

It's Only February. Have You Abandoned Your New Year's Resolutions?

What are the top resolutions people make almost every year?

- 1. Health** – Eat healthy, lose weight, exercise more, get in shape, curb drinking (alcohol and sodas), reduce stress.
- 2. Wealth** – Save money, invest money, earn money, tithe money, budget money and carefully spend money.
- 3. Habits** – Be more disciplined; stop smoking, biting nails, chewing lip, wasting time, speeding, procrastinating and arriving late.

Knowing the road to hell is paved with good intentions, millions of us determine to upgrade our lives by making New Year's resolutions. The Bible has a wonderful way of bringing encouragement to us in every area of life, and this area is no exception.

The Message paraphrase of the New Testament lays it on the line:

"You've all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally. I don't know about you, but I am running hard for the finish line. I am giving it everything I've got" (1 Cor. 9:24-26).

Starting is Easy–Sticking is Hard

A friend of mine who previously ran a health club confided in me that usually about 80% of people who take out memberships in January fizzle by February. Recent research brings this truth home in the area of New Year's resolutions. That's why

we need fresh inspiration from God. As multitudes pray for the next Great Awakening, let's start by embracing a "personal awakening" preparing us for the BIG One to come.

If you started 2022 with resolutions in the area of healthier eating, weight loss and getting in shape, let me prepare you that you will soon enter supermarkets about to be assaulted by an avalanche of Super Bowl goodies that are not low-fat, gluten-free or helping you look like celebrities paraded on People magazine's "Sexiest Man/Woman" covers.

A brother told me that he sensed God whisper to his heart a gentle reminder regarding his appearance, "My son, your body is to be a temple of the Holy Spirit, not a cathedral!"

So let me offer you what I pray will be helpful motivation to help you on a pathway to success. I warn you these are brutal realities, not false promises like "How I Lost 20 Pounds in 20 Days!"

Misery Loves Company

Studies show that approximately 36% of people don't necessarily abandon all their New Year's resolutions within the first month but simply start failing. Well-intentioned individuals who have similar goals but don't set resolutions fare even worse with only 4% success rate after six months!

Instead of bowing out and consoling ourselves with discouraging data, how about we dig deeper, draw on the grace of God and get back in the game?

The "secret sauce" is often twofold:

- Front end mistakes (proving the maxim, "Fail to plan-plan to fail")
- Forgetting "the secret of success is not really a secret; it's called perseverance!"

Common Reasons We Fail

Besides lack of good planning and not persevering when eventual difficulties and setbacks arise, I've found from 50 years of counseling that the other primary reasons for people abandoning resolutions are the following:

Not taking quality time to get alone with God to seek His will and way regarding areas of change He's calling us to make.

The apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthian community to, "Examine yourselves, seeing whether you are in the faith; test yourself. Do you not know that Jesus Christ is in you?" (2 Cor. 12:5).

Millions make resolutions to reach goals to improve their lives, enjoy better health, find greater prosperity and success, launch into new ventures, etc. Yet how many truly originated with God?

Inspired by an infomercial on late night TV with Chuck Norris featured at 80 with abs of steel may ignite a spark causing you to put down those wings smothered in ranch dressing, but will it sustain you? Getting alone with God to get His guidance is essential so you don't spontaneously make a costly investment in "Walker the Texas Ranger" exercise equipment that later collects dust in your basement.

Write Things Down

So, we don't forget or become foggy on our resolutions, it's important to write them down, keep track of them and keep them before us. Our Christian experience is a mix of amnesia and déjà vu. That's why God wrote things down and calls us to repeat significant events and rehearse important scriptures.

For centuries, Jews have followed divine direction and affixed certain scriptures to their doorposts and revisited them regularly to remind them of something extremely important (Deut. 6:4-9 and 11:13-21).

God instructed the prophet Habakkuk: "Write the vision, and make it plain on tablets, that he who reads it may run. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it delays, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay" (Hab. 2:2-3, MEV).

Ben Franklin challenged people to develop a good life by writing down the key areas of virtue (patience, humility, purity, etc.) where they wanted to grow and then focus for one year on developing those virtues. He stressed the importance of keeping them prominent on the pathway to progress.

"Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve" wrote wise, old Ben so resolutions would remain at the forefront and not fade away.

Unrealistic Resolutions

One way to set yourself up to fail is to try to run a marathon if you currently struggle walking a mile; or having read a book titled, "God's Atomic Power Through Fasting" and decide you're going to launch into a 40-day fast like Jesus did. Early in my Christian life, I decided to try a seven-day fast and then I broke it abruptly with a huge buffet meal that could've killed me! I'm not kidding. I went from the meal to speak at a meeting where I was soon keeling over, needing an emergency muscle relaxant shot from medical personnel to rescue me!

Here's the Deal: Regarding resolutions, here's my counsel in a nutshell: 1. Receive God's direction. 2. Record them. 3. Revisit them regularly. 4. Be realistic. 5. Rebound when you fail. 6. Reach out for a friend. 7. Reward yourself along the way, continually giving glory to God for the "good work He began in you that He will bring to completion" (Phil. 1:6).
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