

12 Challenges That Can Make Your Life Better in the New Year

The verdict appears mixed among the people I know of whether or not they make resolutions for a new year. I understand, many have tried before—it didn't work—and so now they say, "Why bother?"

I believe there are probably some principles in place as to whether or not a resolution succeeds. For example, is it reasonable? Is it measurable? Is it sustainable? Do you have accountability in place? (But at this point I'm writing another post—which I may—so let me get on with the point of this one.)

I wonder if the term itself is a problem. *Resolution*. I hereby resolve! Sounds kind of formal—almost intimidating—doesn't it? I hate to say I'm resolving to do something when chances are good that I won't.

I do believe strongly, however, we should work toward continual improvement in our lives—whether this begins at the first of the year or in the middle doesn't matter as much. But the new year does provide a nice, clear place to start.

So I want to offer a spin on the old resolution tradition and offer a new word.

Challenge.

Do you ever challenge yourself to do better? It's easier than saying I resolve to do this. You're not saying you will—you may not even be able to—it will be a challenge—but you're willing to give it a try.

Let me give you some examples—maybe some challenges for you to

consider. I can almost guarantee if you meet just a few of these challenges your world will be better. You won't need to meet all of them—just the ones most “challenging” to you. But you'll have to trust me in this.

Here are 12 challenges for the new year:

1. Quit trying to be someone else. God made you to be you and He didn't make a mistake. The more you live the you He intended, the more you'll enjoy the benefits and blessing. There's something you can offer this world no one else can. Comparison only leads to disappointment.

2. Quit trying to carry all your burdens. The challenge here for you may be to quit trying to carry everyone else's burdens. God designed you (and me) to be insufficient without Him and to have a relational need for others. Sometimes the best thing you can do is admit you can't do it anymore—and ask for help. In your weakness—He is strong, but you'll have to admit your weakness before He usually allows His strength to kick into full gear.

3. Start embracing today. You can keep hoping your life away—that this would happen or that would happen—but when you begin to find contentment—*today* becomes a great day—in spite of the challenges it holds. The apostle Paul said he had learned “the secret of being content.” I've personally defined contentment in my life as “being satisfied with where God has allowed me to be in life—right now.” Perhaps your greatest challenge in the new year will be embracing where God has you now and waiting more patiently for what He will bring in the fullness of time.

4. Let the past go. As much as we can learn from history, we shouldn't be bound by it. One of my favorite verses is Ecclesiastes 11:3, which says if the tree falls, wherever it lies, there it is. That's my paraphrase, but it speaks volumes to me. If the tree fell—there it lies. You can do anything

about it now. If it's grief that holds you back—grieve—get help if needed. If it's regret—reconcile the loss, but whatever “it” is from your past—deal with it now. I challenge you to move forward in the new year.

5. Accept God's grace. It's always more than we deserve. You can't earn it. It's amazing grace. But denying or refusing it ignores the beauty of it. Is the guilt of your past keeping you from enjoying all the blessings of being a child of God? Has there never been a time you received the gift of salvation? Have you been living more like a prodigal in exile than a child of the King? If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. If the Son has set you free—you are free indeed! I challenge you to embrace grace in the new year.

6. Live free of grudges and bitterness. The lack of forgiveness is a hidden destroyer of joy, peace and happiness. Someone reading this is holding on to a grudge, some bitterness, maybe anger—and it's keeping you from fully enjoying life. Every time you hear a person's name or see that person, you are reminded of the injury to you. And it's hurting you more than it is them. Chances are, they've moved on, and you're still struggling. Isn't it time to let it go? (Let it go—could be a *Frozen* song you need to sing to yourself.)

7. Remember other people exist. Don't be selfish or always command your way. People—even the best people—will never perform to all of your standards—and is it even fair to expect it of them? They may not even agree with you as to what is important. You can hold people to unrealistic expectations and not be disappointed often.

Here's a note to those of us disappointed with the things of this world: We can't expect that everyone sees the world as you do. Of course, there are biblical principles through which we, as believers, are to view the world and live, but can we really expect people who aren't believers to embrace them?

8. Admit mistakes readily. Sincere humility is an attractive quality—and it helps to free you from future regrets or guilt. We all can have “perfectionist” tendencies, yet none of us is perfect. If you want to live with less self-induced stress this year, admit you don’t have all the answers and sometimes you have none.

9. Give generously. Giving opens the heart to joy and contentment. Something happens when we give to others, which causes us—though we have less—to feel like we have more. There are many needs around us. I challenge you to give more in the new year and see how it makes your life better!

10. Protect your heart. “Above all else,” the Bible says. Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also. Most likely there are activities, people or places through which your heart is most easily injured. You may not be able to avoid them, but you can be aware so you can “guard your heart.” When you are aware you may be injured, you will build guardrails to lessen the damage.

11. Take a new risk. The adrenaline of attempting something you’ve never done before fuels you for future success. It could be something you’ve always wanted to try or something you know God wants you to do, but, for whatever reason, you’ve resisted. Especially if it’s God-honoring and not sinful, and if it will make your life or others’ lives better, then what are you waiting for? Don’t let fear or thoughts of your inadequacies be your chief motivators in the new year. I challenge you—*go for it!*

12. Think and act eternally. There is more to this life than the world we know today. Thankfully, I might add. Jesus said to “store up treasures in heaven.” Whenever possible, I challenge you to consider the eternal consequences of the decisions, investments and actions of your life. Jesus said to live in this world, but not be of this world. How are you making a difference in the world to come by your world today?

The more intentional you are, the more treasures you build for a future reward.

Which of these challenges are you willing to accept?

Which of the above do you most need to embrace?

Ron Edmondson is the senior pastor at Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington, Kentucky. For the original article, visit .