

What Not To Say In 2012

Ben Bainbridge – January 1, 201

In the movie *City Slickers*, Billy Crystal plays a radio advertising salesman going through a mid-life crisis. He and his friends deal with the monotony of life by participating in a cattle drive from New Mexico to Colorado—an experience that turns out to be a kind of epiphany for all of them. At the end of the movie as they prepare to return to New York and the familiar routine, Billy Crystal explains to one of those friends the concept of a “do-over.” Do you remember, he says, when you used to play ball as a kid? Sometimes when you fouled things up, you would get a “do-over.” It was a second chance to swing at the ball. That’s what is happening to you now. You’re getting a “do-over” in life.

Something like that happens every January 1. We all collectively get a “do-over”—another chance to do it right. If 2011 was a tough year for you, cheer up. It’s a brand-new year! Things may turn out much better in the months ahead.

In that spirit, I’m wondering how many of us have made New Year’s resolutions yet? Most of us, I suppose, use January 1 as a place to begin making some changes in life. Perhaps you don’t write them down; perhaps you don’t share them with anyone else. Many of us plan to do something or stop doing something... to lose weight, or to start saving money, or to call our parents, or to have a daily quiet time, to pray more, to read our Bibles, or to break some stubborn habit.

This is January 1st and most likely if you have made a resolution, you have at least made it successfully for the first 10-12 hours... but there is a discouraging side of resolution-making. They are easy to make and hard to keep. That’s why so many of us are so hesitant to make a new start. You mean well, you intend to change, but somehow life overtakes you and your new-found determination lasts about a week. Then it’s back to business as usual.

Nobody wants to fail. We all want to succeed. SO... *Sometimes it’s easier not to try than to try knowing you will certainly fail.* Now I’ve been there myself many times, and I don’t have any magic answers for you. However, there is a biblical perspective we need to remember at the beginning of a new year. It’s a perspective that’s wrapped up in one simple word. If you remember not to use this particular word this year, your chances of succeeding are going to go through the roof. In fact, I think you’ll be happier if you make a decision here and now to cut this word right out of your vocabulary. The word is can’t.

That’s right. The one word you shouldn’t say in 2012 is the little word can’t. We use it all the time, don’t we? We say, “I can’t lose weight.” “I just can’t seem to save money.” “I try and try but I can’t find the time to read the Bible.” “After what she did, I can’t forgive her.” “No matter how hard I try, I can’t change.” On and on it goes. In fact, I think you can make a persuasive case that “can’t” is the single most destructive word in the English language... it destroys motivation... It shifts responsibility... It denies reality.

When you say “can’t”—especially with reference to the problems of life—you are simply giving up without a fight. You are walking off the field, turning in your uniform, resigning your commission and admitting defeat—all without a battle. You are saying, “I’ve lost and it’s not even worth trying.”

Suppose that you knew you could ... in 2012? Could what? You could pass calculus. You could get out of debt. You could lose 20 pounds. You could read your Bible. You could restore a broken friendship. You could get a new job. You could overcome your shyness. You name it. Suppose you knew that this year you could do it. What a difference that would make. What a great year 2012 would be!

My whole goal in this message is to convince you that you can. *I firmly believe that this year*

you can do everything God intends for you to do. No matter how hard, no matter how difficult, no matter how impossible things may seem right now. If God wants you to do it, in 2012 you can!

My text is only one verse of Scripture. You've heard it, you've read it, and most of you have memorized it. The verse is Philippians 4:13. It reads like this in the King James Version: "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**" The NIV says, "**I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**" The Living Bible expands the text this way: "I can do everything God asks me to do with the help of Christ who gives me strength and power." Finally, here is the unique translation of the Message version: "Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am."

No matter what version you use, it is a verse of unlimited possibility. But, unfortunately this verse is so well-known that many of us take it for granted. Check that... Most of us take it for granted. Who knows? Maybe we all take it for granted. For once, the person who never comes to church actually has an advantage over the person who comes all the time. If this verse is new to you, then you are probably in better shape to benefit from my words than if you've known it for 50 years.

For most of you, Philippians 4:13 is an old friend. You know this verse, you memorized it years ago, you learned it in Sunday School, perhaps you have it on a plaque or a counted cross-stitch wall hanging. The down side of that is that over the years this verse has lost its power to amaze us, to challenge us, to encourage us and to convict us.

Here, then, is the question... The Bible says that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. "All things." Can you really do "all things" through Christ? Is that just wishful thinking, just another piece of hopeful religious propaganda? Or is it literally true?

"All things?" Most people would say, "Some things, yes. All things, no." But the Bible clearly says, "All things." Is this just hyperbole or is it literally true? Is this a verse upon which you can build a coherent, optimistic philosophy of life or is it just a bunch of mumbo-jumbo? Can you do "all things" in 2012? Well, I think the answer to that is yes... IF... I have a few "ifs" I want to share with you this morning.

When it comes to life change **you can IF... you want to**. I call this the principle of **Personal Desire**. Before you can, you must want to. Before the deed, there must be the desire. In order to accomplish your goals, you've got to decide what it is you truly want to do. We all know this.

Now there were a lot of football games over the past three or four days—a fact many wives discovered when their husbands suddenly turned into TV zombies and sat in front of the tube 14 hours a day. Some of you loyal fans may have watched every moment of every game—and taped the ones you couldn't watch.

Are there any sports fans in the room today? I like to watch football and each year there are thousands of games played in the NFL and College. Now, I don't watch all of them, or really that many, but at some point each year I watch a game that is highly anticipated and one team wins, and another loses. The game is over, and then the sports broadcasters talk about the game. Inevitably, this phrase will come up when they are talking about the two teams that just battled on the field for 60 minutes. The winning team won because they "Wanted it more."

When I hear that phrase I think about this. After all the hype, after months of practice, after a grueling game or season, after all the discussion and analysis, when the game was finally on the line, it all came down to this: One team wanted it more.

There's an important lesson for us to learn. Isn't it a principle in life that you usually get the things you really go after? Isn't it true that if you really want something with all your heart, and if you focus all your energies toward one supreme goal, that's what you're going to achieve?

That's not the end of the story, but it is the place you have to begin. *If you want it badly enough, you have a fighting chance of getting it.* If you don't really care, then it probably won't happen. So many people who say they want to do things really don't want to.

I'm not much of a counselor. It's not the area of my training, my gift or my expertise. But like all pastors, I talk to many people about their personal problems. And although I'm not a counselor, I

have learned a lot about human nature just by casual observation. Through the years I have learned this much: *If you've got a problem in your life, you're going to get better faster if you stop saying "can't" and start saying "won't."* Once you start saying "won't" you've put the matter in the right framework.

Now, there are some things we just can't do. For me, I can't give birth... I can't win the Miss USA contest... and I can't walk and chew gum at the same time. But for many things we say we can't, we are just fooling ourselves. We say, "I can't lose weight." For most of us that really means, "I won't lose weight." We say, "I can't forgive." For most of us that means, "I won't forgive." We say, "I can't find time to read the Bible." For most of us that means, "I won't find time to read the Bible." When you say "won't" instead of "can't," you have started to tell the truth. For most of us "can't" is simply a convenient excuse. Is it possible for you to do "all things" this year? Yes it is. But you must want to. That's step number one—the principle of Personal Desire.

Now, the next thing is that you can do whatever it is **you want to do IF... God wants you to**. This is the principle of **Divine Direction**. It's crucial for you to understand this second answer because it is clearly stated in the text. "I can do all things through Christ." This verse is not a blank check. It's not as if Paul is saying, "I can do anything I can dream up." No. If you read the context, the verses right before verse 13, he is speaking about the varying and sometimes difficult circumstances of life. Verse 11 and 12 say—"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." Sometimes I find myself with plenty of food and sometimes I have nothing to eat. Sometimes I have a roof over my head and sometimes I don't." "I know what it is to have money in the bank and I know what it is to be flat broke. And I've learned to be content no matter what my situation might be." Then verse 13—"I have learned through the power of Jesus Christ that I can face whatever comes my way." If it's good, I can enjoy it. If it's not so good, I can deal with it. Why? Because I have access to the everlasting strength of Jesus Christ.

Let me put this teaching in one sentence: **Through Jesus Christ you can do everything God wants you to do this year.** You can face everything he wants you to face, you can fight every battle he wants you to fight, you can obey every command, you can endure every trial, and you can overcome every temptation through Jesus Christ.

Let me share a simple phrase with you: "If God is in it, you can do it." That brings it all together, doesn't it? If God is in your difficulty, you can face it. If God is somehow in your failure, you can overcome it. If God is in your dreams, your dreams will come to pass. If God is in your goals, you can achieve every single one of them. If God is in your prayers, he will not only hear them, he will also answer them.

Another IF.....

Can you really do "all things" in 2012? **You can IF... you rely on Jesus Christ.** This is the principle of **Divine Enablement**. We come now to the heart of the verse: "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." This week I studied the last part of that verse and I discovered that the wording means "to pour strength into." It's like pouring milk into a pitcher or water into a glass or coffee into a cup. It's the picture of something empty that is filled by an outside source. *It's the picture of a believer facing the problems of life—hopeless and helpless—and in that situation, Jesus Christ pours his strength into the believer's life.* He strengthens us—he pours his strength into us.

This is what makes Philippians 4:13 totally different from things like Positive Thinking, "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and gosh darnit... people like me." "If you can dream it, you can do it." and other purely secular approaches to life. Those techniques may be useful and may in fact help you to a limited degree, but if that's all you've got, you still don't have anything that impacts your heart. You may get up every day, look in the mirror and say, "Every day in every way I'm getting better and better." That's a nice thought, and if it helps you, okay. But that's a far cry from the truth and power contained in this verse.

How far will Positive Thinking get you when you lose your job, when you come home and your wife or husband has left you, when the stock market crashes, when your daughter has just decided to have an abortion. Where's the hope for life? What will you cling to then? How will you find the strength to go on? Where is the anchor for your soul?

It takes more than just positive thinking. You've got to have Jesus Christ on the inside. Are we who

believe, better than other people? No. Are we stronger? No. Are we spared the problems of life? No. Are we tougher than others? No. Does God give us a free pass so that what happens to others doesn't happen to us? No. Are we wiser than others? No.

Do we suffer? Yes. Do we know heartache and disappointment? Yes. Do we see our dreams crumble? Yes. Do we face opposition? Yes. Do we get sick? Yes. Do our loved ones die? Yes. Do we know tragedy, tears and death? Yes. All that anyone else suffers we suffer too.

What makes the difference? Only one thing. Jesus Christ within. We have the power of the indwelling Christ and that makes all the difference in the world. Is it enough? Is Jesus Christ enough for the problems of life? Is his broken body enough? Can his power meet the problems of life? *Yes, yes, a thousand times yes, and the saints across the ages testify that Jesus Christ is enough.*

You can do "all things" if this year you rely on Jesus Christ. Not on your own strength, not on your own power, not on your own wisdom, and not on your own ability to figure things out. But if you will say, "Lord Jesus, this year I'm relying on you," you can do all things through Christ.

Ok, back to the question again and one last IF. Can you really do "all things" in 2012? You **can IF... you start today and don't look back**. This is the principle of the **Personal Choice**. One question: Which way are you going this year? Are you going backwards into 2011 or are you going forward into 2012? Your answer makes all the difference. I know that last year was an extremely difficult year for many. I can't imagine some of the pain and worry that some of you have had to deal with, but if we are not careful, we can let the trauma of the year keep us stuck in 2011.

I know people who live in the past, worry about the past, fret over the past. At some point you have to get over it, and move on. Forget it! 2011 is over, done, gone, kaput, finished. It's never coming back. You can't go back even if you want to. The old year is over, the new one is dawning. Somehow, you have to be able to *wrap up the old year and give it to the Lord*. Then strike out in 2012 to do great things for God.

Let me put it all together. Can you really do "all things" in 2012? Yes, you can. Here are the four principles: **Personal Desire, Divine Direction, Divine Enablement, Personal Choice**. Notice that the first one is personal, the next two are divine, and the last one is personal. There's perfect balance here. *Two depend on you, two depend on God*. Does it depend on you? Yes. Does it depend on God? Yes. Think of the verse this way: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." It begins with I, ends with me, and Jesus Christ is in the middle.

Let me boil it down to four key words: **"I can through Christ."** To make it clearer, let me explain what I am not saying. I am not saying, "I can do all things." Those are the words of a boaster. I am not saying, "I can do some things." Those are the words of a doubter. But I am saying, "I can do all things through Christ." Those are the words of a believer.

You can do in 2012 everything God wants you to do. You can fulfill his will in your life. You can obey every command, endure every trial and overcome every temptation. You can Love God more deeply... you can Love others more sincerely, you can serve this world and change lives. You can do everything God wants you to do this year—through Jesus Christ.

There is, then, one word you ought not to say in 2012. That's the little word "can't." Perhaps you'd like to make this into a motto and stick it on your dashboard: "I can through Christ." Can you really do "all things" in 2012? Through Christ you can. And for today...for this year...that is some good news.

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