

I'm listening



Lord God, we thank you for the faith and example Samuel gives us. Raise up, we pray, people full of your Spirit and your word in our own day. Amen.

New Year resolutions

by Heather Cooke

Two weeks into January, isn't it too late to be making New Year resolutions? Not really. There's plenty of 2024 still ahead. Even if cutting down on chocolate didn't work again this year (already!), we might think instead of making a promise to God to do something positive to deepen our faith – of taking something up, perhaps, rather than giving something up. And if we also tell someone

other than God exactly what our resolution is, they can hold us to it.

Today, psychologists advise us that the more positive our resolutions, the better chance we have of keeping them. If they're too negative, our resolutions are doomed to failure. And that applies not only to those related to food, finance, or fitness, but also those about faith. It's more about "This year, I will..." rather than "This year, I won't..."

So what might we resolve to do this year? 🙏

“Let each new year find you a better person.”

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), statesman, author, publisher, scientist, inventor and diplomat

William Hepper *reflects on* 1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11–20]

In our Old Testament reading this week we go back thousands of years to the time of God's call to Samuel. Samuel's family had not been happy. His father had two wives, one of whom produced children, while the other, Hannah, had none. On a visit to the Temple, the devout Hannah prayed for a child, who she promised would be committed to God's service. In due course Samuel was born and Hannah kept her promise, taking her child to the Temple and telling Eli the priest, "I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:28).

Today's reading recounts how Eli's sons were corrupt and blasphemous and their father did little to correct them. Young Samuel, however, was made of a different stuff. When he heard the voice of God, dutifully he replied, "Speak, for your servant is listening." God told Samuel that he was about to do something that would make "both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle", namely punish Eli for not restraining his sons. When Samuel told Eli about this, he instantly believed him. As the Bible says, "all Israel... knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord".

True to his mother's promise, Samuel's life was Spirit-filled and finely tuned to the voice of God. Because of this, he was able to communicate clearly with God and, moreover, to convey the word of God to others. 🙏

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

by Christine Clark

Thursday sees the start of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which in most churches is observed between 18 and 25 January. Each year a theme and linked Bible passage are chosen by the churches in one of the participating regions. This year the materials were put together by an ecumenical team from Burkina Faso, who have chosen the theme of hospitality, focusing on the parable of the Good Samaritan.

During the week the churches in my town engage in "Church

Swap". A few people from each congregation attend another church. Every church has some visitors who are welcomed, shown how to find their way through the service, take communion if that is their wish, and join in coffee and chat afterwards. The following week, back at their home church, they share how they found things, the differences and, often surprisingly, how much was similar.

I have been privileged to share in services at an evangelical church, as well as the URC and Roman Catholic churches. <https://ctbi.org.uk> 🙏