diary with many different things that compete for my attention. But when those things don't match up with what Jesus said I should prioritise, help me to realise that I am valuing my own things over the things you value. Give me your strength and spirit to be able to love you with all that I am, and to love other people with your selfless love. Thank you for sending Jesus to point me in the right direction ... back to You and I ask that you guide every choice that I make' every step that I take this year ... and forever.

In Christ's name,
Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

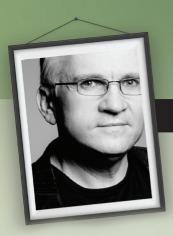
Berni Dymet is a contemporary Christian communicator with a passion for sharing the Good News of Jesus right into the middle of life. He comes from the perspective that this Christianity thing – it isn't just a faith that lives in our heads or even our hearts, but that it actually works right here in the middle of our lives.

Christianity actually works when we dare to accept Jesus Christ into our lives!! Not just as Saviour, but also as Lord.

Millions of people around the globe tune into Berni's radio programs each week. The Lord has given him a special gift for sharing the Gospel in a truly practical way. In a way that really connects into the hearts and lives of real people in real places, transforming their lives. That's what the ministry of Christianityworks is all about. Leading people into a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ.

But Berni's passion, his enthusiasm and his insights into the day to day realities of life are simply tools in God's hands. The real change agent is God Himself.

And to Him – and Him alone – be all the glory.



Berni Dymet

NEW YEAR, FRESH START

God is a God of new beginnings. Not just for others. For you.

As we step into this new year, there are so many people for whom the hurts, the losses, the failures, the regrets of last year are holding them back, robbing them of that sense of anticipation thinking about what God has in store for them this year. But listen up – God has a fresh start planned for you this year.

So join Berni Dymet as he opens God's Word to take a look at the year ahead – your year ahead – through the eyes of God.

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