

Today Is Your Day To Start Over

1 Peter 1:18-19; Matthew 26:26-28

I've often wondered how those big floats in the Tournament of Roses Parade are steered. You can't see anyone at a steering wheel—how do they do it? Actually, the person steering is in a little compartment deep inside the float, where no one can see him. He can't see a thing—he has only a seat, a steering wheel and a set of headphones. Up front, in a similar compartment, sits a man with only a microphone, looking through a very small window. When the float needs to turn a little to the left, he tells the man behind him to turn to the left. If they are drifting too far to the right, he tells the other man to make whatever adjustments are necessary. And this is the guy who guides the other as they turn the corners.

How much like that we are, as we move into a New Year! We have no idea what's ahead of us—we are moving blindly into the next twelve months. We are like the guy at the steering wheel, not being able to see what's in front of us, but if we listen closely, we will be able to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit telling us to turn here, make an adjustment here, speed up or slow down. The guy steering the float has only one job: to listen and obey. That's not much different from our own responsibility, as we follow the Holy Spirit.

In Fredericksburg, Virginia there is an artist named Cliff Satterthwaite who helps people get rid of their regrets. Each New Year's Eve Mr. Satterthwaite sets up a booth there in Fredericksburg where those celebrating New Year's Eve can come for a moment of sober reflection. Put the emphasis on "sober" reflection. Those who come write their regrets on a scrap of paper, then they set a match to them and turn them to ashes in a canister. Literally, their regrets go up in smoke. At least, that's the general idea. Wouldn't that be wonderful, if we could literally see our regrets burn up like that, never to bother us again?

Some of us are undoubtedly making resolutions for this New Year. Some joker has suggested that this year we make resolutions that we can actually keep. For example, gain weight. At least 30 pounds. Or stop exercising. Waste of time. Or read less—after all, it just makes you think. And watch more television. Then you won't have to think at all. Or procrastinate more . . . starting tomorrow. Would any of us have any problems keeping those resolutions?

But what if instead of “resolutions,” we made “promises”?

This was a portion of a column written by Ed Sudduth in 1995, who at the time was the music minister at First Baptist Church, McComb, Mississippi:

This year, let's make some promises rather than resolutions for the new year. Perhaps this list will get you started.

- 1. Promise to be so strong through Christ Jesus that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.*
- 2. Promise to look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true.*
- 3. Promise to think only of the best, to work only for the best, and to make the best come true.*
- 4. Promise to be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.*
- 5. Promise to learn from the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.*
- 6. Promise to wear a cheerful expression at all times and give every person you meet a smile.*
- 7. Promise to give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others.*
- 8. Promise to be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble in your life.*

And many times we find that the key to being successful in this is to make one small change. Adjust our lives in one small area, and we find it easier to move on to the next:

There's a story about a woman who did not keep a tidy house. One day someone gave her a beautiful rose which she brought home and put in a vase in her front room. The rose, though, showed up the vase which was tarnished and dusty, so she polished the vase and set the rose and vase on the table.

But now something was wrong with the table. It looked terrible. It had to be cleaned as well. At last the woman stood back and admired the sparkling table, the polished vase, and the beautiful rose.

But to her dismay, the whole room now seemed dull and murky. Before she knew it, she found herself scrubbing the walls, washing the curtains, and opening the windows to let light and air into every dark corner.

The moral of the story is if you make one small change in your life, light up one small corner, in no time your whole life can take on a different look. If you're dissatisfied with your life at this point, give some serious consideration to that one area you could change.

--Author Unknown

OR, if we really want to make resolutions as we move deeper into the New Year, consider those of Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards was the preacher of the famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God*, the sermon credited with stimulating the Great Awakening here in America, and which most of us studied in school before it became illegal to do such a thing here in our supposedly Christian nation. He was the greatest Puritan theologian of the early 18th century, who served as president of what became Princeton University. He wrote these resolutions before it became fashionable to make resolutions at the beginning of a new year; these resolutions he made across two years, and made them a part of his life. Please listen to them carefully: remember that these were written almost three hundred years ago, so these are phrased differently than we might say them. The list had 70 different resolutions, but I'm going to share excerpts from just a few of them. Pay attention to the subject matter: these are not the typical kind we make today. Perhaps you will be challenged.

The Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards (1722-1723)

Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake.

Remember to read over these Resolutions once a week.

1. Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory....
3. Resolved, if ever I shall fall and grow dull, so as to neglect to keep any part of these Resolutions, to repent of all I can remember, when I come to myself again.
4. Resolved, never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God....

5. Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.
6. Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.
7. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.
8. Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God.
14. Resolved, never to do anything out of revenge.
16. Resolved, never to speak evil of anyone....
25. Resolved, to examine carefully, and constantly, what that one thing in me is, which causes me in the least to doubt of the love of God; and to direct all my forces against it.
28. Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.
30. Resolved, to strive to my utmost every week to be brought higher in religion, and to a higher exercise of grace, than I was the week before.
33. Resolved, always to do what I can towards making, maintaining, establishing and preserving peace....
41. Resolved, to ask myself at the end of every day, week, month and year, wherein I could possibly in any respect have done better.

48. Resolved, constantly, with the utmost niceness and diligence, and the strictest scrutiny, to be looking into the state of my soul, that I may know whether I have truly an interest in Christ or no; that when I come to die, I may not have any negligence respecting this to repent of.

52. I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again: Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age.

53. Resolved, to improve every opportunity, when I am in the best and happiest frame of mind, to cast and venture my soul on the Lord Jesus Christ, to trust and confide in him, and consecrate myself wholly to him; that from this I may have assurance of my safety, knowing that I confide in my Redeemer.

54. Whenever I hear anything spoken in conversation of any person, if I think it would be praiseworthy in me, Resolved to endeavor to imitate it.

63. On the supposition, that there never was to be but one individual in the world, at any one time, who was properly a complete Christian... Resolved, to act just as I would do, if I strove with all my might to be that one, who should live in my time.

67. Resolved, after afflictions, to inquire, what I am the better for them, what good I have got by them, and what I might have got by them.

69. Resolved, always to do that, which I shall wish I had done when I see others do it.

70. Let there be something of benevolence, in all that I speak.

Wow! Sort of makes our own lists of losing weight, saving more, watching television less, reading more and going to church more kind of look puny, doesn't it? Regardless of what is on your list, or even if you don't officially have one, we all see the New Year as an opportunity start over.

Which brings us to the main focus of our service today. Those of us who know Christ naturally want to know Him better, and deeper, and with greater sincerity of

heart. We don't always know what that looks like or necessarily how to get there, but one thing we do know: in order to grow closer to Christ we have to do something about our sin. It always comes back to that, doesn't it?

So that is why it is so appropriate that we begin the New Year together by observing Holy Communion, because it's about forgiveness of sin. It's about the body and blood of Christ, broken and shed for us that we might have forgiveness.

With that in mind, let's turn to the Scriptures we marked earlier:

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Through the Blood of Christ, we can start over. Today is the day *you* can start over.