

A Revolution to Rebuild

New Orleans can begin again, but churches must play a crucial role.

If you're like me, you've made lots of New Year's resolutions you didn't keep: exercise more, eat more healthy foods, take time to relax. Fortunately, I have made several promises that have stuck.

For me, the secret to tangible success has been to set measurable targets. I'd start with simple goals and gradually ramp them up. After a few months, I would look back and see myself doing what I once thought was impossible.

This year, our nation has an enormous resolution to keep: to rebuild the communities destroyed by hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma. But I believe we can do something awesome if we set specific, measurable targets and then slowly ramp them up.

In the Bible, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple was a major demonstration of God's faithfulness to His people. Ezra 3:12-13 says:

"But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off" (NKJV).

These verses describe the tension between how older and younger generations view a major rebuilding process. The young

rejoiced in anticipation of the new thing God was doing while the elder group mourned the loss of the old.

Had the older generation recognized what God was doing-bringing a place of corporate worship back to their homeland-they could have helped lay a correct spiritual foundation. But as history would have it, the new temple also would be destroyed because of corrupt leaders.

The older Israelites may have been able to prevent this decline if they had made four commitments: to recognize God's purpose in allowing the original temple to be destroyed, to embrace God's plan for the new temple, to train their grandchildren in the things of the Lord and to warn the young adults about the danger that lay ahead.

We have an opportunity to rebuild a great portion of America, but like ancient Israel we must lay the right foundation. New Orleans in particular has vast historical significance, but its rich Southern culture has masked serious challenges.

First, the poverty levels in New Orleans' ninth district are astounding. Twenty-five percent of the people in that part of the city made \$10,000 per year or less, and nearly 40 percent made \$15,000 or less. Compared with the rest of the country, this part of the city earned nearly three times less than the average household income.

Second, police corruption and laxness had been allowed to thrive. I was pleasantly surprised at the number of New Orleans police officers who were terminated in October and November. This action sent a signal that duplicity and negligence would not be tolerated among public servants.

New Orleans has an unprecedented opportunity to begin again. But in order for a better Crescent City to rise out of the rubble, churches must play a crucial role.

For this reason, our ministry has decided to partner with a Louisiana church in measurable ways. We will begin by praying for them in our weekly public services and sending a monthly missions offering. Later we will ramp up our resolution and send a short-term missions team.

I believe we should all pitch in and help the church in the areas devastated by the 2005 hurricane season. We can rebuild America, one city at a time. Let's do it!

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