

2012 NEW YEARS MESSAGE

"Happy New Year!"

Philippians 3:13-14

January 1, 2012

INTRODUCTION:

You did it! You made it through another year. 2011 is history! A new year is here. You have a year full of possibility and opportunity. 12 months. 52 weeks. 365 days. 8760 hours. 525, 600 minutes and 31,536,000 seconds. What will you do with all this time?

This is typically the time of year to make resolutions. In the dictionary resolution is defined as "a course of action decided upon; a fixed purpose." We resolve to do things differently; To lose weight, to exercise more; To be a better person; To dispense with old bad habits and begin some new good ones. A few years ago a newspaper in Boston allowed people to post new year's resolutions on their website. Here are a few interesting ones:

- ~ I resolve to stop feeding the office plant leftover coffee. I will use water instead.
- ~ My new year's resolution is to really start collecting Muppet and Peanuts stuff in the coming year!
- ~ As much as I hate government intervention, I resolve to try and get a law passed that requires every person on the face of this earth to have to use their common sense at least once a day!!!!
- ~ As a Theatre Major, I seldom have much time to eat real food...never mind eating with my family. This year, I resolve to try REAL hard to stop eating McDonalds and Wendy's for 2 out of 3 meals a day. If that isn't possible, I promise to at least clean the remains from my car.
- ~ I wish to become the old crone that my body already says that I am and stop trying to look like Barbie due to our culture.

~ I hereby resolve to accept the changes occurring at work. I will try to remember that the decision-makers have a brain and will use it if necessary. Finally, I will cheer for them if it works and I will not laugh if it doesn't!

~ To refuse to take responsibility for my decisions, to never take the blame, not stand by my promises, and to ignore the needs of the poor. In short, my resolution is to become a politician!

~ To become as wonderful a person as my dog thinks I am.

Or how about this one...A son called his parents to wish them a happy new year and when his Dad answered the phone, He asked his dad," well Dad, what's your new year's resolution? His dad replied, To make "To make your mother as happy as I can all year," When his mom got on the phone he asked. her the same question. His mom replied my resolution is "To see that your dad keeps his New Year's resolution."

If we are interested in keeping any of our resolutions this year, we should adhere to the methods employed by Paul in Philippians 3:13 - 14:

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. - --Philippians 3:13-14

WE MUST:

1. ENGAGE IN PRELIMINARY ACTIVITY

"Forgetting what is behind." ---Philippians 3:13

Paul is talking about forgetting in such a way that the past, good or bad, will have no negative bearing on one's present spiritual growth and condition.

1. Forget Wrongs Committed

Forget the wrongs that could paralyze you with guilt and despair. Paul definitely had some of these. As a persecutor of the church, he had a lot he wanted to leave behind.

2. Forget Successes

Forget the attainments that might cause you to pull into "neutral." He also didn't want to dwell on how far he had come from where he was. This might make him want to be content with where he was, and too satisfied or smug about his spirituality. He realized he still had a long way to go if he wanted to know Christ fully and completely.

In order to make solid resolutions we have to put the failures of previous attempts behind us. Sometimes we make resolutions and find that it takes us a very short period of time before we have already broken them. Out of 10 people who make New Year's resolutions, eight won't keep them for more than a month. Maybe your failure to keep past resolutions makes you cynical or skeptical about making any for 2012. But if we adhere to the method of Paul, we forget about all those.

ILLUSTRATION: Speaking of forgetting: Two old men were sitting on a park bench. One of the men said, "You know as I get older I can't remember things the way I used to." The other man said, "I used to have that problem too until I took this memory course. It's a very simple technique, based on associating words with names, places and events. Now because of that I don't have trouble remembering anything at all." The first man said, "Really? What was the name of the course?" The old man got a puzzled look on his face, turned white as a sheet, scratched his head, then asked, "What's the flower with a long stem, has thorns on it, the petals can be white or yellow or red?" "A rose?" the other man replied. "Yes, thank you!" He turned to his wife and said, "Rose, what was the name of that memory course?"

That's pretty forgetful. In a similar way, if we want to move forward, we have to put the mistakes of the past behind; To forget them as over and done with.

FARMING ILLUSTRATION: When I used to cultivate fields as a young man in Ohio I learned that you have to look forward not behind. The shovels are breaking up the ground in between the rows, and coming very close to the plants themselves. Since a cultivator can do 12 or 24 rows at a time, when you get off center, it wipes

out quite an area. But to get the job done, the farmer has to forget the past (what is behind) and keep working on what is ahead, or the job never gets done. We have a clean slate when we forget the past, when we leave it behind.

Paul's first method is engaging in the preliminary activity. Forgetting what is behind. The second method found here that will help us make resolutions that last are:

2. WE MUST IMPLEMENT A PLAN

"Straining toward what is ahead." ---Philippians 3:13

"Straining" refers to continuous concentration, like that of a runner in a race whose ceaseless personal exertion and intensity of desire help to achieve the hoped for victory. This word helps us to picture a runner with his body bent over, hand outstretched, eyes fastened on the goal, never giving a backward glance. In other words, this runner is focused and determined. A plan of action, once developed has to be held to with great exertion and intensity. Concentrating on a solid plan will help to make our resolutions more of a reality.

Set some goals with the following questions in mind:

~ Will this goal glorify God?

The Bible says, "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." ---1 Corinthians 10:31 God wants your goals or your resolutions to bring him glory. Some of our goals could be:

- Spend more time with my children
- Volunteer to lead a ministry at church
- Continue my education
- Exercise regularly
- Purchase a house
- Get married

None of these goals are necessarily right or wrong. The question is how will your goals glorify God?

~ Will this goal make me more like Jesus?

As we make resolutions for ourselves, this is really one of the ultimate questions. Would Jesus spend his time this way? Would Jesus have this as a goal? These are some excellent things to consider.

~ Will this goal make a positive contribution to the world?

Some things aren't necessarily wrong as goals, they're just not all that important. One way to make this distinction is to measure the goal's positive impact on others. Will this goal make a positive contribution to your family, co-workers, church, community and your world?

~ Will this goal enhance my ability to witness?

Everything that we are involved in with other people is an opportunity to witness. Do any of your goals for 2012 intentionally involve you with unchurched people so that you can be a witness for Jesus Christ? Things like joining the Rotary Club, a tennis league, joining a health club, going as a chaperone on school trips with your children, inviting a neighbor over for dessert. Do you have any goals that specifically get you involved with people who need to know Jesus Christ? Once you've made some goals or some resolutions, these goals have to be translated into activities. A lot of us set worthy goals, but then nothing happens.

2. Organize your activities around these categories:

a. Your Personal Life.

Many of us don't spend enough time developing our personal lives. This includes our spiritual well-being, our prayer life, how physically fit we are, how emotionally healthy we are, how willing we are to grow mentally in wisdom and knowledge. The goal is to get closer to God. A suggested activity is to read a chapter of the Bible each day before work.

b. Your Family.

Obviously our goals and activities have to include our families. The Bible warns us not to neglect them. The goal is to spend more time with each of your immediate family members. A suggested activity would be to participate in things that they enjoy.

c. Your Church.

When we don't include church, we get out of balance. We can't be all that God wants us to be without being involved in the family of God. The goal is to get more involved in the life of Gateway. A suggested activity is to get involved with a ministry team on a regular basis.

ILLUSTRATION: A church suddenly stopped buying pencils from a certain office supply. The manager called the preacher to ask what the problem was. The preacher, "We ordered some pencils from you to be used in the pews for visitors to sign their visitors' card." "Well," the manager said, "Didn't you receive them from us?" The preacher replied, "Oh, yes, we received them all right, BUT YOU SENT US SOME PENCILS STAMPED WITH THE WORDS, 'PLAY GOLF NEXT SUNDAY!'"

d. Your Work.

Work is a part of life. If we do everything for the glory of God, we also make work a priority. Your goal should be to improve your job skills and become the best employee you can possibly be. A suggested activity would be to become less of a complainer of your superiors in the work place.

e. Your world.

We are citizens, living in communities. We have a responsibility to the people around us to be good citizens. One goal I would suggest is to become more civil with your fellow citizens. A suggested activity is to become a better listener of opposing points of view.

3. Harmonize your schedule with your goals.

If you don't schedule the important things in your life, you won't do them. If you've made the goal to get closer to God and your activity is to read a chapter of the Bible each day, you have to schedule the time for this, or it simply won't happen. Maybe you've made the goals of getting in better shape, and being a better witness in your community, and you combined them into one activity - joining an aerobics class at a local gym. If you don't do the work to sign up and then put the class schedule in your calendar, it won't happen. Maybe you have a goal of becoming a better musician, which translates into an hour of practice every other day. If you don't schedule it, you know what will happen. NOTHING! And that's the very reason why so many of our resolutions don't stick. We don't have a plan that we stick to. We never make these things appointments that cannot be compromised. Paul "strained" toward his goal. We have to do the same with our resolutions. Then give priority to the scheduled events.

We've seen that Paul's methods for reaching a goal included his preliminary activity of forgetting the past, and developing a plan by straining toward what was ahead.

CONCLUSION: Paul then gives us some pointers for reaching our goals in 2012:

"I press on toward the goal." ---Philippians 3:14

If we are going to press on toward our resolutions in 2012, here are some things to remember. **Go slow!** You probably can't work on changing everything all at once. This is usually my mistake. I see 15 things I want to work on in the coming year, and I start all of them at once. That can be pretty frustrating.

The cartoon character Calvin from Calvin and Hobbes once said, **"God put me on this earth to accomplish a certain number of things. Right now I'm so far behind I'll never die."**

The key with resolutions is just to **make a couple and stick to them.** It's better to work on a little at time and succeed greatly than to work on everything all at

once only to accomplish very little or nothing. Remember this statement: "By the help of the Lord, I intend this year to work at improving myself in this area of my life."

That's really what resolutions are; Self-improvement for God. We want to be more like God himself. He wants to help us become more like Himself. **If you break a resolution, don't give up!** You don't have to wait until January of 2013 to start over.

Remember, Paul said "forgetting what is behind." God is continually making us new. If you have a relapse, talk to God about it, and then get back in gear. It's not the end of the world. God forgives. **Memorize Scripture** that helps you focus on your goal. The Bible has a lot to say to us as we work on becoming more like Christ. Put the Scripture on your refrigerator, your phone or computer monitor at work, the dashboard of your car. See it, remember it and live it!

Tell a friend about your resolution and ask them to keep track of your progress. Accountability always helps me. Maybe you and a friend could work on the same resolution and help each other! Making resolutions is a very Christian thing to do. By doing this we say, "I want to be better prepared for life in heaven by starting to live a more godly life right now." Since resolutions make us consider the future, the best resolutions are the ones that we'll enjoy throughout eternity.

A story is told that at the beginning of a new year, a high school principal decided to post his teachers' new year's resolutions on the bulletin board. As the teachers gathered around the bulletin board, a great commotion started. One of the teachers was complaining. "Why weren't my resolutions posted?" She was throwing such a temper tantrum that the principal hurried to his office to see if he had overlooked her resolutions. Sure enough, he had mislaid them on his desk. As he read her resolutions he was astounded. This teacher's first resolution was not to let little things upset her in the New Year.