# New Year’s Eve: Keep on going!

## Introduction

* The wise men, having shown great perseverance and determination on their long journey to Bethlehem, were overjoyed when they found Jesus and were able to offer their gifts to him.
* Reflecting on the end of one year while glimpsing the beginning of a new year, we too are encouraged to persevere in our walk of faith. ‘Let perseverance finish its work…’ – the verses from James 1:2-4 give us encouraging advice as we look to journey into a new year.

## Scripture:

* Matthew 2:10‘When they saw the star, they were overjoyed’.
* James 1:2-4‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.’

## Context

* There is a definite and positive outcome to perseverance. By rejecting the temptation to give up or go back, we enable our faith to grow deep and provide us with more inner strength and stability. Our perseverance through times of trial and challenge in life builds resilience and creates confidence in God for future life challenges.
* The advice to ‘keep going’ only really comes into focus when things are challenging and the going gets tough. Keeping going when the Christmas lights are twinkling and the presents are being passed around is relatively easy. However, when the going gets tough, keep going. This, says James, is a mark of maturity and completion in matters of faith and pilgrimage (vv2-4).
* What challenges and dangers might the wise men have encountered as they followed the star on their long journey to Bethlehem and back home? Rather than thinking about what may or may not have happened *to* them, we might do better to reflect on what happened *in* them. What impact did the presence of Jesus have on them? What is happening *in* us, as well as what is happening *to* us, will help us to become more like Jesus.

## Reflection – looking inwards

* In Matthew 2:11 we read; ‘On coming to the house, they saw the

child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped

him.’ A life-changing moment perhaps? Following this act of worship and adoration, they proceeded to offer their gifts. Something quite wonderful happened *in* them, causing them to bow the knee to God in their midst.

* Is the destination the only valuable part of the journey? Father Richard Rohr, in his Advent book, *Preparing for Christmas: Daily Meditations for Advent*, says: ‘We all tend to aim for the goal instead of the journey itself, but spiritually speaking, how we get there is where we arrive.’
* The opposite of ‘keep going’ is ‘stop and give up’! Have there been times

when you have been tempted to give up your faith, turn your back on God

and walk away from the Christian pathway? Anything that causes us to

give up will be something smaller than the prize for which we keep going. Nothing is greater than God – he is the all-in-all, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Sometimes we need to see the bigger picture. The star that the wise men followed may have been the biggest and brightest, but when they arrived in the manger and saw Jesus lying in the manger, a brighter light beckoned them to their knees in adoration and worship. ‘Keep going’ is keeping Jesus in full view. ‘Turn your eyes upon Jesus … And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace’ (*SASB* 445).

## Reflection – looking outwards

* Perseverance applies equally in our service to others in the name of Christ. Many people believe that the future of a thriving Salvation Army lies in the local corps willingness to serve people in the local community. The manner in which we serve will differ in every setting, but our love for God will compel us outwards in loving service and ministry. The challenge given by William Booth to his son Bramwell, ‘Go and do something!’, remains for each one of us. From the early days of The Salvation Army the mission to serve others has been a central part of our identity.
* Natural Church Development (NCD) identifies eight characteristics of growing churches, one of which is Need-Oriented Evangelism. It is important that the characteristics are a description of the qualities of a growing church, not a to-do list. It is a way of life as opposed to a programme. The Diocese of Coventry has focused on this for a number of years, and states:

*‘Need-oriented outreach is seen in people and Christian communities filled with the Holy Spirit involved in the messiest parts of the parish …. the people who are hurting the most, the poorest, the most isolated, the ones who need loving the most …etc. The only reason for doing this is to love people with Christ’s love.’*

*(*[*2-the-8-essential-qualities.pdf (d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net)*](https://d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/5f3ffda5728e0/content/pages/documents/2-the-8-essential-qualities.pdf)*)*

Sounds like a good description of an Army corps!

## Prayer – *SASB* 445

Lord, as I reflect on my life today, please help me to accept the

circumstances that surround me and to use them as an opportunity to

deepen my relationship with you. Help me to realise that I am ‘response-able’ …. that the freedom I have in Christ enables me to choose a response that brings glory to you in every circumstance. Help me, in every circumstance, to keep you in view:

‘Turn your eyes upon Jesus,

Look full in his wonderful face;

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim

In the light of his glory and grace.’

In Jesus’ name. Amen.