

New Year's resolutions are tricky things. We start off with the best of intentions, but we stumble along the way, and so our resolutions tend to evolve over time. Here are some examples of how our best intentions get shifted over time.

2014

1. I will read at least 20 good books a year
2. I will get my weight below 180
3. I will not spend my money frivolously

2015

1. I will read at least 10 books a year
2. I will get my weight below 190
3. I will pay my credit card balance in full each month

2016

1. I will read 5 books this year
2. I will follow my diet religiously until I get below 200
3. I will be out of debt by 2017

2017

1. I will finally finish Jesus Calling
2. I will try to develop a realistic attitude about my weight
3. I will make minimum payments on all my credit cards

2018

1. I will donate these books to someone who will appreciate them
2. I will try and drive past a gym at least once a week
3. I will try and be out of the country by 2019

Actually, I hope you find better success with your New Year's resolutions than that, but this morning we are talking about resolutions we should have as a church. I don't just mean things that we promise to do but never do. I don't just mean good intentions. No, I mean things that should be a part of our identity as a people belonging to God. These are a part of our core values as a church.

Since we are heading into a new year, I thought I would state these core values as New Year's resolutions. These are three things we should be resolved to be this coming year. This year we resolve to 1.) be the body of Christ, 2.) be imitators of Christ, and 3.) be proclaimers of Christ.

These aren't just things we need to do, items on a checklist to mark off when we're done. They are a part of our identity, our being, who we are as a people, as a church. Just as fish swim

and birds fly, we are the body of Christ. We are imitators of Christ. We are proclaimers of Christ. If you are a follower of Jesus, these are things you already know. This is what you already believe. However, sometimes we lose sight of these things. We get sidetracked on issues that aren't really central to our purpose. So it's important that we remind ourselves of these basic commitments, that we rededicate ourselves to keeping first things first.

I. Be the Body of Christ

Being a part of the church is much more than attending the same place of worship. It is much more than going forward at the end of the service and placing membership. According to the New Testament when you become a Christian you are placed into the body of Christ, you are made a part of the church. You cannot be a Christian and not be a part of the church. The only question is are you a healthy, functioning part of the body, or diseased, atrophied part of the body?

Being a part of the body is more than where you are on Sunday mornings. It extends to our daily lives. It extends to our way of living and even our way of thinking. We cannot see ourselves as just a collection of individuals or even as an organization. The church is an organism, not an organization.

Scripture very clearly portrays the church as an organism, not an organization. We may tend to view the church as an organization. The world certainly sees us that way. We do many things like an organization. We have positions and structures that sometimes resemble organizations, but the Bible still insists that we are, that we must be an organism- a living, growing, cohesive body, a body that lives and moves with a united and shared purpose.

1 Cor 12:12,27

12 The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ...Now all of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it.

Being a part of an organization only describes only part of who you are and what you do. Last year I joined a cycling club, but that doesn't define me. It only describes some of what I do. There are many times and many places that my being a part of that organization doesn't matter. But being a part of an organism defines who you are. I am a Christian. I am a part of the body of Christ. You are a Christian. You are a part of the body of Christ. You have a Savior that loves you, that died to forgive your sins and give you a new eternal destiny. You have his Holy Spirit that dwells within you. That matters everywhere, all of the time.

If we are a body, then that mean every part of the body has a place and a purpose. Every one of us belongs and every one of us is needed. Every part of a body, no matter how small, has a function and a purpose. In fact, some of the most physically small and insignificant parts of the body provide some of the most essential functions. Each of you has a gift. Each of you has a calling.

If we are a body, that also meant that all the parts work together. There is a unity in their purpose and function. When I walk my feet and legs and arms and eyes, even though they are all doing different things, they are working together to accomplish a singular task– to get me where I'm going. A body that doesn't work together is a sick body, a diseased body.

My mother has a disease called lupus. It is a strange disease that affects people in widely different ways. But the basics of it are that her body's own antibodies can't distinguish between invasive tissue and her body's own tissue. Antibodies are a part of your immune system. They are supposed to attack viruses, infections or any other outside things that threatens your body, but with my mom, her antibodies attack her own body tissue. A part of her body doesn't work with the rest of her body and it threatens her health.

Finally, if we are a body, that means we grow and mature. It is the nature of living things to grow.

Eph 4:15-16

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

A human body grows in both skill and size. Growth in the body of Christ likewise comes in two areas. The first is spiritual growth. This is growth in the faith as we mature in Christ. We grow in Christ likeness. Our faith deepens. We develop our spiritual gifts. We display more of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. We sin less and obey more. That is spiritual growth.

The second is physical growth as more people respond to the gospel and they are brought into the body. Living things grow and so should the church. If they are not, then that is a sign that something is not right. Something is not healthy. These two types of growth bring us to our next two resolutions.

II. Be Imitators of Christ. (John 13:34-35; 1 Peter 1:15-16)

We are to be Imitators of Christ- Imitators of Christ. As His body we want to be like Him. Our spiritual growth comes from becoming more like Jesus. We do that by imitating him.

Imitation really plays an important role in who we are as people. Children imitate their parents. That's how they learn and grow. When I want to learn how to do something, I watch videos on YouTube, hopefully from someone who knows what they're doing, and I imitate it until I can do it without watching them do it.

We all imitate something. We all emulate what we see. The only question is what do we imitate? What is it that we are trying to copy in our lives? If we focus primarily on the culture of the world around us, we will begin to imitate the actions and attitudes of the world. You have to be careful what you imitate, because you'll end up doing something stupid before you even realize what you've done.

I read about a time when President Calvin Coolidge once invited friends from his hometown to dine with him at the White House. Unsure of what table manners and customs were expected in such a formal setting, the guests decided to imitate the president. They watched closely to see which utensils he used, what foods he ate and when. Their strategy seemed to work well until coffee was served. Coolidge poured some coffee into his saucer. They did the same. He added sugar and cream. His guests did, too. Then the president bent over and put his saucer on the floor for the cat! You have to be careful whose example you follow.

In Ephesians 5:1, Paul urges us, "*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.*" The word that is translated there as "imitate" is the Greek word *mimetes*. What English word do you suppose we get from that? Our word *mimic* comes from that word. We are to mimic God as his children. And isn't that what children do- mimic?

Let me tell you a couple of things about when you imitate something. Imitation might not be perfection, but it does two very important things that every Christian and every church should desire. **First of all, imitation points to the real thing.** When we imitate Jesus, it points to Him. Look at a little girl imitating her mother. We see the little girl, and we go "Ahh, isn't that adorable" as she tries to act like her mom, but who do we see in her actions? We see her mother. We say things like, "Boy she sure takes after her mother. She sure has a lot of her mom in her." Or watch a little boy mimic his father. We see the little boy, and we chuckle at his sincere but feeble efforts to be like his dad, but who do his actions make us think of? His father. We say things like, "He's sure a chip off the old block. Like father, like son."

When the world looks at Son-Rise Christian church, we don't want them to ultimately notice us. We want them to see our Savior. Sure, our imitating may be feeble but sincere, but

when we imitate Him, people will see beyond us to the real thing, and they'll want to be like Him too.

There is another thing that happens when you imitate something. First, imitation points to the real thing. **Secondly, imitation becomes like the real thing.** Do you know what happens when you follow a certain example long enough? If you imitate something enough, you become like the real thing.

Many golf experts say that Sam Snead had the most perfect golf swing anyone has ever had. He still holds the record of 82 PGA tour victories. He scored below his own age when he hit a round of 66 when he was 67 years old, and he shot a 59 ten times. Those that played with him said things like, "He had the most graceful swing I ever saw." "His swing was so smooth. That tempo, that rhythm, incredible. I think we all tried to copy it." "I don't think there has ever been a golf swing as aesthetically pleasing as Sam Snead's." Countless golfers since Sam Snead's heyday in the 50s and 60s have tried to copy his swing. In fact, many professionals on the tour today credit Snead's influence on their own swing. How did these players today become the best in the world- by imitating the best in the world.

The more you imitate something, the more like it you become. The more we imitate Jesus, the more like Him we become. There are no shortcuts. There are no simple 3 point outlines to follow. There is no book to read or conference to attend. Becoming like Christ only happens by following Him. The more you imitate Jesus, the more like Jesus you will become. Who are you following? Who are you becoming? Son-Rise will be a Jesus church the more we follow Jesus.

III. Be Proclaimers of Christ

The other kind of growth is physical growth or numerical growth, and the last resolution is that we are to be proclaimers of Christ. We are to share Jesus with others. We have good news, and when you have good news, you don't want to keep it to yourself. You get a raise, you let people know. The doctor gives you the all clear. You can't keep your happiness to yourself. He drops to one knee and holds out the most beautiful ring you've ever seen, you post it on Facebook and let the whole world know. If Jesus is who He says He is, and Jesus has done what we believe He has done, how do we ever stay quiet about it?

We all know this already. We know the Great Commission to go into all the world and make disciples baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We know that faith comes by hearing. But did you know that sharing your faith is an essential part of your own spiritual growth and relationship with Jesus. I want to share with you a little quoted verse from a little studied letter in the New Testament. It is Philemon 6. No, it's not a full chapter, because Philemon is just one chapter. Philemon 6 says, "And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ." Did you catch that? When you share your faith, your own knowledge, your experience of every good thing Jesus has given you becomes more effective.

I think one of the reasons so many of us are stagnated spiritually— we are stunted in our growth — We are stuck— is that we don't share our faith others. And that has put a roadblock to every good thing God is trying to do in our lives, and the way to open that up is to share Jesus with others. It's as simple as that.

Let me end this with some practical application. Some cheerleading and encouragement is fine, but you need some tools in your toolbox.

1. Invite someone to church.

More than 70% of non-Christian people, according to their own responses, are at least somewhat likely to attend a church service or Christian event if you just invite them. More than 40% are very likely to attend if you invite them. The reason they don't come is because we don't ask them. It all begins with a simple invitation. According to author and church researcher, Thom Rainer, the single most effective thing you can do to reach someone for Jesus is invite someone to church or a Bible study.

There's a lot of things you don't have to do. You don't have to wear a sandwich board that says, "The End is Near." You don't have to knock on the doors of stranger's homes and say, "Would you like to buy a tract?" You don't have to wag a condemning finger at lost people and yell through a bullhorn, "You are going to hell." Just invite them to church.

2. Don't be afraid to talk about spiritual matters.

Many times Christians are more afraid to talk about spiritual issues than non-Christians. The truth is we can be more intimidated by evangelism than they are. True, they fear pushy, hypocritical, judgmental evangelists who don't listen. But we don't like them either. Most non-Christians, except for the most hard core agnostics and atheists are open to talking about eternity, heaven and hell, church, your faith, the Bible and other spiritual matters. And you would be amazed how easily some of these things can be worked into everyday conversations if we only

wanted to. And this can be done without being pushy, in your face, shoving the Bible down their throat, or hitting them over the head with it.

3. Build Genuine Friendships with Non-Christians

One of the most common complaints or criticisms of non-Christians is that Christians are phony, that their hypocrites. Many non-Christians have been hurt or let down by Christians in some way. What they really need is an true friendship with someone of genuine faith. This doesn't mean you have to be perfect. It just means you need to be sincere and authentic. This will open their hearts and minds to spiritual truth more than anything.

The sad reality is that once someone has been a Christian for 3 years most, if not all of their close friendships are with other Christians. We need to be very intentional about building relationships with people who don't yet follow Jesus. We can't share Christ with non-Christians if we don't spend time with them. This is one of the reasons I joined a cycling club. I'm looking for a social atmosphere where I can build relationships with people who don't know Jesus.

A part of this resolution might be to find one person— it could be a neighbor, a coworker, someone who has a locker near yours, a teammate, or like me, someone who shares that same hobby or interest as you do. I've had some powerful, deep, spiritual conversations with guys over shooting guns. I remember one guy I took shooting, and before we were done he was spilling his guts about his troubled marriage and his struggles as a father and a husband. Even as he started opening up, he says, "Oh crap, I promised myself I wouldn't do this. I knew this would happen when I went shooting with a preacher." But see, you won't have that preacher thing working against you. It still happened with me, because it happened naturally out of a genuine relationship.