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WVPC

January 1, 2017

“A Joint New Year’s Resolution”

Ephesians 3:14–19

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Introduction

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A Joint New Year's Resolution

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- Nathan just read the Apostle Paul's prayer for the Church in Ephesus. Paul's prayer applies equally to us today.
- Paul prayed that they church would be strengthened through the Holy Spirit so that Christ may dwell in our hearts. Ultimately, he prayed that we grasp Christ's love for us and that we become filled with the fullness of God.
- This morning, I want to challenge you to resolve to take a specific step to become more established in Christ's love.
- Before I begin with a specific step, I want to talk about what is special about today?

- It is January 1st. It is a holiday. A day to relax or to recover if you celebrated too much last night. 2016 is done and we have 2017 in front of us.

- How do you feel about that?

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Janus

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- You might feel a little like the Roman God Janus — the Roman god of beginnings, gates, transitions, time, doorways, passages, and endings. He is depicted as having two faces on his head.
 - To me it is like he is standing in the doorway look both back to where he has been and forward to where he is going.
 - In this sculpture, he has two faces – the older one looking in the past and the young one looking toward the future.
- Whatever happened in the past, it is done. It is January 1st and the only thing that we can change is the future.

Resolutions that people make

- Many people see the change in year as a fresh start – they make New Year’s Resolutions.
- These can be things like losing weight or to read more
- Making New Year’s resolutions is not a new practice.
- Humans have a history of new year’s resolutions
 - The ancient Babylonians made something like New Year’s resolutions, some 4,000 years ago.
- We make New Year’s Resolutions today.
- We make these resolutions, but then what happens?
 - Then we break them

We end up making the same resolutions year after year

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Why do our resolutions fail?

- Perhaps like these goals, they are **unrealistic**?
- We try to do **too much**.
- Perhaps we make **too many** resolutions?
- Perhaps it is because we try to do it **by self-will**.

Our Resolution

- As followers of Jesus, what can we do?
- The Apostle Paul knew that on our own, our frail nature would cause us to fail. That is why he prayed for the church in Ephesus. He said in

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“¹⁴ I kneel before the Father, ... ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit.”

Ephesians 3:14,16

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Make a **joint** New Year’s resolution.

You and God.

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- As we look ahead to 2017, we can depend upon God’s help. Instead of making our own individual New Year’s Resolutions, we can make **joint** New Year Resolutions with God.
- These resolutions will certainly succeed unlike the ones we have been talking about, we will have God working with us.

Why will a joint resolution succeed?

- To assure that God will work with us in our New Year's Resolution:
 - First, we need to be in alignment with God's will
 - Left to ourselves, we often set unrealistic expectations of ourselves.
 - Many of the resolutions we saw above were for our own glory and satisfaction.
 - We just set ourselves up as little gods.
 - If our resolutions are in tune with God—they must conform to God's will, and we will have God's help meeting our resolutions.
 - Paul writes in
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 - Romans 12:2:
 - ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.
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 - In other words, do not conform to the standard New Year's resolutions but instead renew your mind with God's good will for you.
- We can see this by examining our resolutions – do they conform to God's will?

- Is it:
 - get a job where I can be happy or
 - Change my attitude and become content where ever I am
- Is it:
 - Stick to a diet so I can be attractive or
 - Find peace so I don't eat for comfort

- Second, we cannot do it on our own. If we partner with God we will be filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - We need support. We have it in the Holy Spirit.
 - Jesus told us that He would send us help. In John 14:26 Jesus says:
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John 14:26
²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.
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 - We do not need to keep our resolution on by ourselves – we have help.

- Third, in Jesus, we must remember that, unlike Janus, we don't have to keep looking over our shoulders.
 - It is only through Jesus that we can leave the burden our past behind if we ask Jesus for forgiveness, repent, and then look forward.
 - The Apostle Peter tells us in

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Acts 10:43:

⁴³ All the prophets testify about him (Jesus) that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

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- Through Jesus, our past does not drag us down.
- Because we are forgiven, we can focus on the future.
- We are not like Janus, looking both backward and forward. We only look forward to our future in Christ.

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Make a **joint** New Year's resolution.

You and God.

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- It is not complicated. We need just **one** resolution this year:
 - That is to follow Jesus and listen to His will for us.
 - It is not an act of our will
 - But an act of non-will – an act of submission to God.
 - We are in good hands if we submit to God's will.
- This year – make a **joint** New Year's resolution – You and God

Resolution Foundation

- The foundational step to making a joint resolution is to be a follower of Christ.
- If you have never asked **Jesus into your heart** ... if you do not depend upon Jesus, if Jesus is not your master...
 - Now is the time.
 - Jesus came to save you.
 - Following Jesus will be the best resolution ever.
 - There will be people up front after the service to pray with you if you make this decision today.

Ideas for resolutions

- If Jesus is already in our heart, what should our joint resolution with God be?
 - It may be as simple as coming back next Sunday and the Sunday after that.
- We each need to make our own individual resolution to fit where we are.
- I want to give you 6 suggestions for your resolution. Pick one these that you don't already do or a practice that you need to get back into the habit of doing:
First we'll start out simple: Your joint resolution with God could be:

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1. Come to Church each week

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Participate in the service, listen, learn, open yourself up to God wants to say to you. Allow Him to grow your spirituality.

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1. Come to Church each week

2. Pray Daily

[[end slide]]

- A second suggestion is to Pray Daily:

- Pick a regular time – make it a habit

Jesus made it a habit: Luke 5:16

¹⁶ But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

- Pick a quiet place – free from distractions
- When you pray, make it a balanced prayer. Use an acronym like ACTS to help you. In your prayer spend time in

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A – Adoration

C – Confession

T – Thanksgiving

S – Supplication

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- Adoration of God for who He is
- Confession – acknowledge how you have missed the mark
- Thanksgiving for what God has done for you.
- Supplication – lay your requests before God.
- As part of your prayer time, take a moment to look back and see how God has answered your prayer or inspired you to act.
- When we take the time to empty our mind of our desires and be open to God, He will speak to us.

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1. Come to Church each week
2. Pray Daily
- 3. Read the Bible every day**

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- Need something more physical? Try reading the Bible every day.

The Psalms begin with the admonition:

Blessed is the one ... who meditates on his law day and night.

Psalm 1:1–2

- As with prayer:
 - Pick a regular time – it will help you remember your resolution - make it a habit
 - Pick a quiet place – free from distractions
 - After reading a passage,
 - Pause and ponder the passage.
 - What did the words mean?
 - What do the words say to you and your situation?
 - What is the Holy Spirit telling you?
 - Read the bible with a partner – listen to what the passage says to them and share what it says to you. Learn from each other.

- Your New Year's Resolution with Christ is not just an intellectual exercise nor is it just an emotional exercise. It should engage both your mind and your heart.
- Too busy? You will find that it doesn't matter. – if you spend time with God, the timing will work out.

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1. Come to Church each week
2. Pray Daily
3. Read the Bible every day
- 4. Obey the Ten Commandments/the Greatest Commandment**

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- Need something more concrete or with less reading? Obey the ten commandments – see Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21.
 - Most of us know them, but do we really?
 - Print them out or learn them from the VBS song
 - Keep them close.
 - Review them daily
 - Have I obeyed the letter of the law today?
 - For example, have I told a lie?
 - Have I obeyed the spirit of the law today?
 - Have I told a lie of omission or given a false impression?
 - Have I told a lie by my actions – telling myself that I love God but I spend my time loving myself or chasing money or the approval of others?
 - Ponder how obeying the commands has been good for you. How God’s wisdom is good.

- Ten commandments too many?
 - Pick one of them to obey – How about #5 keep the Sabbath?
 - There are 10 possibilities here.
- Perhaps instead of ten commandments, resolve to follow Jesus' summation of the commandments in the Greatest Commandment

³⁷ Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:37–40

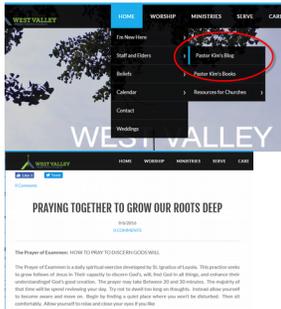
- Have I hated a neighbor – perhaps they are a politician or someone who doesn't listen to my wisdom about the correct political direction of the country?
 - It is God who is in control, not for us to be in control.
 - It is our job to show God's love for us to others.

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1. Come to Church each week
2. Pray Daily
3. Read the Bible every day
4. Obey the Ten Commandments/ Greatest Commandment
- 5. Practice the Examen**

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- o Already pray regularly and read the Bible? Perhaps your resolution is to practice the Examen as Kim wrote about in her blog in September. If you have never heard about this Spiritual Practice, take a look.
- o Start at the Home menu, then “Staff and Elders”, and select “Pastor Kim’s Blog”



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1. Come to Church each week
2. Pray Daily
3. Read the Bible every day
4. Obey the Ten Commandments/the Golden Rule
5. Practice the Examen
- 6. Join/form a small group**

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- Perhaps something with people? Join a small group or form a small group.

Acts 16:40

⁴⁰ After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them.

- The format is not difficult – it is just committing to meeting with friends.
 - A regular meeting date/time
 - 5-10 people
 - Set a regular time for
 - Fellowship – sharing your life with others
 - Study – Bible or book.
 - Sharing of prayer requests, prayer and encouragement
 - You will be blessed.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, these ideas for a Joint New Year's Resolution are not hard. It just takes a little faith, patience and help from the Holy Spirit which is freely available to you.
- Pick one of these suggestions or one that is not up here but has been on your heart.
- Resolve to begin this practice today and to make it a habit in 2017.
- As a Christian it is our duty to align our lives with God's desires for us.
- A Joint resolution with God is a way to do this.
- My hope is that the Apostle Paul's prayer is answered in us:
 - "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"
(Ephesians 3:17)

Communion transition

- If we let Him, our hearts will burn within us when Jesus speaks to us through the Holy Spirit.
 - He speaks the truth
 - He speaks God's will
 - His actions speak louder than any words
- Jesus' death upon a cross, for our sins, speaks of God's love for us.