

# Three New Year's resolutions with significance

Message for Sunday, January 7, 2018

**Scripture:** Romans 12:18; John 13:5-15; Matthew 6:21 and others

## Children's Message:

Toss a baseball up in the air and swing a bat at it. Oops, I missed. Try again. By now, people in the congregation may be getting nervous, so I'll stop!

Talk about some famous baseball players—of all the greatest players who ever played baseball, none of them ever hit the ball more than half of the time when they had a turn to bat! Not one of them!!

The apostle Paul called himself “the worst of all sinners”!! You think you've made some big mistakes—Paul did much, much worse than you or me.

What do you do when you make a mistake, when you fail at something?

- ◆ You can give up: think “I'm no good. I'm useless. I'm a failure.”
- ◆ Or you can get up: thank God for giving you a second chance, get up and keep on trying!

Listen to what Paul wrote:

**Philippians 3:13-14, New Living Translation:**  
I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead.

Tell me: did Paul give up or get up?

Thanks to Phillip Johnson for this idea, from his book *And More Celebrating the Seasons with Children*.

**Message:** “Three New Year's resolutions with significance”<sup>1</sup>

Each New Year's Day, millions of people make New Year's resolutions. “This year, I'm going to lose weight.” “I'm going to exercise more.” As important as it is to have a healthy lifestyle, we can make commitments that are even bigger. Here are

three challenges that will change your world in 2018.

## 1) Seek reconciliation for a broken relationship

**Romans 12:18, New Living Translation:**

Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible.

Is there someone from your past that you no longer talk to because you are upset with them? Or do you have a relationship that has grown cool because one or both of you hurt the other person?

If you answered yes, make it a priority this year to heal that relationship.

You might argue, “But he/she was the one in the wrong! It's up to them to come to me.” It might work that way in the world, but we who live in the Kingdom of God follow a different set of rules.

**Mark 11:25, New Living Translation:**

“When you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too.”

**Matthew 5:23-24, New Century Version:**

“So when you offer your gift to God at the altar, and you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there at the altar. Go and make peace with that person, and then come and offer your gift.”

Put those two passages together and it becomes clear: it doesn't matter who was right and who was wrong. The main thing is, *don't let it continue*.

One more thing: don't just put this on your to-do list, where it will get buried and forgotten. Start the process *today*.

**Ephesians 4:26, New Revised Standard Version:**

Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.

According to the Bible, it's OK to get angry. It's *not* OK to hold onto that anger, to nurse it. “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” You need to start today to repair the damage.

By now you probably have someone in mind. If possible, go and see that person today, either right after the worship service, or after lunch. If that's not

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Rick Warren for much of the idea here.

possible, then at least phone the person and set up a time to get together. Begin today, before you forget.

Apologize for your part in what happened, however small your part of the blame is. You can at least apologize for not doing this sooner! You can't control the other person's reaction, but you can control your response to this biblical command.

Remember, this is a command from Jesus—not Oprah or Dr. Phil! Going to bed tonight without seeking reconciliation is disobeying God.

## 2) Do something helpful for someone else... that you don't want to do

John 13:5, 14-15, New Living Translation:

He began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he had around him. ...

"Since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you."

We live in a culture which is based on being happy, feeling good. Those are the primary goals in life, as our culture teaches it. Jesus calls us to a different kind of life, a life focussed on others, not on ourselves. There are many good spiritual disciplines we should follow, such as prayer, reading the Bible, being part of a worshipping fellowship. But few spiritual disciplines will help turn your attention off yourself and onto others like consciously choosing to do things for others that you do not want to do.

When Jesus washed the feet of his followers, he was demonstrating the kind of people he wants us to be: people who will serve others, who willingly do what is unpleasant, who do it out of love for others.

An American journalist covering a war in China visited a hospital run by Roman Catholic sisters. He watched one of the nuns washing the wounds of an enemy soldier. The infection had developed into gangrene, with dead black tissue hanging on by threads of skin. The stink from the rotting flesh forced the reporter to stand several feet away while he watched.

"I don't know how you can do that," he said. "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars."

Without pausing in her work, the sister quietly replied, "Neither would I."

When you feel that tug on your heart calling you to do something unusual, something sacrificial, even something repulsive, stop and obey. That is likely God's Spirit calling to your spirit, calling you to take the next step of faith, to help you grow more like Jesus. Learn to listen for those moments.

## 3) Give to God a part of your life that you never have before

Matthew 6:21, New Living Translation:

"Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be."

If you're wondering what area of your life you need to give to God, ask yourself this: What part of my life am I holding back from God? Where am I making excuses? That's probably it.

The area of our life that we need *most* to give to God is what we want *least* to give up. Jesus put his finger squarely on the issue: whatever you treasure, that's where your heart is. God wants to be the one you treasure more than anything else.

Giving something over to God doesn't mean quitting it or getting rid of it. It *might* mean that, if it's something that really gets in the way between you and God. It essentially means dedicating it to God. "From now on, I use this thing or this part of my life for God, and not for myself."

*Example:* Your job. Maybe you're asked to do unethical things. Maybe you work alongside people who are a real pain. Maybe the stress is causing health problems. In all these cases, give your job to God. This year, when you go to work, you're working for God. You may have a human supervisor, but God is really your boss. Do your job in such a way that it brings honour to God. Treat your coworkers, your customers, your suppliers, even your competitors in such a way that God shines through.

You can do the same sort of thing with whatever is your treasure, whether it's money, sex, your temper, your family, and so on. Dedicate it to God.

Of course—and I shouldn't be assuming this—before you give anything else to God, you need to start with giving your heart to God. If you've never done that before, you can do that today. That would be the greatest way ever to start a new year.

**Prayer:**

Lord God,

I offer you my body as a living sacrifice, dedicated to you. This is a total, complete and unconditional surrender of my life: all that I am and all that I have – it all belongs to you.

I turn away from all that is wrong in my life, and I turn to you, to follow your ways. I thank you for Jesus, who gave his life so that I can be cleansed from all sin.

Fill me with your Holy Spirit, so that I will have the power to keep this promise. Change not just my outside behaviour; but change me from the inside out. Mold me and shape me to become the person I was meant to be.

This is my prayer, my heart's desire. I come in the name of Jesus. Amen.