

21 in 21

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Who would have thunk in January 2020 that we would be trying to keep our New Year Resolutions in our bathrobes, keeping six feet away from everyone? Now it's 2021 - Happy New Year! We made it! (As if that is an accomplishment in itself.) I hate to break it to you, but the craziness is following us into the new year. Remember all the talk about "the new normal"? This present unpleasantness does not come to an end when the ball drops in Times Square.

What I propose is that we make "perseverance," our theme in 2021. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Galatia in the first century these words: "***And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.***" (Galatians 6:9) This one sentence basically sums up the meaning of "perseverance."

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines "perseverance" concisely - "continued effort and determination." It's gonna take much perseverance to make it through 2021. (I've learned a lot about perseverance from my five children, all trying to navigate adulthood in a time more challenging than my young adult years.) They are a disciplined, tenacious lot.

2020 turned out to be our Kindergarten for "the new normal." We have learned how to don masks. We have learned more than we ever thought about the checks and balances of our US Government. We have learned patience. We have learned to respect past attempts to contain viruses in our history. We have learned how fragile we can be. We have learned how precious it is to gather together to worship, socialize and to enjoy life freely.

-Enter, the New Year 2021. Welcome to the First Grade! Hopefully, we know how to read, float in the pool, and solve simple math problems. To graduate from High School, we must persevere. Soon, it's gonna be Algebra, the Butterfly Stroke and a second language.

Sterry's Ruling Elder, overseeing worship, Melinda Smyser, has floated and executed a New Year exercise I am now promoting: **21 in 21**. I strongly recommend that you hop on board and also, help me spread the word about this simple, potentially fruitful exercise. With 31 days in January, we have a little wriggle room to procrastinate. As for me, I'm ready to get right to it! **21 in 21** is a daily prayer regimen for 21 days in January 2021. It takes less than 21 minutes each day - more like five minutes. Here's how you can get started on **21 in 21**:

Choose a convenient time in your daily schedule - the same time each day, that will work for 21 days in a row. Schedule 5 to 21 minutes each day for this exercise. What are you going to do? **Pray**. The vision is that all of us connected to Sterry will pray for 21 days straight in January 2021. **21 in 21**.

Here's a Prayer Guide for all of us to use. You may pray through all 21 of the following guiding points...or you may choose a fewer number for each day:

- #1 = Pray for peace in our world, the end of war and polarization.
- #2 = Pray for your loved ones by name.
- #3 = Pray for reconciliation with those estranged from you.
- #4 = Pray for the growth of Sterry Memorial Presbyterian Church.
- #5 = Pray for the persecuted church through out the world.
- #6 = Pray for the gospel to free us from all bondage.
- #7 = Pray for the containment of Covid-19.
- #8 = Pray for the President of the United States of America.
- #9 = Pray for the Governor of Idaho.
- #10 = Pray for the unemployed, the poor, and the prisoner.
- #11 = Pray for Parma Schools and New Song Preschool.
- #12 = Pray for your own perseverance in faith in Jesus Christ.
- #13 = Pray for others by name in need of perseverance in faith.
- #14 = Pray for Launch Ministries, biblical release time education.
- #15 = Pray for the funding of the Parma Launch Pad building.
- #16 = Pray for Vidal and Joy Reyes, and New Hope Girls in the DR.
- #17 = Pray for Pastor Richard Cox now living at Lenity.
- #18 = Pray for our new sister church in Port Townsend, WA.
- #19 = Pray for God's Gang.
- #20 = Pray for Ryan Seals and Fellowship of Christian Athletes.
- #21 = Pray for the Parma Community Center.

I'm confident that you will find other prayers beyond these to offer to our loving and gracious God, who loves to hear the voice of his lisping children.

According to Phillipa Lally; a health psychology researcher at University College London, it takes a minimum of 21 days to start a new, productive habit. Actually, for most of us, it takes 66 to 254 days to establish a productive habit. If she is correct, then **21 in 21** is just the start of our perseverance in 2021. With 365 days in this new year, we have ample time to entrench in the healthy habit of prayer.

My cell phone logs how many minutes I spend using every App. Recently, I have been shocked at how much time I spend on my news feed

and other Apps. I certainly have time to pray for 5 to 21 minutes daily! My personal goal in 2021 is to reduce the time I spend on my cell phone, minus the time I actually use my cell phone as a phone, to less than one hour daily. That means reducing the time I spend on Facebook, Instagram and the Weather App.... and, gasp...Apple News Feed. All to say, I do have time to pray. My daughter, Hannah's boyfriend, Josh, said to me during Christmas, "Think of how many books we can read if we only stopped using our cell phones!" I've taken his comment to heart.

I'm ready to take the **21 in 21** challenge. Are you? I hope so. Have you thought about what God intends for us through this present craziness of Pandemic 2020-2021? Is it possible that God is giving us an opportunity to restructure our habits toward more productive use of our time? Is it possible that what we are experiencing is the Phoenix rising from the ashes? It possible that in 2025 we will reflect on our present unpleasantness and conclude, "God has a perfect plan to wrest us from our triviality to a more meaningful existence." My recommendation = Take the **21 in 21** challenge.

Let me return to the Apostle Paul's instruction: "***And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.***" (Galatians 6:9).

Firstly, notice that the Apostle Paul includes himself in his instruction. He writes, "*And let us...*" He considered himself to be as needy of the instruction as his audience. That's humility! Paul was not the guy, who says, "Do what I say, not as I do." We all need perseverance.

Paul writes to himself, the church at Galatia and to all of us, who seek to follow Jesus, "*And let us all not grow weary of doing good...*" In 2021 the Holy Spirit, through our **21 in 21** prayers will sharpen our focus on doing the good deeds Jesus has called us to perform. He has taught us to love one another, to love our enemies, to welcome the person on the fringe, to pray for those who persecute us, to put the interests of others before our own and to enter the kingdom of God through repentance and faith. Such a list of good deeds, partially listed here, can be exhausting. But the heavenly Father and the Son, have sent to us the Holy Spirit to strengthen us so that we will not grow weary in doing good.

The Apostle Paul then gives to us encouragement to persevere. He writes, "*...for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*" All in good time - in God's timing, we will enjoy the harvest of our perseverance. We live in a world expecting instant gratification and results. But most everything good comes after much work and waiting. Don't give up in 2021! The results of **21 in 21** may not occur until 2030. Pray today, and wait for

the results. Love your neighbor and wait for the results. Dig in and do the right, waiting patiently for the results. I may die before the fruit of my labors is ripe. In my following after Jesus, it's not about me, but about God and his purposes for everything I do. I don't do what is right only because it will benefit me. When I do what is right, the fruit may ripen for the good of others and the glory of God long after I'm dead and gone. That's a holy legacy.

Join me in 2021 in perservance. Join me in this little exercise, **21 in 21** and leave the results to God.