

Ward off Lethargic Disappointment With Paul's Eye-Opening Lesson to Timothy

By this time in a new year, many people may be struck by fear because they feel stuck in failure. The uncertainties echo in the recesses of our minds and might sound like this:

- I am afraid this is going be another typical year
- I am afraid I won't ever change
- I am afraid that I will never get my finances in order
- I am afraid I may never lose weight
- I am afraid I will never become consistent in my walk with God

Whether you set resolutions or not, whether you have kept your resolutions or not, whether you have had a great start to the year or not—the New Testament has some great encouragement for your soul.

Moments of New Beginnings

Imagine the exhilaration of the occasion. Timothy's upbringing in the spiritually encouraging environment of a godly mother and grandmother had propelled him to this juncture in his life. Paul, the greatest Christian leader of the day, had taken a special interest in this young disciple. In this moment, Paul placed his hands on Timothy, accompanied by the local elders, appointing Timothy to spiritual leadership. It was his ordination moment. The elders pronounced biblical truths over this young man, and Paul prayed passionately to a great God for the richest of Christ's blessings on Timothy's burgeoning service for Jesus. Paul would appoint him to lead the significant church in the influential city of Ephesus. This was a season of new determination, grand hopes and eager expectations.

We've all had similar moments when our anticipation is high and our resolve is clear. The Lord is leading us, and we sense His power. The excitement of a new start brings fresh joy. Our faith runs high. Often this is the feeling of a new chapter in our career or family. The beginning of a new calendar year can seem like this as we set goals and embrace a spiritual "reset."

A Young Man's Lost Resolve

Let's fast forward in Timothy's story. While pastoring in Ephesus, he gradually surrendered his heart and mind to numbing fear. The hot flame of potential and promise that burned at his ordination had been shrouded by timidity and defeat.

Paul's familiar words explain: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God, which is in you by the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:6-7).

Timothy needed a restart of his resolution to serve with courage, endurance and abounding faith. Paul told him to "fan into flame" the gift of his calling, the reality of His supernatural empowerment. We could paraphrase this as a challenge to make "full use" of all God had given or to keep spiritual passion fiery hot. Why did Paul need to challenge Timothy in this way? Because God had not given him a "spirit" or attitude of fear, timidity or discouragement.

January Discouragement

Perhaps this command is for you today. Having started off with focus, determination and spiritual zeal just days ago, you may now be plagued with doubt and fear. What is the solution? Just as Timothy needed the reminder, so do we. By the power of His Spirit in us, God has given us a spirit or attitude of power, love and self-control. Focus on those three qualities, and let's make some application.

Power Beyond the Resolutions

Our ability to grow and flourish in a new year is not based on our resolve to chase after some ideals we have set. Rather, our attitude of confidence must be firmly established in the reality of the Holy Spirit's power working in us to accomplish God's purposes. Philippians 2:13 tells us, "God is the One working in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure." Ephesians 3:20-21 promises that the Spirit within us is able to accomplish more than we could ask or imagine. Our greatest resolution must be to live with a conscious, moment-by-moment reliance on the person of the Holy Spirit to lead, empower, fulfill the Word of God, and glorify Christ in and through us.

Love Beyond the Disappointments

Romans 5:5 says, "And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." The hope of knowing that God is at work in us, through all the good and the bad of life, banishes the shame of "not measuring up." The Spirit in us assures us that we are loved even when feelings of defeat or disappointment overshadow us. Our Lord loves us eternally whether we achieve our resolutions or fail miserably. Let this truth sink in, and receive the consistent, overcoming love of God in the deepest part of your soul. Live in that reality.

Self-Control Beyond Lethargy

Fear and disappointment can sometimes put us in a funk. We land in a dark place where we want to give up. The power of the Holy Spirit is greater than these unreliable emotions. The fruit of His life in us is self-control (Gal. 5:23). I define self-control as "regulating one's conduct by principle rather than emotion, impulse or convenience." The "principle" is the person and power of the Holy Spirit who can motivate, reshape and sustain us in the good purposes of God.

New Year—New Beginning—Every Day

Frankly, we make too much of Jan. 1. It is really just a day on the calendar. In fact, "New Year's Day" has been designated on various days of the year in history and in other cultures. We should remember that the New Testament speaks of time in terms of *kairos* (moments of eternal opportunity) rather than *chronos* (minutes marked on a linear calendar). With this in mind, every day can be the beginning of a new year and a fresh opportunity. So let us fully receive and rest in the impartation of the Holy Spirit to our souls every morning—an impartation of fresh power, unfailing love and supernatural self-control.

Fear not, my friend. His mercies are new every morning. {eo}

Copyright ©2017 Daniel Henderson. All rights reserved. As a senior pastor for over two decades, Daniel Henderson brought prayer-based revitalization to several megachurches. Today he is dedicating his full-time efforts to help congregations across the country experience renewal and turn-around as he speaks to thousands each year at conferences and prayer events. He is president of Strategic Renewal, which exists to ignite personal renewal, congregational revival and leadership restoration for Christ's glory.