

# Keys for a Successful New Year



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It's a New Year! Does that mean there will be a New You? In what areas do you need to improve? What do you need to change about your previous ways? Have you made any resolutions to help you accomplish new goals for the New You?

More often than not, New Year's resolutions fail before the end of the year. In fact,

according to many studies, the success rate in carrying out a resolution for twelve full months is less than ten percent.

If you fall into the ninety percent, what are some of the reasons you failed? Lack of time, resources, motivation, or enthusiasm? Or perhaps lack of planning or accountability, self-doubt, or unrealistic goals?

What if, instead of making a resolution to do or not do a specific thing for a specific period of time, we made a resolution to succeed in life for the New Year and beyond? What if the keys to succeeding are not as difficult as we might think? Could this be a better recipe for success than a New Year's Resolution that has a ninety percent failure rate?

Before I share the keys to success, we must first start with a question: How do you define success?

Oftentimes success is measured by money, power, prestige, fame, or the like. Defining success by worldly standards of what we have accomplished gives us a sense of fulfillment in feeling we are above others whose accomplishments pale in comparison. But what good are these things if we don't do something good with them?

It is time we all get on the same playing field. And the only way to do that is to measure our success by God's definition. His definition of success is fulfilling our divinely ordained reason for being by using our talents and gifts so that God is glorified, people are benefitted, and His Kingdom is expanded. To put it more simply, it is doing what God has called us to do and using everything He has given us to do it in order to honor Him, serve others, and expand His Kingdom.

Here's the deal—we all have different talents and gifts—given to us by God. When we use our talents and gifts, "worldly success" will come in different amounts by means of money, power, prestige, fame, etc. It is our job to use all He has given us and attained for His glory.

We may not have much money, but we can use the money we have to serve God by serving others. We may not have much power, but we can use what little power and influence we have in the lives of the people God has put in our path for good. And so on.

If we have been given many talents and gifts which have yielded more "worldly success", we are called to do even more as revealed in Luke 12:48 which says, "When someone is given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required."

Are you doing what God has called you to do and using everything He has given you to do it—whether it be little or much? Do you want to learn how to do it better? Here are some keys to help you succeed.

## KEY #1 DON'T FOCUS ON THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR

Before the end of 2022, I broke off the driver's side rear-view door mirror of my SUV. Yep, I backed it into a tree and ripped it right off. I was mortified. Not because of the circumstances, I promise you, it's a good story and anyone, blonde or not, could have done what I did. I was mortified because it was the second time I broke it off in less than a year.

When you own an auto repair shop, word about auto mishaps travels fast and so do the teasing comments. However, this time I had a plan. I would humbly confess to my husband, he could quietly order a new mirror, and my mechanic son, Jace, who was home for the holidays could quickly install it and nobody else would have to know. Great plan, right?

Well, it would have been if I had let my husband and my son in on it. Instead, my secret plan was just that—secret. So that evening when I learned that my husband told the guys at the shop and it was "all in good fun", I was not pleased. My face turned red in embarrassment for what I would have to face. Then I started to feel anger bubbling up.

In an effort to not let the sun go down on my anger (Ephesians 4:26), I met with God to figure out why it was bubbling up. He quickly revealed the reason—

PRIDE. As I said, I was mortified that I busted my rear-view mirror off... twice. And I knew I wouldn't hear the end of it. "Lord, humble me, help me to wear my embarrassment well tomorrow," I prayed. Then, because it was late and my husband was sleeping, I texted him an apology for my bubbling anger.

It was time to face the music. Surprisingly, the person I thought would be the first one to poke fun at me didn't say a word. I made it through several hours without mention of my mirror. But then, just when I thought I was in the clear, Geoffrey said to me "Hey Jeana, maybe we should keep an extra mirror here for you in the future". There it was. So, I ate a piece of humble pie and then went to eat more with everyone else so that we could put it behind us and not let it taint the future.

When we are driving our vehicles, rear-view mirrors are incredibly helpful. I know just how helpful because when I was driving without one, it was especially difficult to navigate lane changes. Though mirrors are useful to glance at when driving, we don't focus on them, we focus on what we see through the windshield.

It's the same in life. We need to focus on what is ahead, not what we left behind yesterday or in a previous year. We get to leave the past in the past and not carry it forward with us. Sure, there were good, joyful, wonderful moments—but there were also been bad, disappointing, and even devastating moments.

If we keep focused on what is behind us, we cannot see everything God has for us through the windshield.

Many people will not be successful in the future because they are living in yesterday. And they can't focus on the good that is to come because they haven't dealt with the past in order to move on. Maybe there needs to be forgiveness—even if that forgiveness doesn't mean a restored relationship because it is unhealthy, forgiving in our hearts can allow us to move on. Maybe regrets need to be let go—shoulda, woulda, coulda's keep us looking in the rear-view mirror. Maybe we need to meet with God to find out what He wants us to see or move on from. Maybe we have some pride or other issue that's getting in the way of looking forward to a successful life.

Occasionally glancing in the rear-view mirror of life is helpful—in that it helps us better navigate by learning from our mistakes and being thankful for good things and what we've come through. But staring constantly at the mirror will affect our ability to drive well, for it will make us stuck in the past and unable to successfully navigate the road ahead.

## KEY #2 KEEP YOUR WINDSHIELD CLEAR

Time, talents, and treasures have been allotted to us for a good purpose. Are you using yours? Do you use them to the fullest? Or do you make excuses? What is getting in the way of fulfilling your good purpose?

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10

We were created "to do" good works, not to sit and wait for them to come to us. We have to see them through the windshield clearly and go after them. But what gets in our way? Rain, snow, fog, dirt, bird poop, or maybe a crack that hasn't been fixed?

Seeing clearly when driving is important for our safety on the roadways and it's also important in seeing the roadways of life. We must stop making excuses for what is hindering a clear vision.

We must use our wipers to swish away the rain or snow, push the defrost button to clear up the fog, wash off any dirt or poop, and for goodness' sake, we must get that crack fixed.

Success will come when we use our time, talents, and treasures to do good works. We must stop making excuses and keep our windshield clear so that we can see what God has for us and go after it.

## KEY #3 SHINE YOUR LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

How many vehicles do you see on the roadways with a headlight out? Do you ever wonder if the other one will soon go out? Do some lights seem to shine brighter than others even if the high-beams aren't on? Do you get excited to use your high-beams to better see what is ahead?

Even if the windshield is clear, we must also have good lighting to help us see in the darkness. With vehicles, it is easy to do the things that will brighten the road ahead—we can get a burnt-out bulb replaced quickly, we can turn foggy lenses into clear shiny ones with a headlight restoration service, and when others aren't coming towards us, we can turn on our high-beams to help us see better. But how can we keep good lighting in life? Better yet, how can we also shine brightly for others?

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may



see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:14-16

In order to be the light to see well, serve others, and help other people see our light, we must first receive the Light. We receive the light by believing that Jesus was the Son of God, that He died for our sins, and was resurrected in order to save us. Once we receive the Light, we must be in a relationship with Jesus so that we can know Him well, seek Him in all our circumstances, and then we can shine for Him.

Paul guides us in this by saying, "Do everything without complaining or arguing, that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people." Philippians 2:14-15

In order to attain success, we must receive the light so that we can be the light in a world of darkness.

## KEY #4 STAY IN YOUR LANE

There are lines on the roadways that help us to know which lane we must stay in. Have you ever accidentally gone over one of the lines without intending to? What was the reason? Distractions while driving—like cell phones or other gadgets, pets, people, food, etc. are often reasons for inadvertently veering over the line.

Just like distractions happen while driving, distractions happen in life. People, busyness, and all sorts of worldly things become distracting and we begin to veer out of our lane—either intentionally (not reading and obeying God's Word) or unintentionally (not fully knowing and practicing God's Word).

In order to avoid distractions and be successful we must learn from God's word. Joshua 1:7-8 says, "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you, do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."

There it is—the recipe for success laid right out in plain words. We are successful in life when we know God's Word, meditate on it, proclaim it to others, and practice it well—by staying between the lines.

We don't know God's Word by listening to sermons on Sunday and then forgetting what we've heard all week long until we hear it again the next Sunday. We don't know God's Word by singing worship songs and then forgetting the goodness of what we've heard. We don't know God's Word by hearing what other say that it says.

We only know God's Word by reading it, learning from Him, meditating on it, proclaiming it to others with our words and actions in every area of our lives, and living it out by staying within the boundaries of what He has written in the Bible and on our hearts.

I challenge you in 2023 and beyond to not make strict resolutions about habits to quit or begin but to operate your life with these four keys to success. It won't be easy. We will have to deal with and heal from the hurts of the past as we stop focusing on the rear-view mirror (though I should focus on it a little bit more when backing my SUV up!). We will have to be vigilant about seeing all that God has prepared for us to do by keeping our windshields clear. We will have to do all we can to build a relationship with Jesus so that His light shines in us and through us. And we will have to be strong and courageous as we obey God and live for Him.

If we use these keys, we will unlock the beauty of success in God's eyes because we will be doing what He has called us to do by using everything He has given us to do it, in order to honor Him, serve others, and expand His Kingdom.



"We care for people and fix cars!"