

**Text: Philippians 4:13**

**Theme: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me**

**Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi at New Years Eve Service on 31/12/2011 at 11pm.**

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*January 2012* – I wish you a Happy New Year and I trust that you had a wonderful Christmas season. I hope that you are as excited about 2012 as you were about Christmas. One of the most encouraging things about new Years, new weeks, and new days is the word “new”. The word “new” means we get to start all over again.

Nobody wants to fail. We all want to succeed. *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 this 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 soldier's 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 your exams. You could get out of debt. You could lose 20 pounds. 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 sermon 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!

**This is Paul's assertion in Philippians 4:13.** This famous verse is closely hinged with the two verses before it – Philip. 4:11-12. Paul knew that God was able to change his circumstances, but that He was much more interested in changing Paul and this is still His desire for His children. In short, he had learned the “secret”, he had counted the cost and paid the “cost”, and in the crucible of testing wrought by both good times and bad times, he had

come to the point of realization that his sufficiency was solely in his Saviour. This principle is echoed in his second letter to the church at Corinth, where Paul writes...

“Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy (Greek = *hikanotes* = sufficiency, competency, ability, capacity, fitness, state of being qualified for something) is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Corinthians 3:5-6).

- Literally, this verse reads: “I have strength for all things in Him Who strengthens me.”
- “I can do all things in Him strengthening me.” (Eadie).
- The idea is: ‘In all things I continue to be strong by the One Who infuses the power into me.’ The Living Bible expands the text this way: “I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me strength and power.”
- The Twentieth Century New Testament translation: “Nothing is beyond my power in the strength of him who makes me strong!”
- Phillips has a nice paraphrase: “I am ready for anything through the strength of the one who lives within me.”

**Jesus** taught the same principle when He instructed His disciples: **Abide** (a command calling for urgent, effective action!) in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it **abides** in the vine, so neither can you, unless you **abide** (as a lifestyle) in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who **abides** (as a lifestyle) in Me, and I in him, he **bears** much fruit; for apart from Me you can do **nothing** (John 15:4,5).

**J Vernon McGee** recommends some caution when interpreting and applying this verse writing:

When Paul says all things, does he literally mean all things? Does it mean you can go outside and jump over your house? Of course not. Paul says, “I can do all things in Christ” - that is, in the context of the will of Christ for your life. Whatever Christ has for you to do, He will supply the power. Whatever gift He gives you, He will give the power to exercise that gift. A gift is a manifestation of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer. As long as you function in Christ, you will have power... Now Paul is not saying that we can do all things. I can’t jump like a grasshopper can jump. When I was in school I was a goalkeeper, but I can’t play football anymore. You see, I can’t do all things, but I can do all things which God has for me to do from the time He saved me to the time He will take me out of this world.” (Mc Gee, JV: Thru the Bible Commentary: Nashville: Thomas Nelson)

## “I Can” Christianity

Here, then, is the question before us tonight: 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? I am going to give you four answers to that question. Along with each answer, I will also give you a principle to think about. These four answers - taken together with the four principles - make up what I call “I can’ Christianity.”

## **Can you really do “all things” in 2012?**

### **I. 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 in 2012, you’ve got to decide what it is you truly want to do.

**Won’t Versus Can’t.** Like all pastors, I talk to many people about their personal problems. And although I’m not a trained counsellor, 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.

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.

## **Can you really do “all things” in 2012?**

### **II. You Can 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 cheque. It’s not as if Paul is saying, “I can do anything I can dream up.” No. If you read the context, he is speaking about the varying and sometimes difficult circumstances of life. In verse 11 - “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” Verse 12 – “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.” (That’s the Pritchard Loose Paraphrase.) 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.

**“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.

**Can you really do “all things” in 2012?  
III. 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 it is a participle in the Greek. The word itself 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, which says, “If you can dream it, you can do it.” and other purely secular approaches to life. It takes more than 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? Is his shed blood sufficient? Is his intercession in heaven able to sustain us? 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.*

We often fail to recognise how much capacity for usefulness is in us. If you still remember the story of Samson in connection with the jawbone of an ass: that donkey’s jawbone lying on the ground was regarded as useless and meant for the rubbish heap. But when it got into Samson’s hands, it was used to slay a thousand people (Judges 15:15). And you have often thought yourself to be as contemptible as that bone. You have said, “What can I do?” But when Christ by his Spirit grips you, what can you not do? Truly you may adopt Paul’s language and say, “I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me.”

**Can you really do “all things” in 2012?  
IV. 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. So many people I know live in the past, worry about the past, fret over the past. Forget it! 2011 is over, done, gone, kaput, finished. It’s never coming back. You can’t go back even if you wanted to. The old year is over, the new one is dawning. *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:

1. **Personal Desire**
2. **Divine Direction**
3. **Divine Enablement**
4. **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 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.”

A minister was preaching on the text, “I can do all things in him who strengthens me” ([Philippians 4:13](#)). What, he wondered, could he say or do in the children’s sermon to help the boys and girls understand the meaning of that verse? Finally, he got an idea. He lined the children up in front of one of the front pews and told them to jump across a distance of about six feet. Of course, none of them could jump that far. They could jump one foot, two feet, even three feet, but not a distance of six feet.

When he came to the last little girl, he told her to count one to three and jump. Then he put his hands under her armpits, and as she jumped, he lifted her and carried her across. “See,” he said, “she did it.” “No,” said the children, “you helped her. You carried her.”

Then he explained: “That’s the way it is with us. We can’t jump out of our sins but Jesus can lift us out of our sins. We can’t jump into the presence of God, but Jesus can lift us into the presence of God. We can’t jump into heaven, but, when the time comes, Jesus can lift us into heaven. We can’t jump out of our selfishness and fears, but, if we let him, Jesus can lift us out of our selfishness and fears.”

### **A Place to Begin**

**With Christ’s help, in 2012 I can ...**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Can you really do “all things” in 2012? Through Christ you can.