

CHRISTIAN HEADS, HEARTS, AND HANDS

ARTICLES TO FORM US AS FOLLOWERS OF "THE WAY"

Resolutions

Do you remember what resolutions you were making this time last year? Perhaps they included losing weight, or eating healthier meals, or putting aside some money. Those are all good things when life's bumps are relatively minor and we believe there to be some semblance of order and prosperity undergirding our lives.

But in 2020, it wasn't long before life as we knew it fell apart. We watched one tiny virus multiply and spread so quickly that it even reached the remotest outpost in Antarctica. We watched our social order unravel in cities and towns across the country and found ourselves pitted against each other, pigeonholed into caricatures of one camp or the other.

2020 has stolen the middle ground of compromise and tolerance in our streets, in our churches and around our kitchen tables. We are now acutely aware of the depth of racial and political anger boiling just beneath our guise of civility. We now know that truth can be reframed in such a way as to appear a lie, and lies can be dressed up in ways that make them seem true.

In times like these, what should our resolutions look like this year? I think that Hebrews 12:1-2 offers us some solid guidance: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

In 2021, let's resolve to throw off what hinders us from living holy, meaningful lives. What are the distractions we use to escape from thinking deeply and living intentionally?

In 2021, let's resolve to throw off the sin that entangles us, especially those secret sins of bitterness, unforgiveness and self-righteousness.

In 2021, let's resolve to run. "I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free." (Psalm 119:32) Let's exchange small living for intentional loving. Let's get serious about our faith and about making a positive change in the world.

In 2021, let's resolve to persevere. When we face sorrow, loss or evil, let's not be quick to give up when our comfort is threatened, but instead "encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today,' so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." (Hebrews 3:13).

In 2021, let's resolve to fix our eyes on Jesus. Let's get off the fence and take our eyes off the fleeting opinions of the world, and open our Bibles daily, committing to know him personally instead of depending on what others say about him.

In 2021, let's resolve to keep our focus on the joy set before us. Now more than ever we need to live with heaven in mind. If we truly believe that heaven is real, it should change everything about how we live, how we suffer, how we succeed, and how we die.

In 2021, let's resolve to despise the shame we may feel in being identified as believers and wear that identity with humility and grace. This is not a time to flaunt our faith, but instead set an example "in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." (1 Timothy 4:12)

In 2021, let's allow the losses we've suffered in the past year to sharpen our vision and deepen our commitment to holy living and courageous loving for such a time as this.

Our homes, our churches and our world need people of humility and conviction to step up and follow the example of Jesus who didn't come to be served, but to serve. We have a cloud of witnesses urging us on. Let's resolve, then, to leave off building our own kingdoms in order to build his kingdom, together.

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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 2021 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.
2. If you are a pastor, or have flexibility in your schedule, put a prayer day on the calendar for 2021.
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 2021 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 (3.14 or March 14) on your calendar 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 in your neighborhood for others.
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.