

CHRISTIAN HEADS, HEARTS, AND HANDS

ARTICLES TO FORM US AS FOLLOWERS OF "THE WAY"

20 New Year's Resolutions You Can Make (and Keep) Right Now

by Kevin DeYoung

Making New Year's resolutions is easy. Keeping them is hard. Some Christians think the annual habit of making new goals is legalistic, ill-conceived, and doomed to failure. I'm not so negative. I think the new year provides a good opportunity to evaluate current practices and consider how the Spirit might enable us to set better priorities in the future.

But this post isn't about arduous resolutions. Well, not exactly. It's about something simpler. It's about your calendar and about making decisions now that will serve you later in the year. As the saying goes, the hardest step is often the first one. So if you can get important dates down on your calendar, you are already well on your way to getting that important thing done. So here are 20 things you may want to consider putting on your [2020] calendar over the next week. No one will do all of these, or even most of them, but as I look at my life, I realize that adding just a few of these dates would be a big step in the right direction.

1. Schedule a date night with your husband or wife for some time in the next six weeks. Take Valentine's Day if you have to.
2. If you are a pastor, or have flexibility in your schedule, put two prayer days on the calendar for [2020].
3. Sign up for a 5k race.
4. Plan a special one-on-one outing with one or more of your kids.
5. Put a date on the calendar when you and your friend will recite the Bible verses you're memorizing.
6. Invite over the new family from church and get it down on your calendar.
7. Set up a time to talk on the phone with that old friend you've about lost touch with.
8. Make a written commitment to give an extra financial gift in [2020] to your church, your school, your missionaries, or some other gospel-centered cause.
9. Plan for a week-long digital fast and get the dates on your calendar.
10. Buy tickets to a ball game, a concert, or a special show. If you can, buy extra tickets so you can invite someone who needs a night out.
11. Call up a hurting person and ask for the best time to bring over a meal or take them out to dinner. Don't take no for an answer.
12. Pencil Sunday school or the evening service into your Sunday schedule. Give it a good try for a month.
13. Get your vacation plans firmed up. Make the arrangements now, then start saving. And remember, it's usually better to spend money on experiences and memories as opposed to stuff.
14. Clear off a work day sometime in the next year. Surprise your family by staying home.
15. Circle Pie Day on your calendar (3.14) and make plans to bring pie to an assisted-living facility or to your neighbor's house.

That's probably enough ideas to get you started. "But you said you had 20 things!" you might interject. True, but the last five are for calendar clearing, not for calendar filling.

1. If you are in more than two Bible studies/small groups, and neither is evangelistic in nature, consider removing one from your schedule if it frees you up to be more present at home and less stressed for your family.
2. If your kids are doing more than one sport or activity a season, try cutting it back to a single thing each season, especially if the events are causing you to miss corporate worship.
3. Turn one of your planned getaways into a stay-cation.
4. Put a Sabbath week (or even a three-day stretch) in your calendar twice a year. Keep the dates rigidly free of activities. Use the time to catch up on chores, catch up on your Bible reading, or just catch your breath.
5. Get more sleep, and don't feel guilty about it. Make those seven or eight hours as immovable as possible and adjust the rest of life accordingly.

Nothing revolutionary. And nothing mandatory (though evening worship comes close). But hopefully something helpful for everyone to consider.

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A Digital Detox Won't Work Unless You Ask Yourself This Question

Breaking free from your phone addiction starts with a simple thought experiment

by Alexandra Hearth

There's an app called *Mute*, which lets you set up challenges with your friends to see who can stay off their phone the longest. Another one called *Moment* offers "device addiction coaching" to help you pick up your phone less throughout the day. For \$349, you can buy a *Palm*, a basic, credit card-sized phone designed to keep you from spending so much time on your big, distracting one ("Slip it into your yoga pants," the website advertises). There are three-step programs, "offline" B&Bs, and even AA-like support groups all aiming to help you disconnect from your digital life. According to Google Trends, searches for "digital detox" have increased by 42% in the past year alone.

Clearly, we have a big appetite for a solution to this modern-day problem. And maybe some of these tools and services can help. But things like booking a phone-free weekend getaway or making our phones very tiny are Band-Aid fixes. For a more sustainable solution, we should ask ourselves this question: If we didn't have our phones to stare at, what would we want to be doing instead?

A big part of the reason we find ourselves spending so much time on our phones is that we don't have a clear idea of what else we should be doing with our time. Rather than finding ways to block ourselves out of our devices for a few hours each day, maybe we need to stop and really think about what we have to gain from being less attached to them.

When I was on vacation in Italy, my phone got stolen. For about 24 hours, I was emotional. I felt detached from people I "connect" with daily, and lonely as a result. After this period had passed, though, I felt strangely relaxed. Sure, being surrounded by the country's natural beauty played a part in that, but for the first time in a long while, I was mentally in the place I was in physically.

I was looking at the view with my own eyes rather than through my Instagram stories. Thoughts about whether people were watching my "content," or whether this one guy was going to text me, or whether that work project was moving forward, all faded because, for the time being, I had no way of knowing. I wanted to live more like this, every day.

I recently listened to writer Zadie Smith on the *Touré Show*, and she made a simple case for opting out of social media apps altogether: "I'm 42. I don't have that much longer to live. I don't want to spend 20% of that time looking at pictures on Instagram," she said. "I really am hungry for life... physical things, experiences."

If time scrolling through social media is passive time, what might be an active use of your time? Maybe it's meeting a friend for coffee, writing, reading, learning an instrument. Detachment from our screens isn't just about the time we get back, but also about the way our minds work when they aren't thinking about any phone-related activity. It's hard to argue against the notion that our digital lives are starting to give us a skewed sense of reality. For a while, the internet seemed to open up opportunities for us to devour information to which previous generations didn't have easy access. But now that we've set ourselves up with selected news feeds, we've stopped actively seeking out different views. Our new mission might be to become active explorers of the world again, instead of waiting to be told what to believe.

With modern life, getting rid of our devices entirely isn't very practical. But there are physical things you can do to spend less time on your phone. You can delete your social media apps, and only use the desktop versions. You can set yourself a digital curfew for when you must disconnect. You can simply leave your phone at home. (I do this now, only keeping my work phone with me during the day). But before you try any of these techniques, first think about what you want to do with the time you take back. If you're not sure, simply blocking yourself from your phone won't help — there will always be something else to take its place.