

THE FIRST 15

Friday, January 3, 2025

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Today is Friday, January 3. At the beginning of a new year, we explore what the Bible says about new beginnings.

OPENING PRAYER

As I enter a time of prayer, I pause and become still. I calm my thoughts and silence my mind. I breathe deeply and slowly, and center myself upon the presence of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Holy Lord, in the peace of these morning moments, I long to experience Your presence. Come Holy Spirit, reveal the new things you want for me in this new year. Enable me to hear the message You have for me in the name of Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:19-25

REFLECTION

Fellowship with other Christians is a gift from God. In the early church, some members of the Christian community withdrew from the fellowship, probably because of persecution. The early believers were subject to ridicule, arrest, imprisonment and loss of property as a result of their beliefs. Having met those trials, they attempted to continue in faith and good works. They helped and supported one another in love. The Bible encouraged these Christians to persevere and hold confidently to their faith in Jesus. The letter to the Hebrews encouraged them to not fall away or give up meeting with one another. These words encourage me to continue to be an active part of the church today.

This scripture reminds me how I can be present with God and with others. I approach a holy and mighty God with confidence because of Jesus who opened the way for me through the shedding of His blood. I draw near to God with full assurance because I have been washed and cleansed through the blood of Christ. I trust God's faithfulness and love for me because of Jesus, my Savior. He is my redemption and my hope.

These words remind me how I can be present with others. I am to meet regularly with other Christians and not get in the habit of neglecting worship attendance, church fellowship and small group meetings. I am to encourage other Christians and "spur them on" to love and good

deeds. I need them to do the same for me. I need to consistently be an active part of the church in order to grow strong in my faith in 2025.

As I begin a new year, God invites me to draw near to him. I ask God to show me when I am reluctant to draw near and reveal the reasons why I hesitate. I envision my heart sprinkled with holy water, my conscience cleansed from guilt, my body washed in purity. I am clean - body, mind and soul because of Jesus. I consider my faithfulness in loving others and doing good deeds.

Like a horse is encouraged to walk, run or quicken the pace, I wonder what would "spur me on" to love more and do more for others. I consider my faithfulness in gathering with other Christians and how God might be asking me to improve my habits in the new year. Where does God want me to find encouragement for the Christian life? Am I taking full advantage of what God offers?

Ask: What steps can I take in 2025 to form new habits and find new friends in Christian community? What relationships will help me grow in faith, encouragement, love and good deeds?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy Lord God, thank You for Jesus and the salvation He brings. Thank you that I am able to draw near to You, cleansed from sin and guilt and washed with the pure water of forgiveness. I hold on to Your promises with hope and confidence. Encourage me to live the life You desire for me as an active part of a faithful Christian community, encouraging others in all circumstances. Help me to make positive changes for the future. Guide me to a faithful community of Christian friends and strengthen me to persevere in the faith, living the life You have designed for me. Amen.