

Godly Resolutions

New Castle Bible Church

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Text: 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

INTRODUCTION

It's about this time each year that we begin to talk about New Years' Resolutions. What will I commit to doing next year that I didn't do this year? Who do I want to be one year from now that I'm not today? So, I scanned through a variety of magazines this week to see what they say about New Years' Resolutions.

Good Housekeeping encouraged me to cook one new thing each week next year, to join a club, or to become a plant owner. I know it's going to be tough, but I'm resolved to own a plant!

People Magazine didn't have a list, but surveyed to find the kinds of resolutions being made for 2021. Most people aren't resolved to go to the gym or lose weight. Of those making resolutions, 62% are resolved to save money. Learning a new life skill, traveling more, spending more time with family—those also were popular resolutions according to *People Magazine*.

That's all well and good, but only 8% of people who make resolutions actually keep them. Almost everyone who makes them breaks them. So, why bother? What's the point of making commitments you know you can't keep?

When I married my wife 19 years ago, I vowed before a crowd of people to love her in sickness and in health. And you know what? I've failed many, many times. I've never perfectly loved Cristi in sickness or in health. I made a commitment to her in the sight of hundreds of witnesses that I've never been able to perfectly keep.

The fact that we fail our spouses is no reason to throw out wedding vows. The fact that we fail is a good reason for making them. By God's grace, I want with all my life to fulfill this commitment. I know it will be hard; I know I don't have the strength—but by God's grace, I'm going to try... and when I fail to love my wife, I'm going to ask her forgiveness and then keep trying and keep trying and keep trying until the day that God takes one of us home.

Why make resolutions you can't keep? Well, why make resolutions that you can keep? Why resolve to do what you've already mastered?

Do you like to eat food? Then you don't need a resolution to keep eating food.

Do you shower regularly? Then you don't need a resolution to make sure you stay clean.

We make resolutions where we are weak. That's why a resolution for saving money makes some sense—it's an acknowledgement you haven't done so well with your finances.

Scripture encourages us to establish priorities, to have a set direction in life. As we look ahead to 2021, I want to encourage you to make some commitments or resolutions for next year. I've been studying 2 Thessalonians this week. Verses 11-12 tell us how to do this. Very encouraging text. I believe the main point is that God delights to fulfill the good resolves of His people.

Main Point: God delights to fulfill the good resolves of His people.

Resolutions that align with God's calling, that depend upon God's power, and that focus on God's glory. Make resolutions like this, and you have made some very good resolves for 2021.

Let's read the text together. I will be reading from the English Standard Version...

2 Thes 1:11-12 — “To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Thessalonians desired to do good works. They had plans to minister in some way, were resolved towards it. One such plan we know about is over in 2 Corinthians 8.

2 Corinthians 8:1-2 — “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.”

The churches of Macedonia were Thessalonica, Berea, and Philippi. Persecuted and impoverished churches that were joyful and generous. The Thessalonians had determined they would give generously to God's work abroad. They didn't have much money, but they desired to do this.

They had resolved to do it, and apparently this wasn't their only resolve. Paul asks that God would fulfill their “every” resolve for good—more than one. This was a church that had all sorts of set plans for how they might be a blessing to others.

Hearing of all that Thessalonians wanted to do, Paul is delighted to pray: May God “make you worthy of His calling and may [He] fulfill [your] every resolve for good.”

Firm commitments. It seems there are resolutions worth making in sight of God. So, the question for today is what kind of resolutions should we make as Christians? First, make resolutions that align with God's calling.

I. Make Resolutions that Align with God's Calling

What does God call His people to be? His. He calls us out of the world to be His own possession, and because we belong to Him, we are called to be holy and devoted to Him (1 Pet 1:16).

At present, each of us has thoughts and desires that are at times shameful, actions and words that are sinful. Our conduct doesn't always align with our calling. Practically speaking, there's this gap. We need to grow so our conduct aligns with our calling.

We must learn to love God more fully, learn to serve one another more selflessly, learn to live more devoted to God, and in time, we begin to look a little more and a little more like Christ. No matter how far we get down the road, we never become worthy of Christ or deserving of His calling. But as we grow, our conduct aligns a little bit more with our calling.

That's the idea in verse 11. Paul prayed that God would make the Thessalonians "worthy of His calling" or if you look back at verse 5 "worthy of His kingdom."

Thessalonians: I want God to align your present lives with what He's called you to be in future glory! His Kingdom is your destiny. May God make you ready for it!

If you were going to meet the Queen of England, you wouldn't just barge into Buckingham and yell for Liz. Right? If you had any sense, you would prepare so it's an enjoyable meeting. You might take a class so you know how to dress for the occasion, learn how to speak to the Queen, know when to rise and when to sit, etc. You would prepare before you arrived.

Is it any different for God's Kingdom? Christian, you have a calling, a divine invitation to enter the King's presence. All that happens in this life is God preparing you to fully enjoy what's to come. He is at work growing us, making us more and more like Jesus Christ.

BUT... how much you look like Christ from day to day requires you to actually work at growing. Salvation is entirely of God, but your growth as a Christians is not. You actually have to do something or you will not grow. Spiritual muscles do not come without spiritual sweat.

Philippians 2 encourages us to "work out" our salvation—not work *for* our salvation, but work out. We are to work out what God works in. God delivers the raw materials for your growth, but you must choose to develop them.

As we work out what God works in, we grow and become more worthy or better aligned with our calling as Christians.

Thessalonians: May God align your conduct with His calling, and may He fulfill your every resolve for good!

I want you to notice how these requests go together. Paul wasn't praying that God would make the Thessalonians more worthy and fulfill some totally unrelated plans that they had. No, this church had resolutions that aligned with God's calling. Their goals were God's goals.

At the endpoint of our salvation, future glory in God's Kingdom, you and I will be fully conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). We will look like Jesus Christ beyond anything we've experienced in this life. That's God's goal for His people.

With this larger goal in mind, the Thessalonians had resolved to give generously out of their poverty to help others. This "resolve for good" or "work of faith" was practical. It was something that resulted from being a Christian.

As this church kept growing in their faith, a strong desire or resolve developed deep within. *We want to give what little we have to help Paul and others like him! And if God gives us the ability to do it, that's exactly what we are going to do!*

Sometimes our goals have little connection to God's goal. He's pushing us onto Christlikeness, growing our faith through trials... while we're praying He would make it all stop. He's committed to our growth, while we're committed to things that have nothing to do with this.

Please consider what you can do to grow next year. For instance,

If you're struggling with anxiety and fear, perhaps a good resolution would be: "Recognizing my weakness, I will seek God in prayer whenever I feel the anxiety creep into my heart."

If you're healthy, perhaps a good resolution would be: "Thankful to God for good health, I want use what He's given to serve others in greater ways this year."

You can resolve to exercise or eat better, but bring that resolution in line with God's calling. Don't resolve to diet just to be a better you. Do it to have more energy for service, or do it to develop the fruit of self control.

Resolutions like these align your present with your future and will increase your joy in this life and the one to come. May God fulfill them!

Make resolutions that align with God's calling. Second, make resolutions that depend upon God's power.

II. Make Resolutions that Depend Upon God's Power

At the end of verse 11, that little phrase, "by His power" brings all the muscle of God Himself into the picture. You are not on your own fighting against the world, the devil, and your own flesh to actually change—you have Almighty God available to help you change.

Worldly resolutions are just me and my willpower to make it happen. *I'm going to doubling down, get real serious next year about...*

For 92% of people, the tank of their willpower starts to run dry and they sputter out after a few months.

For the other 8%, they boast that they did it all on their own. Look at me!

The good works that the Thessalonians wanted to do sprung from their faith in Christ, and they recognized their total dependance upon God to help them. A God-honoring resolution is an acknowledgment of weakness. It's a humble confession made public:

God, I can't live how you want me to live... but by your grace, I'm resolved with everything in me to keep trying. God, I need you or all is lost.

Augustine: "O God, command me to do as You will, but give me the strength to do as You command."

And when you fall short and break your resolution, return to the fount of grace. God knows our weakness, and He delights to help us up again and again and again.

Three-hundred years ago, a young Jonathan Edwards was determined to live a life most pleasing to God. He was 19 years old when he penned the first of his 70 lifelong resolutions. Let me read to you a few of his resolutions...

#1 - Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory and to my own good.

#17 - Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.

#33 - Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily... to grow in the knowledge of them.

Edwards wanted his present life to be shaped his future life. He wanted to live today with the priorities of heaven.

How can I glorify God with each minute of my day?

How can I glorify God with my speech?

How can I glorify God in choosing a spouse? As a husband, as a father, as a grandfather?

But the most important part of Edwards' resolutions is what precedes entire list...

"Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake."

Jesus said in John 15:5 that "apart from Me, you can do nothing." Edwards didn't believe he could just will himself unto perfection, make it happen. sanctify himself. No. He would have been the first to admit he couldn't keep any one of his resolutions.

The difference between Edwards and perhaps most of us is how well Edwards understood his own sinfulness: “I am unable to do anything without God’s help.” He wanted to live for eternity. Like the Thessalonians, his resolves aligned with God’s calling. Like Paul he could say, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus!”

*I press on! I’m resolved to live for God’s glory!
But all is lost if not for God’s power.*

Godly resolutions recognize weakness. You may fail many times over to do the good works of faith you desire to do, but that’s no reason to give up. You may make a resolution to use your time more wisely next year (and be specific about what that means). And you will fail by January 2nd to live up to this perfectly. But the end result of a year of trying in God’s power to use your time more wisely will be a man or woman who is learning to do just that.

The end result with Jonathan Edwards was not a life of failure but immense fruit. May we strive to live our lives more worthy of the call, and may God give us the strength to do it next year!

III. Make Resolutions for Sake of God’s Glory

Finally, we see the real reason for making resolutions.

2 Thes 1:12 – “...so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

God’s glory. However, New Years’ Resolutions so often are about... us.

My goals done in my strength for my improvement.

But what we’re seeing today is that resolutions should be about... God.

God’s goals done in God’s strength for God’s glory.

See the difference? Worldly resolutions are all about me. Godly resolutions are all about God. Please understand the difference. We suffer from a kind of Gnosticism where there’s two tiers in our thinking. The higher things are spiritual in nature; the lower things of life are physical.

Reading your Bible, going to church, and praying—that’s spiritual stuff.

Exercise, leisure, dieting, or sport—that’s all physical stuff.

Two tiers. Thus, the spiritual things are all that matters or what mostly matters. The physical things matter only a little or not at all. That’s Gnostic thinking. A strong division between the spiritual and the physical.

Which resolution is more godly: A resolution to read your Bible each day or a resolution to exercise? Answer: I don’t know, because you can do either for the glory of God.

What's more God-honoring to be a pastor or to be a schoolteacher? Answer: I don't know, because you can do either for the glory of God.

As you consider the resolutions you might make for 2021, take a look at your weaknesses. Consider the things that weigh you down—not from being a better you, but from being a better vessel for God's use.

Lord, I want to please you with all that I am. Recognizing how angry I become after listening to talk radio, I repent and commit to ridding myself of all talk radio in 2021.

Lord, I want to please you with all that I am. Recognizing how fearful I am to share my faith, I repent and am resolved to look for opportunities.

Recognizing my lack of discipline in life, I repent and am resolved to take better care of the body you so graciously gave me.

Why wouldn't the Lord help you with these resolutions? These align with His calling of you as a Christian, can be done in His strength, can bring Him glory... and bring our present lives a little closer to what we will be in future glory.

As I think about resolutions, I can't help but recall the life of Ben Franklin. Edwards wasn't the only young man of his generation to make a set of resolutions. Ben Franklin and Jonathan Edwards were born within three years of each other, just 90 miles apart. They were intellectual giants in Colonial America.

Franklin wrote his resolutions, called the Thirteen Virtues. Like Edwards, he reviewed them for the rest of his life. *Reader's Digest* had a story that said the following about Franklin...

Ben kept track of his performance in a small book in which he entered a black mark each day for each resolution broken. He had intended to reuse the little book, eventually erasing old black marks as his performance improved. It didn't. So many black marks appeared on top of black marks that the little book developed holes. He had to resort to keeping his records on a piece of ivory, from which the accumulated black marks could be tactfully mopped off with a wet sponge.

Edwards made godly resolutions; Franklin made worldly resolutions. Both men made a resolution about time management, for instance. The difference was along the lines of our sermon today.

Franklin's resolutions were his goals done in his strength for his own improvement.
Moral, but godless.

Edward's resolutions were God's goals done in God's strength for God's glory.
Moral, and godly.

1 Cor 10:31 — “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

EXHORTATION

God gives each of us only so much time in this life. From eternity past, he apportioned to each of us a fixed amount of time. The hourglass of your life has less sand in it than it had yesterday... and tomorrow, it will have even less. One day for each of us, the sand will be gone, your life over, and you will be forever either in heaven or in hell.

We are not called to drift through life like spiritual jellyfish without any real aims or goals. We are called to be dolphins that fight the current, determined to reach the heavenly shore.

Friends, make resolutions with heaven in mind. Make resolutions...

that align your life with God's work in your life
that depend upon God's strength to keep
that bring Him glory.

May God strengthen you and fulfill your resolves for 2021.

Post-sermon: If you have resolutions for 2021 that will help you grow in Christ, I would love to hear them and pray that God would fulfill them. Share these with your life group or with our elders. As Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, let others pray for you as you strive to grow.

May God give you the strength to live for His glory!