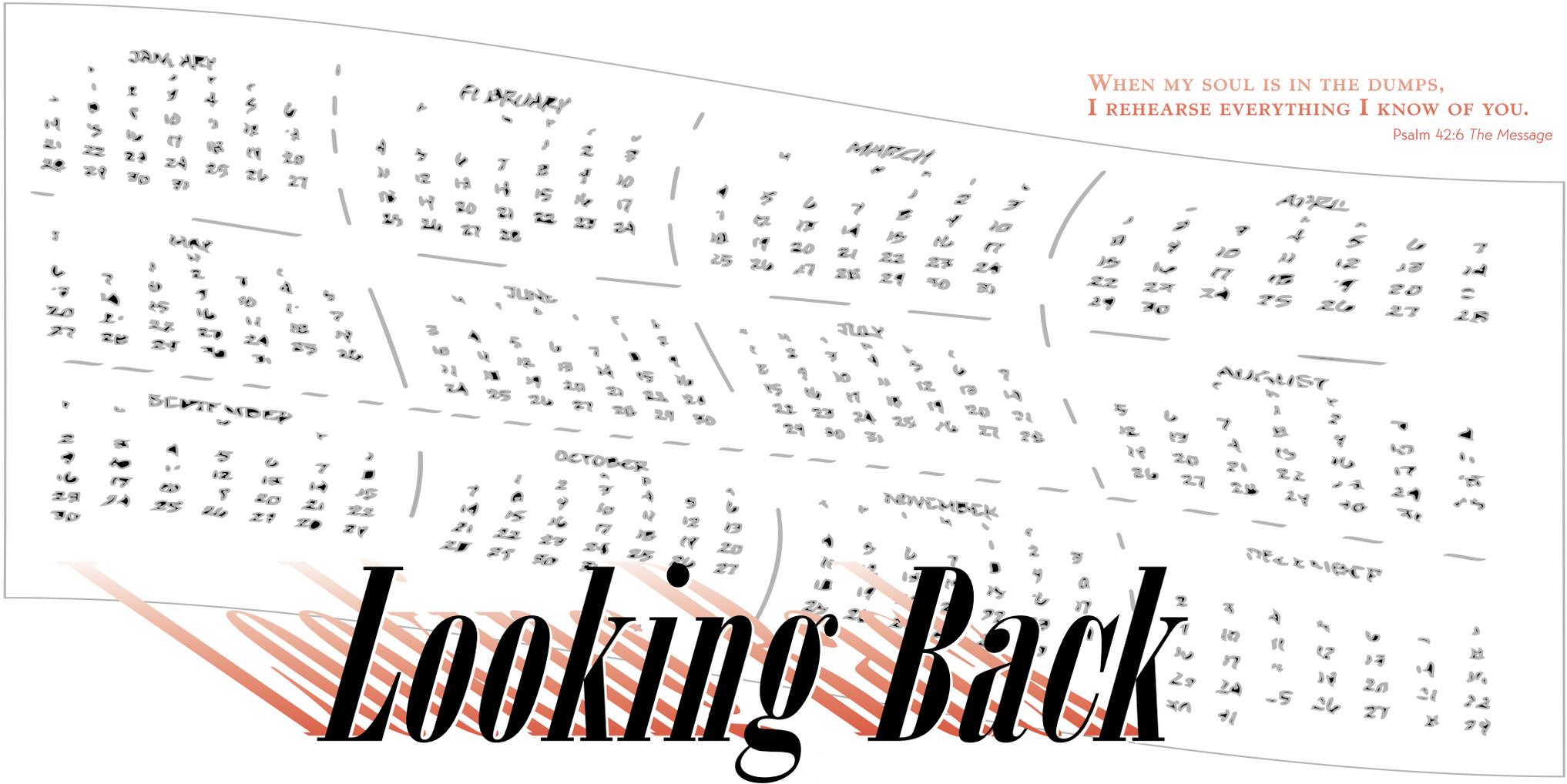


WHEN MY SOUL IS IN THE DUMPS,  
I REHEARSE EVERYTHING I KNOW OF YOU.

Psalm 42:6 The Message



# Looking Back

**I**N A MORE LOGICAL WORLD the first day of the year would come around March 15, or April 1. New Year's Day—that special day combining nostalgic retrospection for the year just ended with eager anticipation for the year just beginning—seems wasted on a day still mired (at least in this part of the world) in cold air, gray skies, and a frozen landscape. How much better it would be if the new year began on a fresh, sunshine-filled day of spring flowers bursting forth to bring new life, new color to a gray world.

On the other hand, perhaps it is appropriate, after all, that New Year's Day comes during the time of gray-sky melancholy and introspection, for in many ways our time on this path is better spent remembering the days past, than anticipating those days to come.

## HISTORY LESSON

Our journey upward into Christ-likeness—that tremulous path of sanctification trod by those indwelt by the Spirit—is to be more a study of recent history and current events, than a planning session for the future. Jesus told us

**“For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*”**

*Matthew 6:25*

Meanwhile the Psalmist, David, wrote

**For the enemy has persecuted my soul;  
He has crushed my life to the ground;  
He has made me dwell in dark places,  
like those who have long been dead.  
Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me;  
My heart is appalled within me.  
I remember the days of old;  
I meditate on all Your doings;  
I muse on the work of Your hands.  
I stretch out my hands to You;  
My soul longs for You, as a parched land. Selah.**

*Psalms 143:3-6*

Certainly the believer is encouraged to spend happy hours contemplating his or her assured hope of an eternity with God. The rock-solid promise of eternal life in heaven is surely one of Christendom's most precious benefits.

But as believers approach one more year of living on this muddy plane, their focus should be less on what will occur tomorrow than on what transpired yesterday. All of life is a classroom for those who have placed their trust in Christ Jesus; if we plough ahead into a new year without first examining the lessons learned in the previous, we run the risk of being called into the principal's office for a dose of “applied psychology.”

## GOD'S DAILY WORK

**Remember His wonderful deeds which He has done,  
His marvels and the judgments from His mouth,**

*1 Chronicles 16:12*

The believer should not lightly regard what the Lord has done for him during the preceding year. The point in time when the old wall calendar is replaced with the new is the perfect moment to ask, *What has the Lord done for me this last year? How has He amazed me, and what have I learned from Him? What prayers did He answer? How did He solve my moments of confusion with wise, timely counsel? How did He prevent me from doing what I shouldn't? (Or how quickly did He forgive me when I did?) How often did I experience the calming, healing balm of the Spirit? What did He do that took my breath away, and left me filled with His praise?*



Every day, in ways both subtle and profound, God works in the Christian's life. Sometimes His hand is dynamic and strong, like the piercing arc of lightning and the thunderous percussion of a storm. We are left gasping from the impact, stunned by His power, grateful that anyone of His supernatural might is on our side.

At other times His hand is gentle and soft, like the butterfly touch of a mother caressing the cheek of her infant child. Often his touch is so delicate that we are not even aware that He is at work; we think He is busy elsewhere, with someone else's problems, when all the time He is only a breath away from ours.

## LET A MAN EXAMINE HIMSELF

Before the believer moves into the new year, he must also take stock of his own behavior in the previous. Oh, not to bathe oneself in the agonies of abasement; not to occupy days on end under the self-wielded lash of castigation. But to use the painful self-examination as one more launch pad of praise to God for His mercy and grace.

Christians are a people most blessed. They have intimate, firsthand knowledge of God's longsuffering and forgiveness. Sadly, however, for

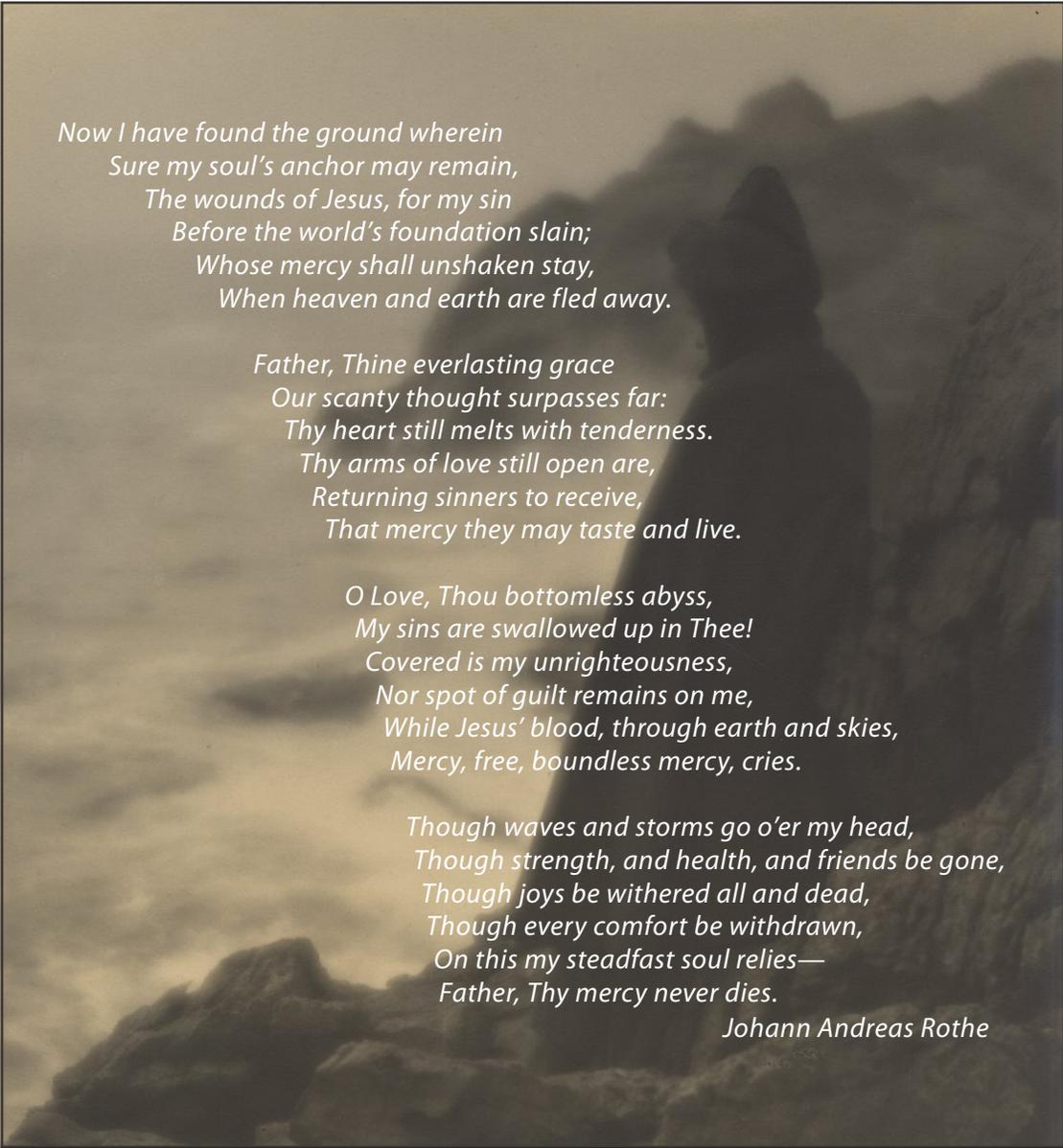
one who requires mercy so often, it can become something common; the oft-forgiven believer can become inured to mercy's costly value. So the individual must pause to revive his perspective on God's mercy. He must elevate his view of the daily graces that keep his head above the muck of sin.

The point is not to return to fondle and caress our old transgressions, but to remind ourselves that they were once there: that we erred, but God quickly forgave and restored us. More than that, the point is to review the lessons learned from our mistakes. In both triumph and failure (but mostly in our failures), God teaches us valuable life-lessons that become stair steps to sanctification. More than the dark act itself, it is the lesson drawn from our sin—along with the resulting forgiveness—that leads us ever upward into Christ-likeness. It is the review and appreciation of these lessons that causes our next year to be an improvement over the last.



**Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you."**

*Joshua 3:5*



*Now I have found the ground wherein  
Sure my soul's anchor may remain,  
The wounds of Jesus, for my sin  
Before the world's foundation slain;  
Whose mercy shall unshaken stay,  
When heaven and earth are fled away.*

*Father, Thine everlasting grace  
Our scanty thought surpasses far:  
Thy heart still melts with tenderness.  
Thy arms of love still open are,  
Returning sinners to receive,  
That mercy they may taste and live.*

*O Love, Thou bottomless abyss,  
My sins are swallowed up in Thee!  
Covered is my unrighteousness,  
Nor spot of guilt remains on me,  
While Jesus' blood, through earth and skies,  
Mercy, free, boundless mercy, cries.*

*Though waves and storms go o'er my head,  
Though strength, and health, and friends be gone,  
Though joys be withered all and dead,  
Though every comfort be withdrawn,  
On this my steadfast soul relies—  
Father, Thy mercy never dies.*

*Johann Andreas Rothe*