

7 Things You Can Do to Make 2017 Better for Yourself and Everyone Else

The reason we make major New Year's resolutions is because we're fed up with the way we're living, and we want to make radical changes in our lives. That's also why we tend to fail so miserably with those resolutions: It's hard to make lasting, dramatic changes.

Although there is certainly a place to encourage such changes—I plan to do that very thing in my next column—there's also a place to encourage us to make some smaller, more manageable changes.

Here are seven things you can do to improve your life and the lives of those you touch.

1. Be nice. Now that all of us can express ourselves all the time about everything via social media and texting—and that means without speaking to people face-to-face—we've become a much nastier society.

How about trying to watch your words and think before you write or speak? How about making an effort to be a little nicer? Would it hurt to try? You'll often see that people respond to niceness with niceness, making it be easier for you to be nicer still. It can lead to a nice-fest.

2. Don't act like a spoiled, entitled baby. Nobody likes a crybaby, especially a fully-grown adult one, but these days, we have a crybaby culture. Nothing is our fault. Everyone else is to blame. I'm not responsible for my failures; you are. And on and on it goes, virtually guaranteeing a negative, never-ending, vicious cycle.

Perhaps you have the “It’s not my fault” mentality more than you realize? I encourage you to take full responsibility for yourself and not play the blame game, even if you have been wronged. It’s liberating and life-changing.

3. Be grateful. Surely there’s something for which you can be thankful and someone to whom you can express gratitude. Surely it won’t kill you to give a positive report, to find the good in those you work with and live with. Surely there are plenty of people in far worse circumstances than you, yet they are thankful for what they have.

You’d be amazed to see how a grateful attitude can change a gloomy day into a sunny day.

4. Get out of your rut. If you keep doing things the same way, you’ll get the same results. Count on it. So, if you’re stuck in a rut—professionally or personally or spiritually or relationally—consider doing something different. Otherwise, the rut will only get deeper.

Understand that not every routine is healthy and not every discipline is positive, so look at your life, ask yourself what needs to change and take a step in that direction. If even the thought of it terrifies you, you might be more stuck than you realize.

5. Concentrate on what matters most. Relationships are more important than possessions. Character is more important than appearance. A loving family is more important than riches and fame. That’s why Proverbs says, “A bowl of vegetables with someone you love is better than steak with someone you hate” (Prov. 15:17, NLT). It also says, “Better a dry crust eaten in peace than a house filled with feasting—and conflict” (Prov. 17:1).

You can work day and night to get more and be more, but lose your family (and even your soul) in the process. Is it worth it?

6. Don't get distracted from your larger goals. It's hard not to be distracted in our increasingly wired world. Constant news. Constant emails. Constant texts. Constant updates. Constant entertainment options. Constant distractions.

We find ourselves responding and reacting with very little time to step back and reflect and plan and focus, but if we're going to accomplish our larger goals, that's exactly what we need to do. So, to the extent that you can disconnect responsibly, take some time daily (or at least weekly) to disconnect and refocus. And ask yourself this question: Will you fulfill your life goals if you continue to live the way you're living?

7. Be spiritual and be practical. Why must it be either/or? Jesus taught us to seek God's kingdom first and foremost, but He also taught us to be responsible stewards—faithful in little things, faithful with our finances, faithful with that which others entrust to us (see Matt. 6:33-34; Luke 16:10-12).

People will not be impressed with your spirituality if you're flaky when it comes to everyday, practical matters, so why not try to marry the spiritual with the practical in 2017?

If this list overwhelms you, pick one out of the seven and go to work on that? One step in the right direction goes a long way, and one good day can make for a much better year.

Forward, one step at a time! {eo}