

Should Christians Make New Year's Resolutions?

A quick glance at social media shows that some Christians wonder if they even should be making resolutions. Are you one of them?

If so, take comfort in the words and wisdom of Billy Graham, who has responded to a number of questions about that annual ritual in his *My Answer* columns through the years.

Questions About New Year's Resolutions

K.M.: If you could make just one New Year's resolution for the coming year, what would it be? I used to make a long list of New Year's resolutions every year, but I only got discouraged because I never kept them so I've decided to concentrate on just one this year.

Graham: If I could make only one resolution it would be this: that I might become more and more like Christ during the coming year.

This, after all, is God's will for every one of His children. The Bible says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Every day we are tempted to forget God and live for ourselves, but God's will is for us to become more and more like His Son. And this happens as we stay close to Christ and allow His Spirit to change us and renew us from within. When we submit our hearts and lives to Christ, the Bible says we will be "transformed into his likeness ... which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

What does it mean to be like Christ? First, it means to be like Him in His behavior—rejecting sin, living pure and godly lives, and sharing His love with others. It also means to be

like Him in our character—in love and peace and patience, and in all the other fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23).

Begin this New Year by making sure of your relationship with God. If you've never invited Christ to come into your life, do so today. Then ask Him to help you become more like Christ this year, as you submit to His Word and follow Him every day.

Mrs. R.Y.: Does the Bible say anything about making New Year's resolutions? I quit making them years ago because I never could keep them, but now that I'm more serious about my faith I wondered if I ought to give it a try again.

Graham: The Bible doesn't mention making resolutions at the beginning of a new year—but it does urge us to examine our lives regularly, and to seek God's help to become better persons every day. The Bible says, "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord" (Lamentations 3:40).

Did you ever ask yourself why you found it so hard to keep the resolutions you used to make? One reason may have been that they weren't realistic, or you had no clear plan for reaching them. Many New Year's resolutions, I'm afraid, are little more than a "wish list"—a series of things we'd like to change about our lives, but little more. They also may be very self-centered, with little thought about whether or not they are God's will.

Another reason, however, why we fail to keep our resolutions is because we seek to reach them in our own strength instead of with God's help. But we are spiritually and morally weak, and we will never be the people God wants us to be unless we turn to Him for the help we need. The psalmist wrote, "My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:2).

As we begin this new year, pause right now and ask God to show you what He wants to do in your life during this coming year. Resolve to grow closer to Christ every day, and with the help of His Holy Spirit to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11).

D.S.: The other day, a friend asked me how many of my New Year’s resolutions I’d managed to keep, and I had to admit that I’d forgotten all about them. He admitted that this had been his experience, as well. Why do we have so much trouble changing our behavior?

Graham: Often, I’ve found, our so-called “resolutions” are little more than wishful thinking. We’d like to be different, and we wish we were different—

but that’s as far as it goes.

A true resolution, however, puts our wishes into action. We may wish we’d lose weight, but nothing will happen unless we develop a realistic plan of diet and exercise, and discipline ourselves to follow it. We may wish we were a better parent—but nothing will happen unless we discipline ourselves to spend more time with our children and let them know of our love. The Bible warns that a wayward man “will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly” (Proverbs 5:23).

But this isn’t the only problem. We can make noble resolutions and develop great plans ... but still fail. Why? The Bible says the problem is within ourselves – within our own hearts and wills. We want to do what is right – but we don’t have the moral and spiritual strength to do it. The Apostle Paul said, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Romans 7:15).

This is why we need Christ, for only He can help us overcome our weakness by His Spirit and give us the strength to change.

Turn your life over to Christ, and then ask Him to help you become the person He wants you to be.

.: One of my New Year's resolutions this year was to read some of the Bible every day. But like most of my resolutions, I've failed to keep it. I found some of it interesting, but I didn't really understand most of it, so I stopped. Was I doing something wrong?

Graham: I commend you for making this resolution—because nothing will help you become the person God wants you to be more than the Bible. The Psalmist said, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105).

You aren't alone in finding the Bible difficult; many people have the same problem. But it doesn't need to be like this if you approach it in the right way. For example, many people do what you did: They start at the beginning and try reading the Bible straight through. After all (they say), isn't that the way you read any other book?

Yes, perhaps so—but when we come to the Bible, it's better to begin at the center—that is, with Jesus Christ. All Scripture points to Him, and He is the center of God's plans for this world. Begin, therefore, with one of the Gospels in the New Testament (I often suggest John), for they tell us about Jesus—His life, death and resurrection for us.

Read a small portion every day—perhaps only a few paragraphs at first. Ask God to help you understand what you're about to read, and then read it carefully and thoughtfully. What does it tell us about God, or Jesus, or God's will for our lives? Then ask yourself what God is teaching you through it, and what difference it should make in your life.

C.L.: I've about decided I'm not going to make any New Year's resolutions this year. I've always done it, but I don't think I've ever managed to keep a single one more than a few weeks.

Why should I bother?

Graham: You're right; it's probably not worth bothering with resolutions if you start out assuming you're going to fail—because that's exactly what you'll end up doing. But it doesn't have to be this way, and I suggest you reconsider.

The start of a new year is a good time to stop and look at our lives—and that's the first step in making any realistic resolutions. What needs to be improved in our lives? What needs to be eliminated—or added? Most of all, what does God see when He looks at me, and what does He want me to do—with His help? What is His will for the coming year—and for my life? The Bible says, “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing” (Isaiah 43:18-19).

Then make sure your resolutions are realistic. Many New Year's resolutions aren't “resolutions” at all; they're only vague dreams or wishes. Don't focus on self-centered goals; focus instead on what God wants to do in your life. Above all, make sure of your commitment to Christ—and if He means little to you, why not begin the new year by giving your life to Him?

Finally, think through how you can achieve the goals you've set. Pray for God's help; plan what steps you need to take; get others to encourage and help you. May 2012 become the best year you've ever had, as you build your life on the foundation of Christ and His Word.

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