

Sunday, January 1, 2023

WILL 2023 BE BETTER? (What Resolutions Have You Set?)

Today, we begin a new year. Every year about this time, I think about changes I need and want to make in my life. And I believe that is a good thing to do, not just once a year, but a few times throughout the year.

I. Setting resolutions

- a. What are resolutions? Real resolutions are plans made designed to improve your life. Most resolutions are directed toward physical things. But what about spiritual resolutions? WHEN and if you make resolutions, is improving your relationship with God included?
- b. Planning is Biblical
 - i. First – God planned – Romans 8:28 tells us that all things work together for good (according to His purpose). Ephesians 3:9-11 reminds us that the church was a part of God’s eternal plans
 - ii. Proverbs 21:5, *The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, But those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.*
 - iii. Proverbs 16:9, *A man’s heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.* NOTE here that in our planning we must NOT leave God out of it. Cf. James 4:13-15.
 - iv. Luke 14:28-30 addressing the cost of being a disciple Jesus said, *For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’*
- c. We must begin with examination – 2 Corinthians 13:5. Where am I in relation to where I ought to be? Was 2022 a good year – spiritually and physically (remember, our physical goals CAN have an impact on our spiritual life - decisions we make can help or hinder us spiritually).
- d. Why do resolutions fail? In preparing for this lesson, I came across an article that noted 2 reasons why we fail to keep our resolutions.
 - i. **Denial.** We are not COMPLETELY convinced we need to change. We KNOW we need to change and that it would be good, but we do not see the need for changes deep down. The Bible talks about those who were CONVICTED! E.g. Acts 2:37 – they were “cut to the heart”.
 - ii. **Our heart is not in it** – we are not serious about improving our lives. We know that reaching meaningful change is going to be difficult, slow and possibly painful. Most will not change because they are seeking a simple solution. And our society (and advertising) is filled with supposed easy solutions – but we know that NOTHING worthwhile comes easy. Why did the people of Jerusalem rebuild the walls in just 52 days under the direction of Nehemiah? Because “the people had a mind to work.” (Nehemiah 4:6).
- e. To be successful at reaching our goals
 - i. We need to be totally and brutally honest with ourselves. Even the slightest denial of reality will hinder your results and could completely derail your efforts. True conversion only comes AFTER one is CONVICTED.
 - ii. We need to change the way we think – we have to MAKE UP OUR MIND that we are going to change. And be willing to take the necessary steps to make that happen. Romans 12:2, *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*
 - iii. We need to create a workable plan – this is why we begin with examination. We identify what needs to change. And then we spend some time determining HOW we are going to achieve that change. We start with overall goals, but then create a “roadmap” to reach that

goal. That roadmap needs to be detailed and broken down into attainable steps – short-term goals. It is “one step at a time” mindset. One source suggests that we have a SMART goal framework. SMART stands for: > Specific, > Measurable, > Achievable, > Relevant, > Time-bound (there HAS to be a timeframe).

- iv. Write down your goals and document your progress. You need to from time to time pause and look at your goals. Journaling your progress is helpful, especially when you start struggling or suffer set-backs.

II. **Considering what I need to change**

- a. Philippians 3:13-14 - *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* There is so much in this text that we can learn – 1) I am not where I need to be yet; 2) I cannot dwell on the past – WHERE do you begin to make changes? Where you are right now; 3) I need to reach forward – have direction and move; 4) I need to “press toward the goal” – this is an action word that describes intense effort being made. It means to actively and energetically pursue something. THIS is a great formula for accomplishing your resolutions (goals).
- b. Are there things I need to stop?
 - i. Hebrews 12:1 calls for us to lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us. Ephesians 4:22 calls for us to put off concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to deceitful lusts. Colossians 3:8 is more straight forward, *But now you yourselves are to **put off** all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have **put off** the old man with his deeds,*
 - ii. Are there some things in my life that keep trying to hang on?
 - 1. Are there sins I am struggling with? 1 John 3:9, 1 Corinthians 15:34 says, “*Awake to righteousness, and do not sin*”. The NASB says, “...and stop sinning” (It is a negative present tense verb).
IF there are things I am doing that are sinful, I NEED TO REPENT! Acts 8:22.
 - 2. Maybe I need to stop overlooking sin in my life and acting as if it is no big deal (to God every sin is a big deal) or something I will deal with later.
 - 3. Do I have bad attitudes such as anger, bitterness, indifference, self-loathing, or constant complaining?
 - 4. Maybe it is some lustful thoughts or actions. Psalm 101:3 says, *I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me.*
 - 5. Maybe it is a mismanagement of my time and resources - I waste too much time on worthless or worth-LESS activities (not necessarily wrong).
 - 6. Maybe I need to stop comparing myself to others – 2 Corinthians 10:12
- c. Are there things I need to start?
 - iii. When we stand before God in judgment, He is not only going to consider what we did wrong, but also what we did not do right. When we fail to obey His commands we are just as wrong as when we do what we should not. We must not forget that obedience is a two-way street.
 - iv. Luke 6:46, Why call Me Lord and do not the things that I say? Obedience is emphasized greatly in scripture.
 - v. In Matthew 12:43-45 Jesus tells the parable of an unclean spirit that is cast out of a man and seeks a place of rest but finds none. So he returns and finds the “host” he left empty so he returns and brings with him 7 more unclean spirits, more wicked than himself. And thus the latter end is worse than the beginning.

So it is when we purge sinful conduct from our life and do not replace it with something good.

- vi. As I examine my life are there things I need to start?
 1. First, have I obeyed the gospel? You have to begin a walk with God if you are to finish with Him. Galatians 3:27.
“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.” Romans 13:14
 2. Do I read and study my Bible and pray regularly? If not, I need to set aside a time on a daily basis to do this. It is a crucial element to growth.
 3. Am I doing anything to try and win other souls to Him?
 4. Do I need to start doing more to help build up the local church here?
 5. Do I need to make the Kingdom of God FIRST in my life? (Matthew 6:33)
- vii. James 4:17 – to him who knows to do good and does not do it...
- d. Are there things I need to improve?
 - viii. For most of us, this is where we are. If we are trying to live the Christian life, we are doing most of the things they need to do, at least to some degree – we attend services, we read our Bibles a little and pray a little, we are not caught up in the “big sins” as we define them. But deep down we know there is room for improvement.
 - ix. 2 Peter 3:18 – we are called upon to grow (present tense) in the grace and knowledge of our Lord
 - x. As an example, consider 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 where Paul commends the brethren for their brotherly love. But then he said, “*But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more*”. There is always room to improve and that is what God wants us to do.
 - xi. God wants us to:
 1. Increase in knowledge – we receive the implanted word that we grow thereby (1 Peter 2:2). And add to this increased wisdom – or applied knowledge. And there is only one way to do this – you have to study and learn (cf. 2 Timothy 2:15)
 2. Improve our “prayer life” – how often and how I pray. Again, like study, there is only 1 way to improve in this – by doing it.
There are all sorts of books that can help you understand prayer, but until you do it you will not improve.
 3. Increase in good works – Ephesians 2:10 tells us we were created for good works.
 4. Improve my functionality within the local church – can and SHOULD I be doing more for the local work? Am I doing my part (Ephesians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 12:27 says, “You are the body of Christ, and members individually.” And this comes at the conclusion of describing what that body looks like with its various parts. Are you functioning within the body properly.
 5. Improve as we worship God with one another – whether I am leading the congregation, or just participating. We know from His word that worship involves both action and attitude. Our heart needs to be right. Do we need to improve in this?
 6. Care more and more about others. After all the 2nd greatest commandment is to love my neighbor as myself – Matthew 22:39. This includes personal evangelism.

And thus, we are reminded on this first day of this new year to resolve that we are going to improve spiritually. What I have said is simple to understand, but it can be hard to do. But isn't anything worthwhile worthy of hard work? And can you think of anything more worthwhile than getting to heaven when this life is over. So, WHERE are you headed in 2023? Think about it!