

LAKESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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I RESOLVE...WITH GOD'S HELP
Psalm 16 & Philippians 3:12-14

At the end of the year, we often take inventory of our lives and try to measure if we are succeeding at them. That leads us to ask questions like:

"Is life turning out the way I wanted?"

"Am I happy with who I am, and with what I'm doing?"

"Do I need to make changes?"

In response to these kinds of questions, many of us will be prompted to establish New Year's resolutions. Have you been thinking about that yet? Most of our resolutions tend to be about *self-improvement*. We resolve to *eat better, exercise more, and do a better job of stopping to 'smell the roses'*. The last thing we want is for the new year to be worse than the last year. We sure don't want to lose ground.

Still, why are our best intentions often ditched by January 21? That's what the experts say ... we give up within 3 weeks! Obviously with most of us, it is easy to resolve to change, but a lot *harder* to really follow through. We vow to make alterations in our lives ... someday!



The Apostle Paul apparently had little need for New Year's resolutions. He knew that Jesus Christ chose him for a definite purpose. Paul unquestionably knew that he was far from perfect and that Jesus loved him just as he was ... with all the spots, stains and wrinkles. The Apostle Paul acknowledged that Jesus Christ's *hope* for his life was being realized—that there was room for growth—that God was not finished with him yet. Paul had goals.

He stated: *"I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:14).

You see, Paul was determined to live, being fully aware that life was not just one-dimensional.



A thousand years before the Apostle Paul lived, King David made a few resolutions of his own ... actually there were many. One was to *always keep the Lord before him*. You and I know that David was not very successful with that one. But, like Paul, David knew that he wouldn't always succeed. He hadn't in the past, and he probably wouldn't in the future. Yet David says emphatically:

"I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8).

The point of all of this, is to say that *YOU* and *I* need to realize [*maybe afresh ... in a renewed way*] that God has a dream for us. Keeping that in mind, New Year's resolutions just might take on a whole new meaning for us. Along side the Apostle Paul and King David we can feel pretty secure that the Lord is the one who is working in us.

So ... why not begin the New Year with some brand new resolutions? And while we're at it, let's make them high enough so that they will *really stretch us!* However, I

want to assure you, right up front that you don't need to be discouraged when you fall short, because most of us undoubtedly will. But you see, the challenge in making the resolutions high enough and to some extent at least beginning to accomplish them, we will *END* the new year with *FAR MORE ACCOMPLISHED* that we otherwise would have.



I've come up with five basic *RESOLUTIONS* for 2008 that I want to share with you and challenge you to make. If you choose to accept them, know that you are not alone ... *God LOVES you and is working IN you*. Feel free to adapt them to your own circumstances ... add to them or subtract from them ... but at least here is a *STARTING POINT* for the year ahead:

FIRST ... I resolve, with God's help, to daily recognize that I am special, one of Christ's very own.

This is, without doubt, the place to begin. It is a form of thought conditioning that has great value to us. It's not an affirmation geared to set a goal way out there and strive to reach it ... *rather, it is a reminder*. What it means is this: "Although I know the facts of my faith, that I have received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, and that he gave his life for me ... I can still easily forget. I can live day by day never stopping to think about my place with God." So, as the cliché states, "Live one day at a time." And remind yourself every day that you are one of God's family.



SECOND ... I resolve, with God's help, to daily look to God's Word for guidance.

This may mean, as someone has suggested, taking your alarm clock a little more seriously. The Bible tells us that if we "*seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness*," all the things that we really need will be ours. However, it isn't easy. For instance, trying to do your devotions in bed ... *can be very difficult!*

I would encourage you to set up a kind of daily schedule for devotional reading. Countless resources are available out there, which include a Scripture passage and meditation for each day. My favorite over the years has been, Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest*. My mom has use *Our Daily Bread* for about 30 years. And I know that many of you use such a daily devotional. I would be very interested if some of you would let me know what's helpful for you so that I might pass the suggestion along to others who need some direction.

Another suggestion is to read three chapters in the Bible each day, and five on Sunday. Over the course of one year you'll be able to read the Bible all the way through. And alternate each week between the Old and New Testaments. This will keep you from getting bogged down. The reality is that not every part of the Bible speaks to us with the same meaning.

Now, I'll be honest with you, I've read the Bible through a few times, but there were many more times that I started out to do it and didn't finish! Still, if I had never set the goal, I probably would never have read it all the way through.

In the words of the Psalmist: "*I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you*" (Psalm 119:11).

Don't approach your reading as if you're in some sort of marathon foot-race. It is way more important that you make a point to expose yourself to God's Word regularly. Go at a slower pace if you need to. That's all right. But always ask in prayer before your read: "*God, help me to see what you have in mind for me today.*"



THIRD ... I resolve, with God's help, to talk to God daily in prayer, even when I don't feel like it.

What I don't mean by this is to come to God each day to tell him everything I want from him. A balanced prayer has several parts, like the quarters of a football game and the verses of a hymn. We begin with *ADORATION* ... in which we affirm the greatness of God.

Then move to *CONFESSION*. As I have expressed earlier, we all are painfully aware of the way we blow it regularly ... our selfishness, our greed, our lack of love and kindness. Talk openly and frankly to God about these things, and then accept his promise of forgiveness. As Corrie Ten Boom once said, "*Do you know what the Bible tells us about sins we confess? God drowns them in the depths of the sea. As far as the east is from the west, he casts our sins from us ... he makes them disappear like a cloud ... thus Jesus causes our sins to be forgiven,*"

Following confession is *THANKSGIVING*. Nothing helps to turn your life around so fast as counting your blessings. Thank God for the little things as well as the big ... our weather here in Florida (after all, we live in paradise), your health, food, friends and family.

Next, *PRAY FOR OTHERS*. Think of two or three people who have needs, and pray for them. In your LPC Sunday News you will find an updated list every week of the members of our church family who need your prayers.

And finally, bring your *OWN NEEDS* and *CONCERNS* before our God in prayer.



FOURTH ... I resolve, with God's help, to organize my day, to provide adequate time for physical exercise and mental growth.

This is another tough one for many of us. We've got to decide what's important and then stick with it. What place does exercise have in your life? Do you, like me, need to make some changes, maybe big changes? And, what about mental discipline and growth? Enough said!



And then, FIFTH ... I resolve, with God's help, to daily serve someone else in the name of Christ.

Let's all be honest here ... there is no way that most of us can do much to alleviate the big problems that our world faces. But *IF* we ignore the needy around us, if we shut our eyes and close our ears to those in trouble, we're *UNFIT* for the Kingdom of God, and the *WHOLE MEANING* of Christmas and the Christian faith is *LOST* to us.

We've got a job to do, regardless of how little or how much you think you can do. Jack Rogers, one of my professors at Fuller Theological Seminary, the Moderator of our General Assembly a half dozen years ago, a mentor and friend, made this bold statement: "We believe as Presbyterian Reformed Christians that we have a job to try and transform the world, to transform society, to make it more the way God would like it to be."

And so, there is something that you and I can do. Each day we can help at least one other person ... in the name of Jesus Christ. It may be a physical need we can do something about. It may be an emotional need ... listening is a wonderful gift. You can give that person some recognition, some care. It may be a spiritual need ... in a sensitive way, tell them how Jesus Christ has helped you. If those suggestions scare you, simply being nice to the check out person at Winn Dixie will help and at least get you started.



We have come to the end of 2007. With Christmas behind us and the New Year before us, let's *RESOLVE* to live 2008 with God's help.

Let Christ be more than just sentiment ...

Away with faith that awakens only on holidays.

Away with a faith that is flimsy and seasonal as tinsel.

Away with the charade and half-heartedness.

Let's put our *LIVES* on the *LINE* for Jesus Christ.

Nothing short of this will do.

These words from an old hymn capture what I have been saying:

“Just as I am, without one plea,
but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou bidst me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.”



Let us pray:

Change me, Lord. Move me by your Spirit and your will, so that I will be a channel of your peace, and truly serve you this year. Grant me a glimpse of your dream, your hope, so that I may press on to take hold of it. For your glory ... and in Jesus' name.

Amen and Amen.