

Father, we thank You. Yes, Lord, standing on the promises, we cannot fall; when Christ is all in all. Father, this evening, I pray, Father, that You would take Your Word and make it real to our lives. The promise that You have given to us, O Lord, in the beginning of the year, I pray, Father, that You would reinforce that promise into the deep most part of our hearts and, Father, make it real, Father; that we would look unto You, the Author and the Finisher of our faith. For in You, O Lord, every promise is yes and amen and therefore, I pray, Lord Jesus, that You would take these words and make them alive. Whatever is of man, let it fall to the ground and whatever is of You, which is in Your heart, let it become a burden in each one of our hearts and let it bear fruit in our lives. To that end, I pray that You would anoint the speaking and the hearing of this Word and grant us, O Lord, concentration and steadfastness even as we hear Your voice. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

I've titled today's message as 'Aim high for God!' It's interesting, when, as I was returning from a vacation we had; we were at a relative's house for lunch and I just browse their library as usual and I found this book by Chuck Swindoll and whenever I find something interesting, it goes into my bag by default. So, the title of that book was, 'Living Above Mediocrity,' and I came back to Church on Sunday and Pastor was preaching and he didn't reveal the promise to us in the morning, right? I mean, he was talking about focus and I was like; I'm not a prophet, I'm just thinking – focus; maybe, *Philippians 3* is the promise for the year and it was almost close. I was not very far. I didn't get 'Thus says the Lord in my prayer,' but I did get the gist of aiming high. That's what Paul says in *Philippians 3*

Philippians 3:13

¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

This one thing I do, what do I do? This one thing I do, forgetting that which is behind, the successes and failures of 2017 and pressing on forward and I press on to the high calling. It's a high calling in Christ Jesus. I press on towards that. That's what Paul says. And I was just going through the book and I found a very interesting quotation which Chuck Swindoll quotes in his book. So, I'm not plagiarizing; he is. So, let's quote it, regardless. So, let's see what it says. This is just like the first page. He says, "The greatest waste of our natural resources is the number of people who never achieved their potential." This is a very profound statement. Gurajada Appa Rao is a famous Telugu poet and he made a fantastic statement. He said, "Desam ante matti kadhoi; desam ante manishuloi." He said, "Nation is not the land that you live on, it's the people that constitute and the natural resources of the nation is not necessarily the gold and the silver. It's the people." It's remarkable! Therefore, he said the greatest waste of our natural resources is the number of people who never achieve their potential. Get out of that slow lane, shift into that fast lane, (This is still quoting Chuck Swindoll.) If you think you can't, you won't. If you think you can, there is a good chance you will, statistically. My dad used to make this very interesting quotation when we use to study statistic and Mathematics. He said, "Vijay, statistics are life!" but that's okay. But chances are – you will do it. Even making the effort will make you feel like a new person. Take that! Making the effort will make you feel like a new person and he ends the quote with this. He says, "Aim low, boring; aim high, soaring." I mean, I looked at that and Chuck Swindoll actually commented on this and said, "You know what? Many people are bored in their walk with the Lord because their standards are very low," and the call of God in the Bible for Moses was, "Come up and be there!" For Apostle John in the Island of Patmos, He says, 'John, come up!' It's a walk towards a higher calling. That is the reason why Paul will say and Pastor was making that statement, he said, "We are caught in the temporal, we are prisoners of time." And that's a very interesting song that we sang. "You are God alone from before time began." We are supposed to be timeless people. We are all prisoners of time. We are just caught in the now and we forget about the eternal when God is and that is the reason why it says in *Colossians*, "Set your hearts and your minds on things above, where you have been seated with Christ Jesus," in *Colossians 3*. Aim low, boring; aim high soaring. How many of you thought your Christian walk was very boring last year? The chances are, your expectations were very low. See, when your expectations are high, every day is exciting. I mean, when expectations are low, aims are low. It's boring because nothing is required of you. You just meet the status quo. You are just one of those ranking file Christians who necessarily amount to almost zero.

Aim High For God!

Look at what *Matthew 5:19* will say; here is Jesus on Sermon on the Mount. Hrish and I were discussing this. He found a book where somebody wrote about hundred most famous talk in the history of man. The hundred most famous talk in the history of man. You know what is the rank one? Any guesses? Sermon on the Mount and this is a secular book, by the way. It is interesting. So, we will go to what He says and this is in the English Standard Version. Look at what He says, in *Matthew 5:19*,

Matthew 5:19

¹⁹ Therefore, whoever relaxes...

Relax, chill, That's the lingo. John Piper hates the word 'fun'. "That was fun meeting." "That was a fun doctrine." He says, "Christian life is not fun, it's excitement." Fun is actually lowering the standard.)

¹⁹ Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them (In other words, without relaxing and meets the requirements of God) and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

I was listening to a sermon recently by John Piper on Jonathan Edwards. It was a commentary on Jonathan Edwards and this is what he has to say about Jonathan Edwards. He is reading the exposition of Jonathan Edward and he's going crazy and he's looking at his audience and this is what he says – "No preacher or teacher including Jonathan Edwards lives up to the level that he preaches and teaches. If he does, then he is not preaching high enough." You can take that with a pinch of salt but you get the principle here. I use to really struggle with this thought when Pastor usde to say, "Even if I'm not practicing it, I still want to preach it because I want to preach it for myself." I used to say, "How can you have the conviction when you are preaching at that level and not really meeting up to it?" That was way back in Abids he used to say that but then, of course, it got confirmed recently when John Piper said it. In the mouth of two witnesses, everything gets established. John and James have to say the same thing. I'll tell you why I said this, there was somebody who was actually preaching from a *Psalms* and he was preaching from the MacArthur's study Bible and then, he made a very interesting statement. He said, "Whenever you are preaching from the Psalms, it's important that you read the MacArthur's study Bible and most of the preaching that I'm doing is from the MacArthur's study Bible." It also says, "Anybody who is preaching from the Psalms has to refer to Spurgeon." The treasury of David. Then, he said, this is a very interesting statement. He says, "When I read Spurgeon's comments on one of the Psalms," He says, "it is interesting that both I and Spurgeon draw from MacArthur." It is very interesting. Everybody, anywhere are confirming because they are timeless. I don't know how many of you got that but that's okay. So, no preacher or teacher lives up to the level that he or she preaches. If he does, then he's not preaching high enough. That is the reason why Piper was writing the eulogy for R.C. Sproul who's passed away recently. He said, "Sproul used to exalt the holiness of God so much that the only option that you would have at the end of the meeting is to fall flat on your face and say, "Lord, save a wretched like me."" What happened in the contemporary Church; not necessarily this Church is the fact that the standards have been lowered and what you have to do now is to get all kinds of external things to keep the people excited because they are not excited with their walk with the Lord. Why? Because their standards are low. And this malady which was found in the people who came out of Egypt. *1 Corinthians 10*. Look at what it says,

1 Corinthians 10:1-5

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. (Everybody) For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. (Look at what it says, but the irony) ⁵ But with most of them...

What is this most? Except three. That is most. People have this question: how many people will be saved? A hundred and forty-four thousand people. Is it a figurative number or exact number? You know what Jesus' answer to you is going to be? "Will you please stop asking that question – strive to enter through the narrow gate for many will seek and will not be able."

⁵ But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

Aim High For God!

Other translations will say, “Were overthrown in the wilderness.” And it’s a very interesting Greek word which is only used once in the entire new Testament. Scattered Catastronimai from which we get the word catastrophe. Remember an earthquake or a hurricane or a cyclone which comes in, slams a place. What happens? Everything is scattered, everything is shattered, everything is laid low. That’s exactly what he is saying. They all met with a catastrophe and that catastrophe was sent from God and not from Satan because God was not well please with many of them except for two, Joshua and Caleb because they said, “You know what, guys? Aim high.” Let our lives not be a catastrophe because we don’t please God. Many lives scattered, they don’t amount to anything. Why? Because they have lowered the standard. They always wanted to lower the standard. They were bored with Manna. What is the Manna? Everyday Manna, Manna, Manna. But there was one man who is eating the same food, who is drinking the same spiritual water and spiritual food and he was never, ever bored – Moses. Look at what it says in *Jude 5*

Jude 1:5

⁵ But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

It’s a very interesting word, Apollonomai, from which we get the word Apollyon who is the destroyer. He allowed the destroyer to come and destroy their lives and to scatter them in the wilderness. Who is that? The Lord. Look at what it says in the English standard version.

⁵ Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

Destroyed them because they did not believe. Why? Because they always wanted God to come down to their level while God was saying, “Come up to My level. You cannot bring Me down.” Lowering of standards in our life and it’s happening over and over again in our country.

I was talking to Pastor the other day. Pastor was talking to us rather. He was saying, “I don’t know if India can survive persecution because we are all compromisers.” You remember the famous story about Golconda Fort being impregnable? Impenetrable? “Oh, you have to do this. You have to do that.” One guy said, “I know it’s impenetrable. There’s one way we can easily penetrate it – bribe the sentry. That fellow will compromise.” And Pastor was saying, “Our culture is a culture of compromise.” So, it’s a warning to all of us never to lower the standard. And never ask the Lord and say, “Lord, can You give Me a break today? Please? Let it be a smooth message.” I’m not saying we shouldn’t have encouragement from time to time. Let us never lower the standard albeit, regardless of our weaknesses.

So, keeping that in mind, I want to position today the promise for 2018. What is the promise for 2018? This is *Psalm 27:4*,

Psalm 27:4

⁴ One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life...

Where? Ah! That’s a desire! When we look at these promises we have very emotional responses. O, that’s a promise! I’ll come and dwell in the house of the Lord. I will worship, hold on! Hold on! It’s not low. It’s high. That desire is not an easy desire. He says, “One thing I have desired.” Therefore, for whom? “Of the Lord,” not for myself. I cannot do it in my own strength, in other words.

...That will I seek: (To have that kind of desire in other words,) That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life To behold the beauty of the LORD...

Really? Are we going to survive? It says in *Isaiah 33*, if I’m right, it says, “Sinners in Zion were scared.” Why? Who can dwell in the midst of everlasting burnings? In the house of the Lord where preaching is absolutely on fire. Do you think it is easy? No. no. let’s see that.

...That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life To behold the beauty of the LORD. And to inquire (or meditate. That's the word,) in His temple.

Well, that's the promise and God said, "He would give." Let me tell you something – God is sovereign. Man is responsible. Say that again. God is sovereign. Man is responsible. God says, "I have chosen this guy to be a vessel of honour and this guy to be a vessel of dishonour. Pharaoh and Abraham. And I will have mercy on those whom I will have mercy. I will harden whomever I wish to harden." That is the sovereignty of God. And then, you will look at that and say, "Is not God unjust?" and Paul will say, "Shut your mouth." He's not even going to give you an argument for that. Who are you to question God? That is *Romans 9*. That is the sovereignty of God. There is also responsibility of man. In a large house, there are many vessels. Some for honour and some for dishonour. Whose house? Lord's house. If you cleanse yourself, you will be made into a vessel of honour. That is human responsibility. That duality is so mysterious. *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling for, God is at work to both will and to obey, to do His good pleasure through you.* But you work out. Purge out the old leaven that you may be made a new lump as you really are new. So, Christian life is active. That is the reason why it's never boring if you know the requirements of God are. So, the question, therefore, is: if I want to desire to live in the house of God, you know, God should invite me, right? I just cannot go in. We have a lot of New Testament sentimental pictures like, "I stand at the door and knock," etc. But there is something also. I accepted the Lord. Yes, that is true. You accepted the Lord because He accepted you. See. He has invited you into His house. And therefore, if you want to be in His house and to dwell in His house, there are certain requirements. Let us see those requirements.

One of my favourite psalms which I often read and get depressed; and it's good to get depressed by the way because you know that you are not reaching up to the standards, and therefore, depression is good. Depression is not necessarily wrong, or bad or negative all the time. Like I heard Sunday's message and 31st night message. I told Pastor, "Pastor, it's going to take a year for me to digest that." It feels like a freight train coming and steam rolling us. I don't know sometimes people are so happy. Why? Maybe, your requirements are absolutely low. Look at what it says in my favourite psalm. Five verses. Depressing verses. Okay? if you've never been depressed reading this psalm I hope by the end of reading this, you'll get depressed. Look at this. *Verse 1.*

Psalm 15:1-5

¹LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?

That is Zion. O boy! The answer is rhetorical by the way. It's a rhetorical question. So, if you change that question into a statement, the answer is – no one. Absolutely. I should say, "No. No. No. That is not right." Oh yeah? Let's see the requirements therefore. *Verse 2.*

²He who walks uprightly, (The word is perfect.) And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart (24/7. That is one level of depression. Okay? Level 2.); ³He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; (Boy! Depressing! *Verse 4.*) ⁴In whose eyes a vile person is despised...

It comes against all our modern-day Christianity, "Love the sinner and hate the sin." Look at what it says. There is some kind of genuine hatred toward sin in other words. In whose eyes, a vile person is despised.

⁴In whose eyes a vile person is despised. But he honors those who fear the LORD; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change

Really? One of the indictments in my home is that you don't keep your word. "Papa, you said the other day you will give me some reward. And you forgot." And then I had to think and I was like "O Lord, I forgot." And then, ah! "The vacation was your reward by the way." I'll tell you why this is important by the way. We'll come to that. *Verse 5.*

⁵He who does not put out his money at usury Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. (Okay, so he takes the bribe against the not innocent. I don't know. Then, he says) He who does these things shall never be moved.

How many of you meet these requirements please? O you got a promise! That is automatic? The promise? O yes! Every promise is yes and amen in Christ Jesus. Let's look at verse one first.

¹ *Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle?*

The law of God is ruthless. It's absolutely ruthless. Very ruthless. I was discussing with some of you the other day. A few weeks back, Aunty Catherine, she met with an accident. She fell in her home and she had a surgery. So, Pastor and I, we went to visit her at the hospital and pray with her. And we were discussing. She was in a special hospital. Okay? It's an orthopaedic hospital, Uday Hospital in Hyderabad. And she was telling Pastor and I, "Ninety percent of the cases here are freak accidents. Ninety percent. People slip and fall." That's exactly what happened to her. The grandchildren came home and she walks very fast. She is extremely active for a woman her age. She walks very fast at home and those guys spilled water on the floor. And she slipped and she fell on her hip. No mistake of hers by the way. And she said, "Ninety percent of the cases in this hospital are this." I was thinking about this for a while and a few days and I was saying, "How ruthless the law of the law of gravity is!" I mean, come on! She could not even argue with gravity, "Gravity give me a break! It's not my mistake. Somebody put water. I did not see. I slip. I fell." You can't argue with gravity, can you? "Please, please, please, just give me a break." That's what children learn over a period of time that you cannot argue with gravity. The first steps they take, they're afraid of falling. When Abigail was taking her first steps, one, two, three, and, "Take her! Take her!" I mean, take her that is. She was scared. Because she knows she cannot negotiate with it somehow intuitively. It's built into her system. You cannot argue with the law of gravity even if you break it without intention. Nobody breaks the law. "Today, I'm going to break gravity." Nobody! Right? Nobody does that intentionally and the law is so ruthless. I was thinking about this and I said, "If the law of gravity is so ruthless, what about the law of God?" I cannot argue with the law. "Arrey! It's a white lie. I did not even plan it." I didn't get up in the morning and say, "I'm going to lie in the morning today." I didn't say that. I didn't say. "Let me make a promise that I'm going to break." I didn't say I'm going to make a promise that I'm going to break. No, I didn't say that. I didn't say that. The law! The reason why we do not appreciate our salvation is we do not know and we are not apprehended how ruthless the law is.

Moses brought the law. Three thousand people died. O saints, saints, saints! Never lower the standards of God. Even if it is a small breaking of the moral law of God unintentionally. That's what happens in the *Book of Leviticus*. He says, "If you build a home and you don't put a parapet wall and a guy comes to your home and he stands there and he falls, you're guilty! You will say, "Baba! I didn't even ask him to go upstairs." My landlord is very careful. He said, "Vijay! Vijay! No going on the stairs. No passing this line." And one day, when I passed, he said, "This is unacceptable!" Thank God for landlords like that. They discipline us. You cannot argue! Can you? You can't. You have to pay the price. And what is the wages of sin? Death, even if it is unintentional. You know what that fellow has to do? He has to come and give a guilt offering for unintentional sin, sins of ignorance. That means somebody innocent has to die in your place. What you're essentially telling? You are saying the punishment, which was due you, is passed on to this innocent animal. Oh! Saints, the law is ruthless. Who can abide in the Holy hill of God? Nobody. Look at **Matthew 5: 17-18**. This is what Jesus has to say. He is going to make us more depressed by the way.

Matthew 5:17-18

¹⁷ ***"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, (if you break even the smallest of the commandments unintentionally, you have to pay the price,) will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.***

So, what does God do? He loves us so much, right? That's the reason when Martin Luther was reading about the righteousness of God and he was looking at the righteous requirements of God; somebody asked Martin Luther, "Do you love God?" He said, "Love God? I hate him. Look at His righteous requirements. What is this? I am actually a good guy. I am a monk." And if he can't stand a chance, then how much more you and I? Until something breaks through somehow somebody has to fulfil the right requirements and the just and the righteous requirements of the Law, for whom? For us. And who does that? Let's look at,

Romans 8:3-4

³ ***For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.***

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So, God sends His Son; He kills Him on the Cross. That is why He says, *“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the Passover Lamb.”*

Remember that when Jesus was twelve years old, they go to the festival every year and He gets lost. Do you know in which festival He gets lost? The Passover. That was the lamb’s blood that was slain, the blood was applied on the door post so that the Angel of death can pass over and then, He is asking the Scribes, “Hmm.. Passover Lamb, who is this he is talking about?” He is actually taking about Him. And then, He asks them questions and He gives them answers and they were amazed. This is the same Passover Lamb who came to take the sin of the world has come to the temple. And that’s the reason you won’t understand how justification is. What an incredible gift it is!

We look into another passage in

Hebrews 10:19-22

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way (You see that? Blood of Jesus, which speaks the better word than Abel’s. He pleads for us,) that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,

He condemned our sin in His flesh so that we can approach God and now, we can come boldly into the holy of holies so that we can obtain mercy and grace in the time of need. Why? Because God has paid the penalty for the sin. Now, we have access for that. Thank God! Otherwise, who can? None, except through the Blood of Jesus.

²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

Now, He is there as our advocate. “Father,” He says, “They believed in Me. They trusted in Me. Please let them enter,” and God does not look at you; he looks at His Son and allows us inside.

²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

This is what He does. He washes us. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to cleanse us from all our unrighteousness* and give us a right standing with God. That’s the gift that He gives so that we can enter into His house. So, there is a cleansing that He does and there is a cleansing that we have to do. Christian life is not automatic. It’s a war.

“I have given this land to you,” that’s what God tells Joshua. “But go in and possess it. Fight for it.” Six hundred thousand men, they said, “Boss, it’s a too high a standard,” and they were scattered in the wilderness but three people said, you know what? Even Caleb, at eighty-three, he was asked, “Caleb, what do you want? Do you want the plains?” “No, my aim has always been the mountain, Brother. Send me there.” High. So, something which we need to do. So, let’s look at *verse 2*; what should we do, therefore?

Psalms 15:2

² He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart;

Look at the order – walk, work, Word. Ours is word, all the time. You are full of word. You have to say something. You can see that in our WhatsApp groups also. Somebody always have to say something, which doesn’t make sense at all, sometimes. He who has ears let them hear. I really sometimes wonder, “Do you have so much to say?” What does God say? We will come to that. The word ‘stop’. It is very animated, by the way. God is animated. We will come to that.

What is this ‘walking’? What is walking perfectly? What does it mean? How do we achieve it? Walking uprightly, walking with your spine on your back, in other words. You are whole. You are healthy. Walking in integrity. That’s what it means. The word is ‘tammim’ in Hebrew from which we get the word in Urdu word ‘tammam’. Tammam chijo me - bahut acha hai. That’s what it means – wholeness, completeness, uprightness, integrity these are all synonyms by the way. What does it mean? How do we do that? Let’s see Scripture.

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Genesis 6:9

⁹ ***This is the genealogy of Noah*** (I like that introduction. In other words, this is the resume of Noah. Those days family tree was very important. Not anymore. Eathakota is not very important every now and then, you have the 'Eathakota's' invitation and the 'Nandamoori's' invitation; but those days, the genealogy; the resume was important) ***Noah was a just man*** (the same word, perfect man- tammim), ***perfect in his generations.*** (How was he perfect in his generation? Because) ***Noah walked with God.***

That's the key. We know this famous verse,

Amos 3:3

³ ***Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?***

How do we cleanse ourselves and how do we aim high in 2018? Stop arguing start agreeing. Somebody sent in the WhatsApp the other day about Derek Prince's Sermon, which is a part of a sermon, which is going to shake everything. It is a two-part sermon – "I am going to shake everything that can be shaken." Two hours, forty-five minutes long sermon. I heard the entire sermon. And he says, "We should stop Christian counselling. Stop writing books on Christian counselling. Take the Bible. And if couple comes to you, this one keeps on coming to you, problems and problems, tell, I am not going to counsel you anymore." "Love your wife and you don't love your wife. Submit to your husband and you don't submit to your husband." First learn to do this and then, come back again. But what they will do? They will argue. Agree that you sinned and when you mess up don't justify. Don't argue. There is one famous arguer in the Bible. His name is Saul. Look at how he argues. But before we go there, very interesting chapter in

Jeremiah 3:13

¹³ ***Only acknowledge your guilt— you have rebelled against the LORD your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me," declares the LORD.***

You acknowledge that you did not obey. And when you acknowledge that you did not obey, I am going to help you but you do not. That you will not. Let's look at what it says in in *1 Samuel 15*. This guy is an arguer.

1 Samuel 15:13-25

¹³ ***Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD."*** ¹⁴ ***But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"*** ¹⁵ ***And Saul said, "They (the famous analogy that Pastor was talking about Adam – "This woman You gave.") have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed."*** ("They", "we". He is including himself there. Whatever is obedient he is including and whatever is disobedient he is not including. That's his idea and he is arguing his case. He is going on and on.) ¹⁶ ***Then Samuel said to Saul, "Be quiet! And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night."***

Our devotions are monologues. You know what monologues is? They go on and on and on and God says, "Stop." This year, stop!

And he said to him, "Speak on." ¹⁷ ***So Samuel said, "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel?"*** ¹⁸ ***Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.'*** ¹⁹ ***Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?"*** ²⁰ ***And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites."*** ²¹ ***But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal."***

Then, of course, you know the story.

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²⁴ Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. ²⁵ Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD."

He never acknowledged that he disobeyed. Never. Think about it how many times in 2017 when we know that we have disobeyed, we argued with God, "I didn't do it; I did it, I didn't do this," and you know that you actually transgressed. Stop arguing and start agreeing with God. Let your argument become less and less and your obedience become more and more. Agree with Him. When you say, "Lord, I disobeyed Your voice." Acknowledge it. He says, "Just acknowledge your guilt. I am not here to condemn you. Don't argue with Me."

It's very interesting how children learn this. How interestingly they will learn to argue the disobedience! I remember my two children. I can use them as examples when they are young. When they grow big, they will be upset with me. They have a bathtub (I told you some time back) and tell them not to step into the bathtub and make it dirty. One day, both of them were in the bath tub in their feet and got it completely dirty. When I came into the bathroom, I said, "Abigail, I said 'don't get into the tub with your dirty feet'." Abigail's argument, "That was not my idea!" She said, "It'll be a great idea to put our feet into the bathtub and therefore, both of us put our feet in to the bathtub," and I was looking at her. Sometimes, we are so good in arguing our case, we actually insult God's intelligence. I was looking at her and said, "Did you know that I have a Ph. D in robotics? And you are absolutely totally convinced that I am convinced with that argument." Unbelievable!

If you've seen the movie 'Godfather', in the last scenes, when he is getting rid of all his enemies, he comes to him and he says; the guy getting killed, "I didn't do it!" He says, "I like you as a brother but don't say that you didn't do it. You are insulting my intelligence." And most of us insult God's intelligence by saying, "Lord, I did not do it." We give arguments so that we can buy our case out. There are only two people who can argue their case before God – either it is you or Jesus. That's it. Get that straight this year. Don't argue. I tell to all the young people – your arguments. You are telling reasons why you disobeyed God. And I can see lot of arguments over there. Stop arguing; meaning – this is not little children; it's even for a little older people too. Why? They can't do it? Don't argue a case. Let God argue your case and He will only argue your case when you say, "Lord, I disobeyed." That is the reason why the Pharisees and the tax collectors justified God by getting baptised in the waters of baptism but the Pharisees and the Sadducees rejected the counsel of God and they did not justify God." They rejected the counsel of God therefore, the baptism. When you have to get baptised, you have to publicly confess your sins and those people were like, "No way." They will argue. Stop arguing this year. Start agreeing. Whenever you sin, acknowledge that you disobeyed. Do that every day of your life. Don't argue with God. Don't insult His intelligence. He sees everything. That is the reason why John will say, "If you say that you have not sinned, you make," whom a liar? "You make Him a liar and His truth is not in you."

Second is – "Trust in the Lord. Wait for Him." Look at what He says in *Genesis 17*. This is again the context of walking.

Genesis 17:1

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.

Why? After he messed up, he created an Ishmael. Thirteen years of silence. God refuses to speak to him and he is out in the afternoon; out of his tent. God visits him and says, "Walk before Me." Don't trust in your own intelligence, in other words.

Look at what it says in other words in *Proverbs 23*,

Proverbs 3:5-6

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

Let me tell you this year – don't make any hasty decision without consulting with God. Ask this question to yourself when you are making a career shift. Some of you are in a brink of making a lot of major decisions. I know because I hear your conversations and the thoughts which you express. Be very careful when you make decisions of moving here and there. Ask yourself this question: will I stand firm if I go out of this place? Is this what the Lord is asking of me? A lot of people, they

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just make. Let this year be a shift for many of you because of the decisions you are going to make. Either you are going to make a decision to leave or to stay, whatever it is, when you are not ready. To marry or not to marry when you are not ready. Trust in the Lord. Take godly counselling. You know how subtly you avoid counsel? You know it. You know, if you take this and ask your Pastor, he will say, "No, wait." Therefore, you do it first and then, you mess up and say, "Pastor, I messed up." Who asked you to do it? I don't want to name specific names but I know many are making career decisions, career choices. Hold on! What comes first? If you choose to gain your life, you lose it. Period!

In multitude of counselors, there is safety. Take godly counsel. You know, at least, there should be one person in your life who will disagree with you. You make a decision and if there is at least one guy, somebody; I think one of the US Presidents would never make a decision, especially, when they are going to war unless he finds one guy who opposes his view, because there are lot of 'Yes men' in the world. They say, "Very good, brother. You can do it. Go ahead." I remember once I was coming back from Chennai in train. There was one prosperity pastor. He looked at me and he puts his hands upon me and says, "This year, the Lord is telling me that you are going to the US." I didn't go by the way. A lot of people who gives counsel like that. Hold on; who will side will your idol.

I was reading, recently, Tim Keller in one of his books and he says, "Think about this guy who is working hard and hard to make a living. He wants to get a breakthrough in his job. He is not getting a breakthrough. He is working hard. In the process, he is sacrificing his time with the Lord; he is sacrificing his time with his family; he is sacrificing everything." And he asks this question, "What is the worst thing that could happen to him? Is it success or failure? Many people will say 'failure'. Sin will destroy, No! He does not succeed, he will ask this question: what is going on here? But if he succeeds, it will only confirm him in his trajectory of his disobedience." Ask God this year if people in the Church have given you counsel and you are still adamantly following the trajectory, be warned!

Don't go out. Think about it, this guy, Elisha was called to the ministry when he was thirty-five to forty years old. I was listening to Tim Keller – the person whom the God chooses. Elisha was called into ministry when he was thirty-five to forty years old and Elijah comes and puts a mantle on him. You know that? Remember? And then, he slaughters all the animals and he follows Elijah. If you read the narrative, so many kings pass by during their tenure as both Elisha and Elijah. It was, at least, about eighteen years, theologians say. And if you ask Elisha's parents; they all know – this guy is next in line to Elijah, "What's your son doing?" "He is next in line Elijah." Ah! Interesting. "So, what does he do?" "He makes breakfast for Elijah. He washes his clothes." "What? What is your son doing?" "He is the general in the army." "How old is your son?" "Forty years old." "And what is your son doing?" "Oh, he is a general in the army." "How much does he earn?" "Good pay packet. Extremely doing well." "But what is your son doing?" "Washing plates, washing, pouring water on Elijah." "For how many years?" "Eighteen years." Not one prophecy. He was forty years old. He was called into the ministry till the time he was fifty-eight, (it is the time of retirement by the way in our government), he doesn't even speak one word of prophecy. Can you imagine that? Can you wait? Can you wait in His presence? "One thing is needful," Jesus told Martha, "and she has chosen the right thing to sit at My feet and wait."

Look at what it says in *Psalm 27*. This is the same Psalm from which we get the promise.

Psalm 27:14

¹⁴ Wait on the Lord; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord!

Wait. Don't be in a hurry to make decisions in your life. See in every decision if God is first. Young people, take that cue from me. Otherwise, you will waste like the way I wasted my life and I read C. S. Lewis and all these people these days and I said, "What was I doing useless stuff and watching useless stuff in the internet? I could have redeemed the time and read. I didn't read when I was young." Don't waste your life in senseless pursuits. Wait. That's something which I wanted to speak about.

Second;

Psalm 15:2

² He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth (where?) in his heart;

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What does it mean? Keep yourself free from all self-deception. The greatest person who can deceive you is you yourself. Nobody else. And how will you deceive yourself? Look at what it says in *1 Corinthians 3:18*,

1 Corinthians 3:18

¹⁸ Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

That's the reason why, don't think that when you are young, you know it all. No, you do not know. So many things, you don't know. I was reading J. I. Packer. He was talking about wisdom. Look at what he says; this is how he defines wisdom in one of his books. He says, "For us to be truly wise in the Bible sense, our intelligence and our cleverness but be harnessed to the right end." Many intelligent people but you are all stallions. You are not harnessed. You want to do your own thing. And then, he says, "Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination of the best and the highest goal together with the surest means of attaining it. Wisdom is, in fact, the practical side of moral goodness. As such, it is found in its fullness only in God." So, human wisdom, you can be incredibly intelligent but if your heart is deceived, your intelligence is useless; it is foolishness.

Look at what it says in the same book – "Human wisdom can be frustrated by circumstantial factors outside the wise person's control. Ahithophel, David's turn-court counsellor gave sound advice when he urged Absalom to finish David off at once." You know what Ahithophel said? "I know your father is weak now. Send your army and finish him off. He is weak now." That was real incredible counsel. And you know what David said? "Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." And what happened? "Before he recovered from the first shock of Absalom's strike, Absalom stupidly took a different line and Ahithophel, seething with wounded pride, forcing no doubt that the revolt was now sure to fail and unable to forgive himself for being such a fool to join it, went home in despair and committed suicide." Why? Was he intelligent? Was he wise? But his heart. This is something which you need to see. It is deceived hearts. Keep yourself from self-deception this year.

How do we deceive ourselves? In another place – *James 1:21-22*,

James 1:21-24

²¹ Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and (what does he do? He) immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

Another way people deceives themselves.

James 1:26

²⁶ If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

You cannot control your tongue? You are deceiving yourself. Ask God this year. "Lord," Keep on talking. The greatest instrument is a weapon; look at what it says in *Romans 6:13*,

Romans 6:13

¹³ And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members (especially, your tongue,) as instruments of righteousness to God.

Look at what it says in *Ephesians 4:29*,

Ephesians 4:29

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

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Another place;

²⁹ Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Another translation;

...but only what is helpful for building up the one in need and bringing grace to those who listen.

When you open your mouth, will it bring grace to those who listen? That's the question.

This gives us a perfect position for verse 3. Look at what it says in *Psalm 15:3*,

Psalm 15:3

³ He who does not backbite with his tongue,

Do you know what this word 'backbite' is? It's a very interesting word. Do you know what it means? To spy. ABN Andhra Jyothi – investigative journalism. ABN Andhra Jyothi – we report, you decide. That is the principle of many people in the Church. What do they do? They do investigative journalism. Espionage. "What is that person doing?" Always – "Mujhe jaana chahiye tumhaara zindagi mein kya ho raha hain? Batao. I want to know what is happening in your life. Tell me." I've see that. I just hear it. I'm not pointing at anyone. I just listen to this – "Oh, this person is like that. This is how they treat their children at home. This is how they bring up their children." I see that. This is giving reporting news. Investigative journalism – we report; you decide. Think about it. This year, stop it. Just mind your own business. Backbite is spying. We are spies in Churches. We call them 'Scotland Yard'. Oh my goodness. They want to know every conversation and what's going on in every person's lives except theirs. I think they just want to look at other people's lives because their lives are so miserable that they just want to say, "He's falling. Thank You, Jesus. He is falling. He is not very good. I thought he was very good. But that fellow is falling. Okay, nice. He fell the other day." That's exactly what I was telling yesterday in the Roman's Bible study. I said, "The younger brother comes home and the elder brother is upset. He is a very religious fellow. He is very upset that his father has accepted him." I'm just looking at the scenario. It's Zac Poonen who told this – "He clothed him righteousness, gave him a robe, fattened calf." Kalyani Biryani was given that day. And then, he was very upset and he was looking for opportunities. "You've accepted this fellow? Let me see one day." The fellow is trying to control his smoking and he goes there and he just smokes quietly and he comes back. "Ah, that fellow fell. Father, this son of yours; your son, you know what he did? He smoked. You put a robe, right? Look at what he did." That's how people are. They want to look at how other people fall secretly. If those guys are absolutely on fire, they want him not to succeed.

The other day, I was talking to Hrishi and Hrishi said, "Anna, whenever you make a decision and it's something out of the box, everybody wants you not to succeed just so that they can prove to you that you are not good enough." That is spying. Let us be done with spying this year. Just look at your own life.

1 Timothy 5:13

¹³ And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.

Stop.

Then,

Proverbs 11:12-13

¹² Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent. ¹³ Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.

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And I will tell you something, this is one of the most important things in any establishment, even it is a Church, to earn the trust of the eldership. And nobody will trust you if you are loose in your mouth, in your talk. Nobody. You have to earn that trust.

Let's come back to *Psalm 15:4* – the first part.

Psalm 15:4

⁴ in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the Lord...

Choose company who will challenge you this year. Hang out with people who will challenge you. hang out. Ask them, “How do you do this?” That’s exactly what people say in the world, right? If you want to be successful, hang out with people who are successful. Don’t hang out with deceivers. In your college, they will say, “Nenu eppudu chadhavaledu. I didn’t study.” But he will get full marks. Why? Because he doesn’t want you to get full marks because he wants to eliminate competition. “Emi chadhavaledu. Naaku emi radu. (I didn’t study anything. I don’t know anything).” No, don’t hang out with such people. Hang out with people who will really challenge you, you are not in competition with you. I’m telling you, honestly, this is some of the things we have to learn. Look at what it says in *Psalm 16:3*,

Psalm 16:3

³ As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.

These are the people with whom I hang out with. These are the people who will speak into my life. I’m telling you honestly, our men’s Bible study is always fired up. It’s electric. Is it not? It is. It is iron sharpening iron. You know why? There is a challenge every time to press on and move ahead. And don’t hang with people who will just want to chit-chat. Speaking to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Very clear – psalms and hymns. Learn a few hymns this year. Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Let the Word of Christ richly dwell in you. Let the Holy Spirit richly dwell in you and encourage one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. In other words, sharpen the other person; let the other person sharpen you. Let them rebuke you. How many of you got their first rebuke this year already? You see? You haven’t got it because you were not searching for it. People have challenged you already? I don’t know. Ask yourself this question – how do you succeed in life? You hang out with people who challenge you. don’t avoid. A lot of people avoid. “Arrey, valutho unte, vaadu eppudu Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.” (If I’m with him, he will always talk about Jesus) This even happens in our school. Small children. There is one guy called Phinehas. Always Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. “I love Jesus.” And other people hate him and bully him because that fellow puts everybody else to shame. I’m telling you something – don’t hang out with people who will just pour water on your zeal and on your enthusiasm but who will harness it, who will correct you, who will love you, who will rebuke you, who will speak the truth into your heart with love. Look at this *Proverbs 27:5-6*,

Proverbs 27:5-6

⁵ Better is open rebuke than hidden love. ⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

What will he do? He will kiss you. But what does a friend do? He wounds you. I like the statement that Pastor keeps telling me. Whenever I meet him, he says, “Vijay, I might have hurt people but I never harm them.” Fantastic. It hurts. Truth hurts. Another place;

Psalm 141:5

⁵ Let a righteous man strike me—

That’s exactly what Nehemiah did. “You come here, you fellows.” He tore the beard and gave them one shot. Don’t do that. People in GSS are very Old Testament types.

⁵ Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head;

Wow! How many of you thought that slapping on your face is like oil on your head?

...let my head not refuse it. (That is rebellion.) Yet my prayer is continually against their evil deeds.

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Let people smite me, Lord. Let the righteous smite me. Let them speak to me. This is high calling, saints. Don't let people, "He might feel bad. I should walk on eggshells. I should not say anything here and there." Otherwise, "You hurt me. Vaadu nannu kottadu." (He hit me). Let not my head refuse it. Look at what it says in *Proverbs 20:30*,

Proverbs 20:30

³⁰ ***Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, As do stripes the inner depths of the heart.***

This is fantastic. There are strokes that reach the inner depths of the heart. The strokes are going inside. It is making sense. Ask the question, "why has this happened to me," when God has smacked you. Don't be angry with God.

Another *Proverb*.

Proverbs 28:23

²³ ***He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward Than he who flatters with the tongue.***

That's exactly what I tell my parents. Thank God for my parents. They spanked the daylights out of me. They find favor in my eyes now. Really, honestly. Pastor keeps telling about his father, "Thank God for my father. He inculcated discipline into my life." Now, he says, "My father has found favor in my eyes." Choose company which will challenge you, saints, this year. Let the mark be up. Don't lower the standard for yourself and be the mediocre Christian.

Finally,

Psalms 15:5

⁵ ***He who does not put out his money at usury,***

Don't be a calculated giver. I hear this – "I put in my hard-earned money into the offering bag." Let me tell you something – you are not supposed to say that. You know who can say that? The Pastor can say that but not you because it is God who gave you the strength to earn wealth. He could have just taken His hands off your lives and you would have been in the hospital, not being able to earn any living. And then, you will say, "I put my hard-earned money into it and this is how they use it." Be very careful when you use all those words because I hear it. I hear it in my Church but I'm not pointing out any names. He, who has ears to hear, let him hear. Calculated givers. "How much did you give?" "Ten percent." When you heard that message by Tim Dilena, I was excited when I heard it. Don't be a calculated giver this year. Everybody is doing Mathematics. The principle of compound interest works in everybody's life. "If I give to God, how much will I get?" You are putting your money in usury, saints. It's never yours, first of all. *2 Corinthians 9:6*. The point is this – this is what Paul has to say. The point is this,

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

⁶ ***But this I say: He who sows sparingly...***

In the heart, let me add that. In the heart. You may be giving twenty thousand rupees, for example, but I thought I'd give fifteen thousand only. Ten thousand only. But this guy gave thirty thousand. You know what will happen? Only that ten thousand or fifteen thousand is accepted. Five thousand is gone. The Church has become rich but not you.

⁷ ***Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.***

And why? Why is this important? God is able to make all grace. Do you want grace to overcome sin your life, saints? Do you want grace so that you will get a revelation when you read Scriptures? Be faithful in your giving. Oh my goodness, you see? He who is faithful in unrighteous mammon will be faithful with eternal riches too. And eternal riches are God Himself. He who does these things shall never be moved. Aim high for God, saints. Aim low, boring. Aim high, soaring. Let the standards be high this year. You increase your standards. God will do it for each one of us in our sins here. He will allow situations in our lives to raise standards. Raise your standard for giving. Raise your standard for praying and taking risks for God. You need to understand – if you want to win with God, you have to lose with the world. There are no two ways about it. You

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cannot just have everything best in the world and you cannot also have the best in the Kingdom. No way. He who loses his life will gain it. That's the principle in the Kingdom. This is for all those people who make choices in career – "My field is here." Hold on. Ask God. I was also like that. I wanted to get out of this place but restraints. Do you know why? Not because God forced me but because I said, "Lord, I choose You." Aim high, soaring. Aim low, boring. And then, what will happen? You will start dwelling in His house and you will understand what this promise is – to dwell in God's house. Okay, let's pray.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we thank You for speaking to our hearts. I pray, Lord, this year, we will aim high. We will just not lower the standards for ourselves this year. Grant us grace, O Lord. Grant us the desire to aim high for You. Grant us the boldness and the faith that we will make choices for You; that we will be like Abraham. We will be going, not knowing where we are going but we know we are looking up to that Heavenly Kingdom because our citizenship is not here, Lord. that is where our high calling is, Lord – it is to gain You, to choose You, to choose life and to choose life, is to choose You, O Lord. Enable us, Lord Father, to aim high this year. Enable us to be sick and tired of our mediocre Christian lives. Even if it was above average last year, even if we were good last year, I pray, Lord, this year, O Lord, we will not be satisfied; that there will be a holy dissatisfaction in each one of our lives. You will create that craving because, Lord, we ourselves can't even generate those cravings, Lord, unless You give us those cravings. I pray, Lord Father, that we will truly be blessed for we will hunger and thirst after You, after righteousness. You said, Lord, that we will be filled. Fill us this year, Lord. Fill us this year. Use us, O Lord. We thank You; we praise You. We give You glory. In Jesus' Mighty Name, Amen.