

Guide for End of Year Reflection

Taking time for reflection is a critical practice. Reflection fosters learning, stimulates growth, calls for course corrections, identifies priorities and renews focus and energy.

At the end of another challenging year, it is even more important to carve out quiet space to listen to God and reflect.

To maximize this experience, set aside an hour. Find a quiet space. Bring a journal or paper and pen. (Note: You can also do this exercise as a family, a small group or team. Share the instructions and give people a set time to complete each section or the entire exercise. Regroup at the end and review the debrief exercise below).

Pray – Your first step is to pray. Let God know that you want to hear Him and ask God to guide you.

Then take some time to reflect through each of these three sections:

1. Grieving: For many, it has been another year of challenge, change, conflict and chaos. Hard decisions have been made, loneliness has been endured and there have been many losses. No one likes to grieve, but grieving with God is a biblical, healthy and needed outlet, especially in difficult seasons.

The Psalms, in particular, are full of laments—real and honest grieving. David and others didn't hold back their true feelings from God. They knew God already knew. They knew God was big enough to hear their heart cries. They also knew that by sharing their grief and heart cries with God, they were moving toward (not away from) deeper intimacy with God.

Take some time to journal and reflect. Don't hold back or minimize. Be real and honest.

- What's been hard this year?
- What's been disappointing or a struggle?
- Who or what has been lost, or at least seems lost?

Take a look at Psalm 13. It's a psalm of lament that follows a pattern. Verses 1-2 are heart cries to God. Verses 3-4 are calls for God's help. Verses 5-6 are an affirmation of who God is (even though verses 1-2 are still very raw and real).

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Write your own psalm of lament following the same pattern. You could also write or say a prayer using these prompts:

- Lord, these are some of the things that have been hard this year....
- Lord, I need your help. Would you help....
- Lord, I choose to trust you regardless. You are.... (Declare truth about God's character here.)

2. Celebrating: Even in hard years there are blessings, special surprises and concrete examples of God's goodness and provision. Thankfulness breeds life and fights any sense of entitlement. We need to thank God and celebrate his goodness above all.

There are many Psalms of Thanksgiving. In all circumstances, we are called to, "Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts"(Psalm 105:1-2).

Take some time to reflect on:

- What are you thankful for? (Make a list of at least 10 items.)
- How have you seen God at work? How has he protected, provided, answered or helped?

Write your own psalm of praise and thanksgiving. You could also write or say a prayer using these prompts:

- Lord, I want to praise you and thank you for who you are and what you have done.
- I am thankful that you have...
- I am thankful that you are...

3. Entrusting: How are you feeling about the year ahead? Whether you have hopes, dreams, fears or worries, you are called to entrust all to God. The end result is deeper peace, increased freedom and deeper connection with God.

Take some time to reflect on:

- What emotional, mental or practical burdens are you carrying into this new year?
- Are there some people, situations, circumstances, unfinished business or uncertainties that are weighing on you?

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Don't rush. Linger and reflect on what you are consciously and unconsciously carrying. Make a list.

Taking this weight into the new year, even unconsciously, will hinder your rest at night and your peace in the day. You don't have the strength to carry this weight. You can't control the outcomes. Instead, you need to choose to entrust everything to God. He can bear every burden (Psalm 55:22).

Pray a simple but powerful prayer like:

God, by your grace, I choose to entrust _____ into your good care.

Pray this prayer for every item on your list.

To close this reflection time, you can pray this prayer:

Heavenly Father,

Whatever lies ahead...

...it doesn't catch you off-guard.

...it doesn't diminish your love for me.

Whatever lies ahead...

...you are still bigger.

...you are still in charge.

Whatever lies ahead...

...you can bring good from it and further your purposes.

...you are with me and for me.

Whatever lies ahead...

...I choose to trust you.

...I desire above all to see you glorified.

I pray this in the name of my Good Shepherd, the risen King Jesus.

Amen.

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Special Note: If you are doing this exercise with your family or a team, invite (not require) each person to share their responses to two of the questions. This helps people externalize their internal processing. It can also be a very special community-building time.

After you have listened to each other, share if there are any follow-up or next steps flowing from your reflection time. For example:

- A note of thanks to be written?
- Forgiveness to be extended or sought?
- Something that needs to be left behind.
- A “page” that needs to be turned?
- New priorities that need to be established?

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Dr. Steve A. Brown develops Jesus-centered leaders as president of Arrow Leadership. He is the author of *Jesus Centered- Focusing on Jesus in a Distracted World*, *Leading Me – Eight Keys to a Christian Leader’s Most Important Assignment*, *Great Questions for Leading Well* and free e-resources at www.sharpeningleaders.com.

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For 30 years, Arrow Leadership has been developing Jesus-centered leaders for greater Kingdom impact. We help leaders and organizations lead differently through transformational programs, personal mentoring, organizational consulting and exceptional resources. Discover how you can grow in Jesus-centered leadership to be led more by Jesus, to lead more like Jesus and to lead more to Jesus.