

.....2018 is just around the corner.....It's time to start thinking about New Year's Resolutions



How many times had you heard people say, "I never make New Year's Resolutions, anymore," "I never keep them, anyway." I can remember all too many resolutions I've made and let slip away, too. But I believe New Year's resolutions are worth making. Let me tell you why.

First, we all need **changes**. Some we find very hard to admit to ourselves. Raylene and I struggled the whole year of 2017 with a life changing decision. We felt we were called by God to serve in another part of the country, my home state in east Tennessee. We were not sure it was a true calling and we have been praying for the answer. I've been seeking help from my friends, brother Bob and several other people that serve God in different capacities.

All have told me that this is always a difficult question, we learned from the experiencing God study that we sometimes find ourselves in a "crises of belief" when God invites us to join Him in His work.

We recently had a family of missionaries visit our church, Craig and Susan and their two beautiful daughters from Indonesia. They made a decision early in their life to serve in a faraway country that is 95% Muslim. Their decision far out ranks our decision to move to Tennessee. I thought just maybe they could tell me the secret of knowing a true calling from God.

After the service I had the opportunity to talk with Susan and I ask her the question, how do you know it's a true calling? She paused a short time and said the same thing that many other had said, "that is a hard question to answer," but she didn't stop there. She said, you have to take that first step! I thank her for her help and told her how much respect I had for her and Craig for the hard decisions they have made in answering God's calling and giving there life to serve God.

I went away asking myself, what is the first step? It didn't take me long to come up with the answer. I had to make a **major change** in our lives to show that whatever the calling may be I'm willing to take that step. For us it is selling our home, one that we love dearly. After the first step is complete we look forward to what God has planned for us. One thing I do know for sure, God's plan is always better than man's plan.

Second, when we change calendars it's a good time for **reassessment**. How did last year go? What do I want to do differently this year? This time of year always reminds me of a passage of scripture, better understood by farmers that I grew up with than suburbanites: "**Break up your unplowed ground, and do not sow among thorns**" (Jer 4:3). I have my own understanding of this verse, the unplowed ground was hard, in some cases it

had never been plowed up. Without being plowed up and prepared properly by removing the weeds and thorns nothing useful will grow there.

I plowed with a single point plow behind a mule. It was hard and exhausting work not only for me to keep the point of the plow deep in the soil but hard for the mule to pull the plow. We were taught that the plowing must be deep to assure all those roots that hinder the growth of the useful crop must be removed.

Spiritually speaking the same holds true, you must prepare yourself in the same way. Look deeply into your own heart and repent of your sins, God will cleanse you and prepare you for a bountiful harvest.

Now I ask myself and you as well a serious question. What percentage of your life is producing something of value to God? How much "unplowed ground" do you have that ought to be broken up in this coming year and made useful? With God there is no limit to what you can do. The brink of a new year is a good time for **reassessment**.

Third, New Year's is an excellent time for mid-course **corrections**. Sure, we might fail in what we set out to do, but if we fail to plan, the old saying goes, then we plan to fail. Craig (the missionary from Indonesia) told me that sometimes he found himself on the wrong road because he was too eager to wait for God. Sometimes if things fell apart you knew it was not a plan from God, and you start all over. If you're so fearful of failure that you never start the car, then how can the vehicle be steered? Failure is not the end. For the person who determines to learn from it, failure can be your best friend.

One of my heroes in the Bible is the Apostle Paul. Talk about failure! Throughout his life he was opposed, persecuted, shipwrecked, stoned and left for dead, deserted by trusted co-workers, slandered, and scorned. Sometimes it seemed that projects to which he had devoted years were turning to dust before his eyes. But during one of his stints in prison, we can see from one of his letters an unwillingness to quit. **"Forgetting what is behind," he wrote, "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"** (Phil 3:13-14, NIV) No wonder he made a mark on his world. He stopped looking back, and looked forward instead. He didn't let the fear of failure keep him from trying again. This is my example, I must move forward and wait for instructions from God. I will make **corrections** if and when necessary.

Fourth, New Year's is a time to learn to rely more heavily on the **grace of God**. Now I've met a few self-made men and women and so have you, but so often these people seem proud and driven. There is another way: beginning to trust in God's help. One more secret from the Apostle Paul: **"I can do everything through Him who gives me strength,"** he said (Phil 4:13, NIV). And God's strength saw him through a lot--through pain, through joy, and through accomplishment.

If this last year, you didn't practice relying on the Lord as much as you should have like I did, there is no time like the present to make a New Year's resolution. My prayer is short and simple, dear Lord, I want the New Year to be different for me. I want to serve You in a way that will be pleasing to You and I know that I'm going to need a lot of help. Right now I place myself in Your hands. **By Your grace** help me to be obedient to You so I can receive the blessing of Your strength. Amen.

I hope all of you will have a blessed new year; Love to all of you!

Rob