

Jeremiah 31:7-14

John 1:1-18

Ephesians 1:3-14

“God sends out the Word and melts what’s frozen.
Praise the Lord, praise your God.” AMEN!

“Imagine yourself as a Living House.
God comes to rebuild that house, you.

At first perhaps, you can understand
what God is doing.

God’s getting the drains right,
fixing the roof leak and making touch-ups, so on;

you knew those jobs needed doing and
so you are not surprised at the work.

But, later, God starts knocking the house about
in a way that hurts and the things God is doing
do not make any sense.

“What on earth is God up to?” You ask.

The explanation is that God is building quite
a different house from the one you thought of -
demolishing a wing over there,
putting an extra foot on here,
running up towers, and
making courtyards.

You thought you were being
made into a decent,
sturdy little cottage.

But God is at work building a palace. [You]

God is building a place where God
can come come to live."

This little story comes from one of favorite books,
C.S. Lewis' book titled: *Mere Christianity*.

This book came at a time in my life when
I was searching for meaning and purpose.

The search is not over, but the book
had a positive impact. (Pause)

That's one of my favorite parts of
beginning a New Year.

We get the chance to look back on events in our lives
that made positive impacts to
the people we've become.

The book, "Mere Christianity" was put together from
a box set of radio talks during the darkest
days of World War II.

In a time of chaos and upheaval, which
comes so often in war,

Lewis brought truths to a fearful nation
that was being relentlessly
bombed by Nazi Germany.

On those radio broadcasts, he spoke in a way
that brought hope.

He spoke in a way that people became
able to see religion with fresh eyes.

And that Christianity can be likened
to an underground group
that gathered in a war zone,

in a place where evil seemed to have
the upper hand.

He talked about the ways that following Jesus meant
hope in a weary world because God is
present in the cosmos' suffering.

The book continues to be popular today
because unlike the many books we see
on the shelf at the store -
it doesn't focus on the latest theological
or cultural fashions.

“Mere Christianity” doesn’t promise a quick fix or a 30 day life turnaround.

What Lewis did was to speak about transformation, humility, forgiveness and the Christian duty.

It is no small task to follow Jesus.

To look, consider, and define what Jesus did and then follow.

Some good C.S, Lewis quotes:

“Die before you die;
there is no chance after that.”

Another is “Since God forgives us
we must forgive ourselves.

Otherwise, it is almost like setting ourselves up
as a higher court than Him.”

Another (and my favorite),
“I don’t go to religion to
make myself happy.

I can get that from a bottle of port.” :-)

Finally, "If you want religion
to make you really comfortable;
I do not recommend Christianity." (Pause)

Another aspect that is good about the New Year is
that we are eager to look forward.

We might even look forward to ways
we can step into becoming children of God.

This change of focus is called transformation.

As God is fixing up our Living Houses,
we are being transformed.

We no longer are in the spotlight of attention.

At the center is Jesus Christ. (Pause)

Lewis said, "When you teach a child writing,
you hold their hand while
the pencil makes the letter.

That is: the child forms the letters because
you are forming them."

The same is true for God, I think -
we love because God loves and

God holds our hand while we do it.

Transforming us with grace upon grace. (Pause)

If I was to recommend a strategy for us
moving into 2026 it would be this.

Let's be focused more on God than
we are on ourselves,
trusting God to work through us.

The second step follows, according to Paul,
to consider that we've been let in on God's plan.

We have been drawn into
the drama of the cosmos' restoration.

You and I, in becoming merely Christian,
find more and more times when
we are open to the power of the Spirit of God.

This is the moment of transformation.

When the Spirit leads you to do something Jesus-like.

Where people see Christ in the life you lead.

Oh, you will still look physically the same
but people spot something different about you.

You are able to bring people together.

You listen more and temper your judgment.

Transformed Christians hate war, violence,
and all kinds of racial division.

Transformed Christians speak out against
economic injustice and divisions
caused by gender or hurtful ideology.

We believe that peace and love
are the ultimate winners.

And today we hear the words of Jeremiah,
and see the character of God as
“one who creates and gives life.”

Where scattered ones are not simply created,
but also redeemed, nurtured, and sustained.

AMEN!