

New Year's Resolutions. Each year at this time, you hear people talking about their resolutions. Have you made any resolutions or goals for 2018? Generally, I've made different resolutions for myself in the past, and generally I've had resolutions fall to the ground. That doesn't mean all resolutions, but at least enough to wonder *why* make New Year's Resolutions!

When you hear "New Year's Resolution," you might think similarly. Some of you may even shutter. I looked up the top 10 commonly broken New Year's Resolutions. The article was written in 2011 and here's what TIME says: loose weight and get fit, quit smoking, learn something new, eat healthier and diet, get out of debt and save money, spend more time with family, travel to new places, be less stressed, volunteer, drink less.

These are the top 10 broken resolutions. Now, that doesn't mean that everyone fails, but what we find here is that every human being wants to change something and yet they also like what they want to change; so, they don't really because their desires take precedent over their will. So, sadly, many human beings continue on in their endless pursuits of mediocrity – never attaining to greater goals of change for their own selves.

Where do you fall in the resolution category? Now, I want to be careful this morning to make sure that I do not give the impression that writing out a list of resolutions is required for every believer, but I also want to make sure that every believer knows that we should have goals that we want to see accomplished in our lives. This is hard, but God gives grace! Many times we find ourselves like the Apostle Paul who said, "the things that I don't want to do, that's what I keep on doing." But, even while Paul can say that about himself, he also says of his Christian walk, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Phil. 3:12, ESV).

So, before I go any further, I want to ask you to do something. I want you to take about a minute to write down the things you'd like to make progress in. Hold that list off to the side, and I want you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Thessalonians 1. Let's pray before we read verses 11-12 together.

*¹¹To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,
¹²so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him,
according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. ¹*

Paul writes first and second Thessalonians to the Christians in Thessalonica who had been confused about the coming of Jesus. For some reason, they were falling prey to an idea that Jesus had already come. These Christians are also undergoing persecution. As you can imagine, these people have lost hope for living because they feel like their Lord left them. In a modern day way of talking, they thought they'd been "left behind." And, if they've been left behind, how are they to find hope in God? I imagine some wished they'd all been ready!

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Th 1:11–12.

But Paul writes to them with the encouragement that God has not left His children. And, so in the beginning verses of 2 Thessalonians, Paul re-explains to the Thessalonians a correct view of the return of Jesus. In order to understand the two verses that we're going to study today, I need to give a basic backdrop regarding the return of Christ. In these verses, Paul says that there's going to be a just punishment for those who do not believe in and follow after the Lord, but Paul doesn't stop there. Paul also says that there's going to be great joy for those who experience salvation. I want to take a moment to read verse 10: "when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed."

We see a couple of great truths here: 1) Jesus hasn't come yet, and 2) Jesus will come for those who believe. This is a key phrase that sets certain people apart from others. There are those who do not believe and there are those who do believe. The word "believe" from a biblical standpoint doesn't simply mean to affirm, but it conjures up ideas of embracing the truth and depending on the Lord. Therefore, you hear the Scriptures elsewhere say, "Believe on" or "Believe in." Here Paul comforts the Thessalonians by saying that they believed his testimony and therefore will participate in the second coming of Jesus.

There is a glorious reunion to come, and this glorious **reunion** should motivate us in how we live today. So, think about the concept of a future reunion. Many of you had reunions with families over Christmas. How did you prep for that reunion? Some of you might be getting reunited with old friends for New Year's Eve. What's the prep look like for that? Maybe think of an engaged couple thinking about their wedding day and all the friends and family coming. Think of a parent imagining what it's going to be like to see their child after months of being apart. Think of gathering together with a long-lost friend. In any of these situations, there is anticipation (and rightly so)! And this anticipation motivates certain behaviors. But, the reunion between Jesus and those who believe will far exceed anything that any imagination can imagine! At this point, Paul is saying to the Thessalonians, "He hasn't come, but when He does, this is what's going to happen."

First, **Jesus is going to be glorified in the saints**. In the Scriptures, we read that those who believe must live for the glory of God. "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). But, we find that in this life, believers still only do this imperfectly: "The flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh so that you do not do the things that you want" (Gal. 5:17). But, there is going to be a moment when all of that changes. 1 Corinthians 15:52 says, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." I can't even begin to imagine what that moment will feel like. In one moment I will be changed! 1 John 3:2 says, "2 Beloved, we are zGod's children cnow, and what we will be dhas not yet appeared; but we know that ewhen he appears 1 fwe shall be like him, because gwe shall see him as he is."

Second, Paul says that Jesus is not only going to be glorified in the saints (those who have been made holy by God), but **Jesus will be admired among the believers**. This word for admire can also be translated "marveled at." Listen, there are going to be those who do not marvel at Jesus in this day. Paul says that those people are going to be experiencing just punishment, but there are going to be those who marvel at him. In my mind, I'm picturing when the disciples were looking up into Heaven when He ascended to the right hand of the Father. They were stunned, and the Scriptures says that they were gazing. What confusion for them. They didn't understand what was going to take place, but the angel did say that as Jesus ascended so will he come back in the clouds. And now we even anticipate

this return! And, at that return, we will marvel. Think with me about that phrase. The Scriptures tell us even now to delight in the Lord. Do you delight in Him? Too often, people treat God like some Master that they must serve, but they fail to see Him as a Savior that is worthy of savoring. Where are you in your relationship to God? Do you merely do what He tells you or do you delight in Him and obey Him? For me, this verse is what I'm anticipating. I'm anticipating the day when I will continually, without any hint of sin, marvel at my Savior!

Now, it is in light of this future hope that the Apostle Paul gives great encouragement for a believer's life. Basically, Paul says "because this is going to happen, then you can now live in anticipation of what's to come!"

Some so-called Christians may listen to what I've just said about Jesus' return and say, "Well, if he's returning for those who believe, I can just sit around and wait." But, that really doesn't make any sense. That's like saying, "Well, Christmas day is arriving; therefore, we're not going to decorate or buy presents." People who say they can just live lazy Christian lives while they wait for Jesus' return don't understand Jesus or how glorious his return is going to be. The fact of the matter is that if we are going to marvel at Jesus when he returns, then we must live today seeking to marvel at him.

Now, I've given you the background to the main verses for this morning. You also should have your list of resolutions for the year-to-come. Let's re-read verses 11-12: ¹¹To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, ¹²so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²

When you read these two verses, how do they line up with your resolutions? Let's probe these verses a little deeper to see what Paul says should be our greatest resolves as Christians. We should seek to make resolutions that encourage us to:

1. Live a life of dependence.

When Paul expresses the great hope he has for the Thessalonians in experiencing eternal life, we don't then come to the following verses and hear Paul say, "So, try harder Thessalonians. Work harder. Stop being so lazy." No. Instead, we hear Paul saying, "So, I'm praying for you." This must be the natural result of someone who understands that God is in control of everything and that it is from Him that we receive any blessing.

Can I ask you something? Is prayer on your resolutions list? Maybe I should ask a more basic question, "Do you even desire to pray?" When you hear about the return of Jesus, do you desire to talk to Him now and have your heart drawn closer to Him in sweet communion – preparing you for the day that you will marvel at Jesus and glorify Him perfectly? A person who is a believer is a person who grows in prayer – calling on the name of the Lord. And, it's not just that we pray one time a day or at our meal times, but here we read Paul saying that he prays always.

Some people might think of this and say, "Always? Really? I have other things to do." However, we don't realize the privilege we have when we get to pray. If I told some of you football fans out there

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 2 Th 1:11–12.

that you could have the opportunity to spend time with your favorite football player, you'd probably be thrilled and you'd plan accordingly – in great anticipation and marveling! For others of you, I could say that you have an opportunity to go on a vacation with anyone you want wherever you want. You'd then plan accordingly with great anticipation. Now, the Scriptures say that we have the God of the Universe – the holy One whom no one has ever seen face to face on this earth. This God of the Universe is what we were created for and from him and to him and through him belongs all the glory and because of Him we live and move and have our being. This Holy One is beyond our comprehension in every way. He's greater than the greatest athlete. He made the greatest athlete. He is more wondrous than the wonders of the world – He created those wonders. He's more holy, just, kind, compassionate, loving, miraculous and enthralling than anything the mind can conceive. Yet, with Him, many people simply say, "I don't have time." It makes no sense to me how we can carve out time with family and friends – even ones that we don't care as much more – but we don't carve the time for God. And, if we'd carve time out for our best of friends – and wish we could be with them all the time – why is it so hard to believe that Paul would pray consistently? Paul was enamored with God; therefore, he was always communing with Him.

Please don't hear any of this as only a guilt-talk, though. Some of you say, "I know. I fail. Why don't I just pray more." I would praise God if you see the sin of prayerlessness in your life. But, if you stop there, it's merely a worldly sorrow that does no good. Instead, I want you to move forward and be motivated by awe! Confess your weakness to the Father and say, "Lord, I want to be motivated by a marveling of the Savior. Work that miracle in me." Then start praying and watch as God works in your heart as you're seeking His glory.

2. Live Up To Your Calling

Now that we've seen the most basic area of communion with God, let's move into the specific requests. Paul says that they're to live up to their calling. What is this calling that he is talking about? I believe that he's talking about the calling of being united with Jesus. Anyone who has believed in Him have been called to Him. 1 Thessalonians 2:12 says, "we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory."³ The calling is the calling into his kingdom and glory. And, that calling begins when we believe. We're transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the Son. And, there's going to be the final, visible expectation of this kingdom when Jesus returns!

So, if you have believed, you are now sons of God. You are heirs of a kingdom. The Bible says that we will reign on thrones over the New Heaven and New Earth. We will see God with our eyes. This is our calling. What's glorious about this calling is that it is something completely undeserved and it is a wondrous gift. Listen to what Paul says elsewhere about this calling, "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards,¹ not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth" (1 Cor. 1:26, ESV) . . . "And because of him⁵ you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us ^swisdom from God, ^trighteousness and ^usanctification and ^vredemption" (1 Cor. 1:30, ESV). The beauty of this calling is that it is not something we earn. It is something given by God. And, this calling is given through Jesus who is our wisdom, our righteousness, sanctification and redemption. This basically means that now,

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (1 Th 2:12). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

when God looks at those who believe in Jesus, God sees us as wise, righteous, holy and bought out of the slavery to sin. This comes as great encouragement to people who say, “Well, how am I supposed to live up to my calling. I’m a nobody. I’m weak. I’m frail. I fail everyday.” In Christ, you are victorious! This is your calling.

So, what does it mean to live your calling? Basically, imagine your destiny (the second coming of Jesus) and seek to live faithfully in light of that calling. Peter writes, “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3a, ESV). As a result of this, Peter says to add to “your faith [i](#)with virtue,[5](#) and virtue [i](#)with knowledge,[6](#) and knowledge with self-control, and self-control [k](#)with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, [7](#) and godliness [i](#)with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection [m](#)with love” (2 Pet. 1:5b-7, ESV). Peter then says that by living this way, you are confirming your call to yourself and the world around you. Basically put, don’t put doubt in people’s mind if you really are a believer. Instead, live a bold life of faith and obedience. That way, your calling will be sure to those who are looking at your life!

Having said all of this, I wouldn’t want you to write in your resolution, “Try harder at being good.” Paul prays here that God would make us worthy. In other words, it is God who wills in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. The only way that you will fulfill these virtues to the glory of God is by God’s grace. He is working through us to complete the work He’s called us to do. And, he does this through growing relationship with Jesus. 1 John 2:6 says, “The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” That means that we must be abiding in Jesus first. And, the word abide takes on the idea of intimacy. If you are growing in your understanding of Jesus with great delight and joy – seeking to know Him from the Scriptures and through prayer – you will want to have a disciplined life for the glory of God.

So, pray to the Father for grace to marvel at Jesus.

Now, let’s stop for a moment and ask again, “How does your list line up?” Do you see insufficiencies? Do you have areas here that will help you to fulfill the calling to which you are called? Maybe it is exercising or dieting or reading the Word or doing family devotions. Now what? How can you not be like the statistics of the on-line *Time Specials* article?

- 1) Live with anticipation for God to work.

In this passage, Paul says that he prays that God will fulfill every desire for goodness. We can look at this first request and think, “I’m just going to try harder,” but we all know that type of mindset can fail and has failed in our own lives. Is there any hope that our resolutions can last longer than three weeks?

Yes. And, the hope is found in God. This phrase, “and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness” can also be translated, “may fulfill every resolve for good.” This phrase is why I picked the text this morning. We have many resolutions. We have a lot of intentions for good for 2012, but we know our tendency.

The good news we find in our calling is that God doesn’t merely call us to a future hope, but He also enables us to fulfill the commands He’s given us in Scripture. Right here, we are told that

God is the one who fulfills every resolve for good. This reminds me of the psalmist who says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart."

When we are God's children, God gives us a delight in Him. As we delight in Him, he changes our desires to coincide with His desires. Look at your list again. What things on that list coincide with His desires? Maybe you say all, but let's ask wisely. Based on the priorities of life God has given to you – which things will keep you focused on delighting in God and which things will take you away from the right priorities?

Let's think for a moment to get practical. Take work for example. We all need to work. We need to make money to provide for our families. We've been called to use our creativity in this world to display God's glory. So, we can argue that work is necessary. But, some people work so much that it takes them away from their family and also hinders their family disciplining ability.

What about exercise? The Bible says that bodily exercise profits little. That doesn't mean that it's of no value. Paul was talking in terms of eternal benefit vs. temporal benefit. Therefore, in comparison to eternal life, bodily exercise profits little. But, it does profit. We can go through the Scriptures to see that we are to take care of our bodies. So, we can argue that a resolution for exercise is necessary. But, the question is "how much exercise?" I've heard of people who exercise in the morning for hours and in the evening for hours. Then they work and finally they're home – only to go to sleep and wake up the next morning to exercise. Is that really maintainable? What other priorities has God given you? Now, some of you may see the foolishness of that, but let me ask you this, "Why do you want to exercise?" Do you just want to be healthy for healthiness sake or do you want to be healthy in order to glorify God? Or maybe you want to exercise because you want to fit in with other people who exercise?

These are just two examples, but I hope you think deeply about your life and your goals. And, I hope that you think about the reasons behind your goals. Make sure that you are seeking God's glory in this because the Bible says that if you're just wanting to be healthy for healthiness sake or to be good for goodness sake, then you're just wanting to spend it in your own desires and asking for God's grace is useless because you don't really want God. As James puts it, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask zwrongly, to spend it on your passions" (Jas. 4:3, ESV).

So, look at that list. Mark the ones that you'd keep. Mark the ones that you'd modify. Mark the ones that need to be scratched off because they'll deter you from keeping other priorities.

Now, look at that list and pray, "God, give me the grace to fulfill these resolves for good!"

2) Depend on God's power.

Paul is continually reiterating the importance of God's grace at work. He prays for us. He asks that God would make us live worthy of our calling. Then he prays that God fulfills our desires to live out that calling. Now, he prays that God would empower our own faith. It's like Paul is working backwards in this list. He moves from Jesus' return, to our obedient lives, to our desire to live obediently, to the faith that empowers the obedience.

Do you realize that it's God's grace that grants and strengthens your faith? He does this through the work of God, the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 3:16 says, "according to xthe riches of his glory yhe

may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit zin your inner being.” This promised comforter and counselor continues to strengthen believers to continue to believe. And, it’s the powerful working of the Spirit to keep us believing. And, as a result of the Spirit, our faith grows, works to give us desires to do good and also strengthens our obedience to live according to our calling!

Look at your resolutions again. Do these resolutions reveal deep dependence on God or do they look very human-centered and easily achieved by your own strength? There is great power working in God’s children. Why don’t you pray that God would empower you in great ways to trust Him and love Him and obey Him more. Are there things that need to be added to that list?

Ventura, these requests were prayed so that the Thessalonians would have Jesus’ name glorified in their midst. What about us? Do we want that? Do we want people to say about us, “Jesus is in that church. Jesus is everything to them”? These requests were also prayed so that we could be glorified in Jesus. This means that we are lifted up in Him. Jesus says, “whoever loses his life for my sake will gain it.” James said, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (Jas. 4:10, ESV). Do we want people to say, “I don’t know how, but I all their sacrifice, they have great joy”?

And, just in case you’ve missed this throughout the sermon, Paul reiterates this point. All of this, the glory of Jesus and even our exaltation in Him is due to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus.

Too often, I’ve seen resolutions as a bunch of law that I’m going to fail. But, when I see this passage and it points me to Jesus, I realize that God can and promises to enable me to fulfill those resolutions, and it’s not because I’ve done so many things to impress Him. Instead, it is because of His pure grace that I will fulfill His calling in my life.