



# Be the Message New Year

based on the book *Be the Message* by Kerry and Chris Shook

*We turn the page of the calendar and get a sense of newness. Isn't that what God's message is about? He exclaims, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:5). As this new year breaks, how can we both experience this newness and express it to others?*

## FOR CHURCH LEADERS

### Teach/preach on the “new creation.”

The key verse here is 2 Corinthians 5:17, but you could easily do a whole series on this chapter. We are “compelled by the love of Christ” (v. 14). As “ambassadors” (v. 20), we are entrusted with God’s “ministry of reconciliation” (v. 18). People may think we’re “out of our mind” (v. 13), but we have a whole new perspective (“faith, not sight,” v. 7).

### Plan a “silent retreat.”

We all need to learn to listen to the divine whisper, but our everyday lives can get very loud. What if you took a group away for a Friday night and Saturday, with a focus on hearing from God? Plan a Bible study on Friday evening that sets up important meditative questions. Then send people off with instructions not to speak at all until you gather for breakfast the next morning. Instead, ask them to listen to God, read Scripture, and meditate. The next day, discuss what you heard. NOTE: This can be even harder than it seems, so you might want to try it first with a select group of church leaders.

### Start a research project on community needs.

How much do you know about the community around your church? As you seek to apply the love of Christ to the needs of your neighbors, do you know what they really need? Assemble a team of caring and curious folks to explore this and report back to the congregation. Perhaps community leaders could be brought in to talk about some needs. Consider safety; food and water; health and medical services; family crises; education; and of course spiritual needs. Then ask: *How is Jesus calling us to love our neighbors?*



### **Worship with the Sermon on the Mount.**

Let Jesus' most famous message in Matthew 5-7 be the "script" for a worship service. Unleash the creative talents of artists and teachers. Perhaps the Beatitudes become a series of posters on the sanctuary walls. Perhaps you sing about being the light of the world. Recite the Lord's Prayer. Do comedy skits on planks in eyes and houses on sand. Have a dance about serving two masters. Let congregation members tell stories about giving good gifts to their children, seeking first the kingdom, or asking and receiving. This is Jesus' message; let's try to grasp it with our whole souls.

## **FOR SMALL GROUPS**

### **Do a "new" search and study.**

Use your computer app (or a concordance) to find all the uses of the word "new" in the Bible. Pick a handful of the most interesting and use them in your upcoming Bible studies. For each one, ask: *How can I be new?* and *How can I share newness with others?*

### **End each meeting with a new challenge.**

Why not try a new tradition? As you end each Bible study, have each group member answer two questions: *How can you be the message of Christ in your world in the week ahead?* *How can the rest of us help you do that?*

### **Pray the "Holy Disturbance" prayer.**

At the end of Chapter 7 of *Be the Message* (p. 123) there's a prayer of humble brokenness originally composed by Craig Groeschel. Pray this together with your group.



## FOR INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

### **Rethink resolutions.**

Instead of setting lofty goals that crash and burn by February, try a new approach. Set *two* resolutions. (1) To spend a half-hour once a week listening to God. (You might have to give up a favorite TV show to do this.) You could read the Bible or recite a rote prayer in this time, but the most important thing is to listen. Ask God specifically what he wants you to do in the following week. Then (2) do what he says.

### **Give God your brokenness.**

Quit trying to be good enough for God to love. He loves you. Just offer yourself to him, in all your sins and struggles. Stop trying to hide those things from God. Bring them. Read 1 John 1:9; Romans 5:6-8; and 2 Corinthians 12:9. Then consider how God can use even your faults in his service.

### **Plan a Love Strategy for your family.**

Get a short list of people you want to show love to. Include neighbors and enemies (and possibly siblings). Discuss together how much Jesus loves them, and how you in the family can show the love of Jesus to them. Follow up regularly as you put these ideas into action.