A Maturing Faith, Part 1: A Pleasing Walk

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[0:00] You know, we serve a great God that takes care of us even when we don't see it and don't understand it. But as we get ready to move into a new year here, and you can go and start finding your Bibles here this morning, 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, as we're going to continue. It's going through the book of Thessalonians here this morning. But if you haven't heard yet, there's a new year right around the corner. You know, it seems like 2025 with the things that the events and the challenges and the blessings, all those are moving to the past. And the course of the year has played out. And, you know, there's no way to look back and change what happened last year.

You know, we know that that is settled. That's where it is. But we always find hope in a new year, the year ahead, when the calendar turns. It seems to have a break in time, going from the old to the new. And, you know, we celebrate that culturally, you know, as a...but it's also something that God established. If you understand that it's based in a scriptural thing, we're not on a Bible or a Jewish calendar. But, you know, God did have a new year for them. And year by year, and they would renew those things with Him. And that time of the calendar, you know, the first event on God's calendar was the Passover. You know, it refocused on what God had done for us, that the blood that was shed for us, that we might be saved. You know, the Passover was that. It was a celebration and reminder of the blood of the Lamb that was applied and allowed death to pass over them. It was a new beginning. It separated Israel to follow the Lord, and it will a call to walk with the Lord, and for that walk also to please the Lord. You know, the believers at Thessalonica had begun a new life in Christ, a new walk with Him. And the Bible tells us, and Paul commends them, he says, you've turned from idols unto the living God. And he was thankful that they received the truth, not as it was from Him, but as it was from God. You know, it's important to separate that because we may be the messenger, but God's Word reveals who God is. And we need to always know that the Word of God takes precedent over everything else when it comes to the testimony of who God is. Because we see this testimony of transformation had taken place, and their continued hope in the coming Savior held them fast, even in the face of persecution and problems.
And that ought to help us also today to understand that we can look to the future. We can look to what Christ has promised for us. But we're going to see here, though they were off to a good start, you know, oftentimes people get off to a good start, but maintaining something gets a little more challenging. And trying to maintain those things and to understand what's needed to do that. And while the church at Thessalonica, the believers there were off to a great start, you might say spiritually walking with the Lord and standing fast and knowing exactly what God had for them, and they were going to trust the Lord, even though they didn't understand all the details, they said, we're going to trust God as we walk through. But we're going to see here this morning that while they were off to a good start, Paul's going to tell them there needs to be some maturing that takes place. Because even though we're doing good now, we need to understand God has an expectation of continued growth in our faith and to grow spiritually. And we find that term we're going to look at this morning is called sanctification. You know, to be sanctified and what that means in that. And Paul's going to have that because he says they need to grow mature practically in the application of their faith. Because our faith isn't just something that's on the side. It isn't just a footnote to life. It isn't a secondary things to life. Your faith has to be the primary thing in life. Because your faith being focused upon the Lord gives us direction. And this maturing faith, I want you to understand here, if you mature in the faith, a maturing faith is a faith that pleases God. Now that's important because a lot of people think they're maturing. But if what you're doing in course and action of life is not pleasing to God, you're not maturing. You may be maturing in your mind, but you're not maturing spiritually before God.

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And we're going to look here this morning as we see this, because chapter four begins with a request for them to abound more and more in the direction of the Lord. So if you found 1 Thessalonians chapter four, let's stand together this morning in honor of the reading of the word of God. And we'll read down a few verses here and pray. And we'll get into the main course of the service here this morning. So it says, furthermore, then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that you have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God. So you would abound more and more.
For you know the commandments we gave unto you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles, which know not God. But no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter, because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. [6:06] For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despises, despises not man, but God, who has also given unto us his holy spirit. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we come before you this morning, Lord, we just thank you for your word. Thank you for your direction. Lord, as we look at a very important topic in our life, in our walk with you, Lord, as it ought to please you. Lord, I pray that you just stir our hearts and minds, even here this morning, to understand the importance of what we're looking at here today, that we ought to walk to please you. Lord, help us to evaluate, Lord, even as we go into a new year, to evaluate where that was, what that looked like last year, and Lord, where it needs to be this year, not in light of ourselves, but in light of you, in light of your word. And Lord, we just ask it all in your precious name. Amen. You may be seated. You know, as we see here this morning, notice this, Paul tells them, he says, furthermore, furthermore then. You know, we're going to see here that Paul challenges them. He says, furthermore, besides these things, you need to continue.

It's a moving forward, furthermore, moving forward in our walk and in our life with Christ. And the apostle asks and invites them, he says, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus Christ, because he wanted them to continue to grow that they may please God. Now, I want you to understand something very important here, because sometimes we get caught up, we get, who are we pleasing? We're concerned about, are we pleasing this person or that person? Or sometimes believers are saying, am I pleasing what the preacher thinks? Ultimately, it doesn't matter what anybody else thinks, but what God thinks. Because you know what? If you're pleasing God, you're going to be pleasing to the people who want to honor God. Those things tie directly. You know, our goal is not to please another person. Our goal is to please the Lord. And you know why the church here and the people, the believers at Thessalonica were off to a good start. They still had to continue to mature in their understanding and their application of truth for their life. You know, even though they'd endured many challenges and remained faithful, you know, I want you to understand that that's good, but you know what? Sometimes we can just be stubborn. No amens on that one? You know, sometimes instead of trusting God, we're just stubborn. Stubbornness doesn't please God. You can be stubborn about doing the right things, but I want you to understand God wants us to do it for the right reason.
For the reason of honoring Him. You know, because of, if you're His child, you ought to understand the importance because He doesn't want us just to be strong-willed or stubborn. He wants us to walk pleasing to Him. There's a difference. Both of them may look similar on the outside, but on the inside, they're totally different things. Because one is about us and the other is about Him. There's a distinction that you will find here. And when you called upon Him to save you, and hopefully today you know that you're saved, because when you're saved, the Bible says the Spirit of God comes and dwells within you, you are a new creature in Christ. Things have changed. Your direction of life has changed. And we see here that Paul talks to them about their walk and how it ought to please God. Look there at verse 1 here, and it says that, have you received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God. To walk and to please God. You know, your walk needs to change in your maturity with Christ.
Your walk ought to be different because, you know, what does it mean that you ought to walk? You know, this word here, walk in Scripture, simply refers to those things of life as you as you navigate life, as you go down the path of life. Because every believer ought to be concerned with their walk. And what our walk, what we ought to ask, is my walk pleasing God?

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[10:39] Or is it pleasing myself? Because we can have a walk that's focused on us, or do we have a walk that's focused on God? Because notice, throughout the Bible, we find that this term walk refers to the life of an individual, not just a short-term, but a long-term picture.

You know, you look in the book of Genesis, you find this come out very quickly in the book of Genesis. Genesis chapter 5, verse 24, it says, Enoch walked with God. Chapter 6, verse 9, and Noah walked with God.
Chapter 17, verse 1, and God and the Lord appeared to Abraham and said unto him, I am the Almighty God, walk before me and be thou perfect. That's just a few examples that you find from Scripture.
The reality of our walk, a walk suggests progress in a direction. That direction for a believer is to be a way that pleases God. You know, if you look in the book of Ephesians, you'll find this brought forth.
You know, Paul, as he's describing to the church at Ephesus these things, notice what he says, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. A worthy walk. You know, one that's pleasing to him is a worthy walk. And he contrasts this, and a little later in that same chapter, verse 17 says this, walk not as other Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind. Paul says everybody is walking.
[12:20] Everybody has a course of life. The question is, which course are you on? Because your course entails how you think and process the things of life. Because notice here, he talks about the vanity of their mind, their self-focused mind. Their mind is upon what pleases themselves and not what pleases God.

And he tells us in the next chapter, chapter 5 in Ephesians, verse 2, talks about there, he says, walk in love. You know, that's the believer. He said, our walk ought to be one that exemplifies love for God, love one for another. You know, the Bible talks about love for the brethren, those that are saved. You know, it's like a love for family and a love for those that are saved walk hand in hand because one might be your physical family, the other is your spiritual family. Because you've been born into God's family at the moment of salvation. You know, it's another misconception in people's minds that everybody's a child of God. Yes, everybody's made in the image of God, but not everybody's a child of God.
It's a family you're born into. But every believer is to walk, to live their life, to please the Lord in all that we do in this life.
You know, your first steps with the Lord and those that follow are by faith, trusting in what God has declared to be true. You know, we're saved by faith because we believe what God has declared about Jesus Christ and how he accomplished what we could not, how he took his sin upon us, died in our place, took our penalty, and rose again in victory.
That takes faith to trust what God has declared, but it's also the instruction for this life. You know, a lot of times people get saved and it's kind of like they go, they walk a little bit and they just sort of stay static. Their spiritual growth just plateaus. You might ask, why does that happen?
[14:31] Well, it's because they're just coasting along. They're at a point where they might have got comfortable, you know, and we could just, in my own mind, I can do kind of both sides. I can have a foot in the world and a foot in the things of God and make it look good and we can go along and we can coast along. But I want you to understand, God doesn't save us to be static.

Because notice, look at the end of verse one. So that you what? You abound what? More and more.
Now, I don't think you have to be an English major to figure out that that's progress. That's motion. More and more means multiplied or growth. It means there's something to it. Now, I want you to understand there's a big theological term in the Bible that refers to this. It's called sanctification. And when it comes to the use of this term in the scripture, I think it's important for us to understand because I'm going to take a moment here and explain some things I think are important because when we hear the term sanctification, there's a lot of confusion about it because they think anytime it says sanctification, it means exactly the same thing. But in the scripture, there's different dynamics of sanctification. Because you can be sanctified, okay? I want you to understand when you're sanctified at the moment of salvation, you've been set apart. When something is sanctified, it means being set apart for service specifically to the Lord.
You know, this same term is used in the Old Testament quite a bit. When they set up the temple and the tabernacle, all throughout you'll find that the items, the people, everything about it was

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sanctified.
[16:28] It was set apart for the Lord. All those instruments, the priests were sanctified. You can read that that was an important part, being set apart, separated under the Lord. All those things that were involved in it, that's that idea. It gives us that picture. You know, even the sacrifices were sanctified, set in place and directed by God's instruction.

sanctification. I want you to understand, anytime you find the word sanctification, it has nothing to do with our opinion. It has everything to do with God.
Because God is the one we're to be set apart to. As we get ready, you know, and it's good to think about this at the beginning of the year because you can ask, what am I going to be set apart to for God this year?
How am I going to grow? But I want you to understand, the Bible reveals three things regarding this idea of separation or sanctification. Because when you call upon Him to save you, in that moment you're sanctified positionally.
Because you've been set in place. The righteousness of Christ is put on. You are sanctified. You're accepted in the beloved.
[17:51] You've been set apart to God. You know, Ephesians 1 tells us this, it says, To the praise and glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved.

You know, 1 Corinthians 1, verse 30, Paul says this, But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, of whom God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.
You know, that's positionally. When you're saved, you are in Christ. You are set apart in Christ. That's positional.
Now, there's nothing you can change about your position in Christ. But what we're talking about, what Paul's talking about here is what we're going to look at, you might say, is practical sanctification.
Practical sanctification. This refers to God's will that you walk to please Him. This involves what you do after salvation in regards to serving the Lord, to love Him the way you ought to love Him, to do those things.
[19:01] And we see here that this working of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer. Look at verse 3 in our text there in chapter 4, 1 Thessalonians. He says this, For this is the will of God, even your what?

Sanctification. God's will is for you to be sanctified. You know, I've had people ask me, well, preacher, how do you know God's will? Well, if you read the Bible, God usually reveals it to you. This is a big one, and he says, my will for you is that you be separated and your walk would be pleasing.
That is the will of God for your life. That practical sanctification. You know, Philippians chapter 2, verse 15 talks about this. He says this, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke.
Now notice this, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation among whom ye shine as lights in the world. What's it talking about there? It's talking about our walk.
Our walk in the world ought to be different, ought to be what pleases God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, a people that are against God.
[20:13] That's practical sanctification. The Bible also speaks about what we're going to call perfect or complete sanctification. Because one day we're going to be transformed into his image.

The Bible makes it clear. Romans chapter 8, verse 29 tells us this, for whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.
I want you to understand, God has a plan. When you call upon him, you become his child. He says, one day you will be transformed completely.
When we get to glory, all the problems of this life, the very presence of sin will be removed. All the issues we have here will be no longer. All those things are gone away.
Now that we've established that, we can continue to see what the Lord is involved in when we're talking about mature faith is being practically set apart, sanctified for God.
[21:21] There's a practical element that is involved here. And you cannot mature and walk in a way that pleases the Lord if you don't first place the Word of God as your authority.

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You know, I want you to understand the importance of that because it's not, because really, honoring God is built upon a question of authority. Paul makes it clear.
He instructed them in the Word of God. He talks about in chapter 1 that they accepted the truth not as the Word of men but as the Word of God. It was built upon the truth of what God has declared. It was built upon what God had written, what God had put forth for us. Paul was not the authority. It was the Lord Jesus Christ. And he's the one who provided all that was required for us, you and I, to be saved.
He is the authority that we look to. You know, think about what Jesus told his disciples as he was getting ready to go to the cross in John chapter 14, verse 15. Jesus makes this declaration.
[22:27] He says, if you love me, keep my commandments. What's Jesus saying? He says, if you say you love me, there's authority. Because to keep his commandments saying, God, I'm giving you and what you've said authority.

But you know, the big problem in our walk is authority. Authority is a big issue. Because we either look at the Word of God and we look at what God has declared and say, that's going to be my authority.
That's going to be my measuring stick. That's going to be what I want to have. That's what I want to measure up to. This is what I want to abound towards. Or we're going to say I want to abound to what I want.
That self-authority, the commandments of Jesus are for our sanctification. You know, notice what he tells them there in verse 1.
I exhort you by the Lord Jesus that you have received of us how you ought to walk to please God. You know, think about verse 2. for you know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.
[23:30] You know, there's a lot of confusion today because I want you to understand Paul was an apostle but Paul's authority was rested in Christ Jesus. It did not rest in himself.

Authority is of God and God puts people in different positions. You know, just like when God gave you parents, he puts your parents in authority over the kids.
But ultimately, your parent is not the ultimate authority. The ultimate authority is God, the one who gave him that responsibility. Gave him that accountability.
You know, his commands are there for us to know something important. That is to know what holiness looks like. And we're going to look here in the rest of this passage that we read, this dynamic of holiness.
You know, look down at verse 7 because verse 7 here gives us the summary here of this. He says this, for God hath not called us unto uncleanness but unto holiness.
[24:31] You notice something there? There's not a whole lot of middle ground. It's either unclean or it's holy. But as people in our authority, we like to make a lot of mushy in the middle. Well, maybe, maybe not.

I can get by with this and if nobody sees me, I can do this. And, you know, my friend over here says this is okay. We can go do that. But we need to understand He has not called us to walk in uncleanness but to walk in holiness.
1 Peter tells us this in 1 Peter chapter 1. He says, But he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. That word conversation is another word for walk.
It's all those things of life. It's what your life says, what your life declares. And notice his authority here. Peter's not saying, I'm Peter and you better be holy.
What does Peter say? It is written, Be ye holy because for I am holy. Peter's quoting God's declaration.
[25:37] He says, Be ye holy because I am holy. Peter's not having his authority. He's using the word of God. But notice what this is. Now notice what he tells us here in verse 3.

It says, For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor.
You know, notice here, your separation to God ties into moral dynamics. There's a moral element and that's oftentimes where we get into debate.
Well, is that moral or not moral? You know, and we try to make things moral that are not and sometimes we think things that God has said and try to make it not moral.
You say, what do you mean? Well, people call good evil. You know what they're saying? That which is moral is not. But notice he says, you should abstain from fornication. This is a word that many try

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to redefine today and diminish in application because the word has many parts you might say. [26:48] The main meaning has to do with illicit behavior. It has to do with illicit behavior that is tied to idolatry. Now, I want you to understand as you read through the Old Testament you'll see one thing that pops out very clearly.

Idolatry and immorality walk hand in hand. Idolatry and immorality fornication walk hand in hand. You know, the main meaning here has that illicit behavior and idolatry in play because physical pleasures have a direct tie to idolatry.
You know, throughout the Old Testament we see that these things operate together side by side. You think about it's the reason for God's judgment on the land. When Israel went into the land coming out of Egypt God judged the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites and all them because of their idolatry and immorality their fornication.
When we understand the tie is there and it's the reason for God's judgment but just as both the northern kingdom of Israel and Judah were both judged and put into captivity because of their practice of idolatry that involved fornication.
[28:13] Sexual immorality is built upon idolatry. The two walk hand in hand. You never see them separated from one another in the scripture because you say well what do you mean any time that you have what it is it's somebody setting up an idol to either making themselves the idol making themselves the authority or they're making something else the authority that gives them justification in doing what they want to do anyways.

You know often times idolatry is just that it's making something in what we want it to be so we have authority that we say well look at that they want us to do this over here this religious thing to do and therefore we have an authority to say we can go do it.
That's idolatry idolatry always takes us away and takes us into the dynamics of ourselves and we see here from the practices you'll see in the Old Testament it talks about the groves and the high places from the worship of Baal and Molech all of those involved prostitution it involved immorality fornication tied in now today we see the same occultic and demonic practices are tied to sensual pleasure it takes what God designed to operate within the restrain of marriage and exploits it in rebellion against the Lord it simply gives authority to yourself in matters of morality now I know that's a hard pill to swallow because it hits right at the core of who we are it hits right at the core of our sin nature our selfishness it hits directly in those things and
Paul is telling them here you guys have to work through you have to deal with this you have to make sure that you're not being drawn away into it because people it gives authority to yourselves in that matter of morality that's the reason today you see a massive rise in things like cohabitation and adultery and unnatural affections this idea here is very clear the command here is to abstain to hold off notice here it says that you abstain from fornication now I want you to understand something here because this this is important to understand because he's not telling them that these temptations aren't going to be present he says you have a decision to make how are you going to respond to them because to abstain means I may see somebody else doing it but I'm going to choose to please the Lord instead but you know what oftentimes peer pressure draws us into doing what other people want us to do and you say well peer pressure didn't know you really wanted that the other peer pressures gave you permission because that's our problem we're looking for permission to do what we wanted!
to do anyways notice here what he's talking about because he says the pressures will be there but we need to have a responsibility of how we act or think look at verse 4 that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor now let me sum it up in a modern term for it it's called self responsibility every person has a responsibility for the choices!
[31:33] that they make now often times that doesn't sit very good does it you know we don't like self responsibility you know we live in a generation well it's not my fault it's their fault you know it's always somebody else's fault but you know what God says it's your problem it's your choice what are you going to do their own body including their thinking and their actions regarding it because when we understand the nature of what's transpiring and to whom it disregards in rebellion against the commands and instructions of your Savior this is the same standard for everybody morality is just not for a pastor or a deacon it's for every believer immorality is a problem in the church look at verse 5 it says!

not in the lust of concupiscence even as the Gentiles which know not God concupiscence wonderful word what's it mean it's the coveting of carnal things or an irregular appetite for worldly good an

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inclination for unlawful enjoyment let me put it this way it simply means that we have a desire inside to go against what we're told you ever notice you tell somebody not to do something what's their first temptation to do you know put something on a table and say don't there's something inside then that says I want to go touch that because I was told I shouldn't touch it that's what this word is talking about that lust and desire to do that which you've been instructed and know that is wrong look over to James chapter 1 for a moment James chapter 1 in verse 14 says but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin and sin what is unfinished bringeth forth death do not err my beloved brother we have an inward desire to do exactly opposite of what we ought to do that's that sin nature it's a rebellious nature and notice what he says that we were operating with just when we operate with just our own desires and authority it's natural it's as the
Gentiles that know not God but while it may come naturally it doesn't mean it's justified you know that's another falsehood today well it's just natural to me just because something feels natural doesn't mean it's right always like going back to the nursery you know you don't have to teach kids to take toys from somebody else it's natural for them to try to take it what do you have to do you have to go and train them you have to make them think differently about it because just because it's natural doesn't mean it's right in our own life we have that same constant dynamic taking place that passion includes a desire for power or position along with fleshly desires this is the conflict within whether we'll submit to God's authority or one of our own choosing you know we violate the direct instructions of the Lord and we're placing ourselves in authority instead of him you know
Paul here is talking about that sanctification is maturing in our walk notice here in verse 7 it says for God hath not called us unto cleanness but unto holiness notice what he says here in verse 8 he therefore that despiseth despiseth not man but God who hath given unto us his holy spirit because remember who's Paul talking to here he's talking to believers I want you to understand lost people do what lost people do you know some people I can't believe somebody would do that or commit that I'm like if somebody doesn't know the Lord and they're operating in their own dynamics of morality gloves are off I mean they could do all sorts of atrocious things the reason people don't like that is because it reveals who they are well if that person can do that what does it say about me and that's really the question because it's our sin that needs to be dealt with it's our sin and that choice that we have to make are we're going to be practically sanctified are we going to walk with him are you going to despise the
Lord that saved you you know I want you to consider that dynamic as we get ready to go into a new year if you say you're a believer but reject the Lord's instructions to be holy as he is holy the Bible says you despise the one that died for you in order to be redeemed the one who took care of your sin for you and the penalty of it you despise you reject let me give you a practical example to change the dynamic for a moment imagine if you were drowning you there's something about a drowning person when they actually hit panic mode there's nothing they can do to save themselves you know drowning is an interesting thing you can be an expert swimmer and when you hit the mode where you're literally drowning from exhaustion and your body goes into panic how good a swimmer you are becomes irrelevant once you hit a certain point they tell you that you will go under you will die you you're unable to save yourself somebody comes out rescues you pulls you to shore and when you get to shore you spit in their face that's the picture the one that rescued you from your sin when you despise them you spit in his face that's the seriousness of the matter you know it sounds untenable to us that somebody would do that you would say if you saw that happen people like and he says guys be careful what you're thinking how you respond so to so great a salvation that you've been given that your walk ought to be a walk that pleases
[37:49] God you know as we get ready to start a new year it's a new year a new opportunity there's something about that change that provides opportunity in our mind to say there's an opportunity for something new something different you know there's no greater way or better opportunity than to get right and to serve the Lord in the year to come to understand that he hath not called us to uncleanness but unto holiness it doesn't matter what your 20 25 look like that is behind us but I want to encourage you to make a choice to say I want holiness in the year to come are you ready for that will you serve the Lord or will you reject him you know it begins at the moment of salvation you have a choice to make when it comes to your sin are you going to accept the one that has provided a way for you to be redeemed that happens in a moment when we recognize we're a sinner and need a savior if there's never been a time and a but if you can look back and say

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I know this is the time and place I called upon the Lord to save me I want to encourage you to consider what are you going to do to move forward to abound more and more in holiness in the year to come as heads are bowed and eyes are closed this morning you know what about you today what are you doing with what Christ has done for you how do you want to start out a new year because you don't have to wait for a few days for a new year it can begin right now what about you today as the piano plays what about you what decision are you going to make what your walk going to look like

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