

As we are in the midst of the Holidays, I think back on the celebrations of years past during my Arizona years. The last few days of each year have always held some special times and anticipation for the upcoming New Year.

First and foremost is the celebration of our Saviors birth. In preparation for the special day of Christmas, we focus on the Hope, Peace, Joy and Love of the Season in anticipation of the birth of Jesus Christ. The busyness of the season can easily interfere with this preparation. Each year we have our nativity scene set on top of our piano as one way to remind us daily of the blessing of the birth of baby Jesus.

My first Arizona Christmas was also my first time I was spending Christmas without any family around. My church family definitely filled that void. I was invited to join many families throughout those days that I actually told my family not to bother calling me because I wouldn't be home. I had expected to feel lonely and sad that first Christmas, but was filled with love and joy thanks to my church family. We anticipated this may have been our first Christmas without the 4 of us together with Matt being unsure of being able to come home since he is working in Des Moines. We were blessed because he was able to join us for 3½ days. We have been able to spend those days together and cherish each moment. Thanks to God for the blessing He gives us at this time, and all days.

December typically has been busy with finishing out the semester at school for our children, and work for me. In addition, there had been the ending of many of the youth sports seasons. Many years, it has allowed us travel north for our children to experience the snow and go sledding. With John working at UPS and not being able to take vacation time during their peak season, December has also meant staying in Arizona and not travelling to see my family (primarily all of them are in the Midwest). This year, both kids return to the Midwest and will see snow and experience the winter weather there.

As we prepare for the New Year, we prepare for new opportunities, new friends, new challenges and new experiences. In our house, we will return to using text, Snapchat, FaceTime, email and calling on the phone to connect with our family. Just as we have the various types of technology to stay connected with those we love, we have many methods to stay connected with our God. Three ways to stay connected with God every day is by:

1. Stopping all Compromise – Refuse to allow things of the world (material possessions, career position, worldly pursuits, dysfunctional relationships or social standing) eat away at our time with God. Get His Word into our hearts so nothing else matters.
2. Stay Connected to God by Praying – Talk directly with God. Tell him what is on our minds. Share our concerns with Him. Ask for what we need and what we want. Pray for the needs of others. Believe that our prayers will be answered. Matthew 21:22 NIV *“If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”*
3. Stay Connected by God by Accepting Jesus' Love – John 14:21 NIV – *“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”* We don't have to be shy about our relationship with God but be confident in the love God has for us and His desire to bless us.

The late Rufus Moseley once said, “Life in Jesus is gloriously easy. It has one responsibility: the responsibility of remaining in union. If you stay in union with Him, He'll take care of everything else.” What better way to prepare for the New Year! Connecting with God and staying in union with Him!  
Happy New Year and GOD BLESS YOU!