

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

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[0:00] All right, please take your copy of God's Word and turn with me to 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. Our text for this morning will be 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, verses 11 and 12.

If you've been here with us for a while, yes, we're going to talk about resolutions again. This week we will celebrate the arrival of a new year, which I am so thankful for.

However, this past year has been so particularly strange and tiring. I'm not sure that 2021 will be any different at this point, but it just still feels good to enter in to a new year.

While on the one hand will only be another day into another journey around the sun, on the other hand there is something seemingly significant about passing from one year into another.

Doesn't it feel like we are turning a page in a book, closing the chapter that we call 2020 and opening the chapter we will call 2021? Doesn't it feel like an opportunity for a fresh start?

[1:11] Because of the grace of God to us in Jesus Christ, we always have the opportunity to start afresh. But our minds are often drawn to make new commitments at the beginning of the year that we call resolutions.

We are surrounded by people making resolutions and suggestions for resolutions. If you're on social media, you've already seen them, and more will come in this week.

But our prayer this morning is that we can look to God's word together and consider how we can make resolutions that please him.

Now, some have asked if resolutions are biblical. Should we make promises to change? And I would say emphatically, yes. We most certainly should.

To believe in change is Christian. We are a people who have been changed from enemies of God into his friends because we have placed our faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[2:14] We are fundamentally changed by our faith in Christ. So change is Christian. Further, we have set for us a pattern in the Bible of God's people making promises that are pleasing to God.

Let me give you just two examples, and then we'll turn our attention to today's text. Old Testament example. Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the Babylonian king's food or wine.

Daniel chapter 1 and verse 8. New Testament example. Paul resolved to make his way to Jerusalem to fulfill a Nazarite vow. That he had made.

Acts chapter 19 and verse 21. And there are many other examples in the scripture. So, let us resolve to change.

Believing that change is really possible. May we not just do so at the first of the year, but may we do so at the first of the year. And may we do so in a way that pleases our God.

[3:16] 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 11 and 12. Before I read it, beloved, let me remind you that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and our good.

And we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. To 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.

So 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. Now, the outline for this morning's text is as follows.

Number one, resolve to be holy. Number two, resolve dependently. Out of dependence, resolve dependently.

And number three, resolve for the glory of Christ. At the age of 19 and across some time, a young follower of Jesus Christ penned 70 resolutions, promises aimed at God's glory and his good.

[4:30] The first resolution reads, resolved that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory and my own good, profit and pleasure in the whole of my duration.

Without any consideration of the time, whether now or never so many myriads of ages. Hence, resolve to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general.

Resolve to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many and how great so ever. Anybody making resolutions like that this year?

This young man's name was Jonathan Edwards. In the preamble to his resolutions, he wrote the following, which is found in the quotation section of your bulletin this morning.

So if you have that, you can read this along with me. 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.

[5:30] So far as they are agreeable to his will for Christ's sake. And it is my intention this morning to weave Edwards' poignant preamble through our text to set for us an example of application for how it is that we are to make resolutions.

Now, in addition to our text this morning, I do want to encourage you to read Edwards' resolutions. You will be greatly encouraged by them. So number one, resolve to be holy.

Resolve to be holy. If you make resolutions that are not aimed at your holiness, then you are setting your sights far too low.

If conformity to Jesus Christ is not the end goal of all that we do as Christians, then we are failing miserably short of that which God has called us to. Holiness is our high calling in Christ Jesus. Having come to Christ, we are made holy in him. His holiness is imputed to us. And then we are meant to become holy.

[6:39] We don't do this with perfection, right? But it expresses our great love and adoration for what God has accomplished on our behalf. Don't get this wrong this morning, right?

I am not suggesting to you that you make a resolve to be holy so that God will accept you. What I'm saying to you is that because God has accepted you in Christ, you should resolve to be holy, to live a life that is pleasing to him.

Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1, verse 13 and following, Therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded. Set your hope fully on the grace that we brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

As obedient children, right? Having been made children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

Since it is written in Leviticus 11, verse 44, You shall be holy, for I am holy. In our text, I first want to draw your attention to the specific what that Paul prays for the Thessalonian believers in the second letter to them.

[7:45] Verse 11, he says, To this end we always pray for you. What end? What is it that he's praying for these believers? That our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith.

So his prayer is not an aimless prayer. He's not just saying we pray for you. He's saying we pray something specific for you. He is not primarily concerned about their circumstances, that they would have jobs or find houses or be in good health.

But rather, he is concerned about their holiness. He prays two specific things. That God would make them worthy of his calling.

Some translations say, count you worthy. Paul's prayer is that they are, in fact, counted worthy of God's saving call, which is evidenced in the practice of their faith.

That they would show themselves to be Christian by the way they orient their lives toward Christlikeness. He also prays that they would be able, God would enable them to fulfill every resolve or desire for good and every work of faith.

[9:05] This was a consistent concern of Paul's for those who claim to follow Jesus Christ. Because the fervent pursuit of holiness is a marker of those who are truly converted.

People who have been changed in type also desire to change in degree, to be conformed to the image of their Savior.

Now, for a moment, don't lose sight of our text in 2 Thessalonians, but let me show you how concerned Paul was with the holiness of those professed to follow Christ by looking at the prayers he mentions in four of his other letters.

First to the Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians chapter 13, the beginning part of verse 7, he says, But we pray to God that you may not do wrong, that you would be holy.

And in verse 9, the last part of verse 9, 2 Corinthians chapter 13, Your restoration, so those who have been wandering from the faith, them coming back to the faith, is what we pray for.

[10:10] So he prayed this for the Corinthian believers, that they would be holy. His letter to the Philippians, Philippians chapter 1, verse 9 and 10, he writes, And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Again, a prayer for the Philippian believers for holiness. He prays the same for the Colossian believers, chapter 1, verse 9 and following. And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.

And he works out some of the ways in which we will be holy as Christ followers. And lastly, to the Thessalonian believers, 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 11 and following.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

And then in chapter 5 and verse 23, Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[11:56] Paul is highly concerned about the holiness of those who profess to be in Christ. Now again, we have not arrived at perfect holiness on our own, right?

But God, in Christ, sees Christ's perfection, gives to us his spirit, and enables us to follow him. And we are, if we are in Christ, going to express this.

We are going to be growing up into maturity. We are going to look more like Jesus day by day by day. So as Christian people, we ought to want this.

We ought to desire this. We ought to hate the way of the world. We ought to love the way of God. We ought to want to put off our flesh and put on our new selves.

I don't want to reject the old Nathan, and I want to live in the new Nathan, right? Who is empowered in this way to honor God in the world in which I live. So back to Edward's statement, his preamble statement.

[13:05] He says, 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.

This is what God wants of us. It is what is good for us. It is what displays him to the world in which we leave that so desperately needs to see him.

Our holiness. Edward's resolves were aimed at his character, his personal habits, his relationships, and his service to the world around him.

Again, you should look these up. They will encourage your soul in the way that you desire to change. To go a little bit further, let me give you three examples of my own for this year.

So I tend to write out resolutions each year. Often they live in my head for a long time as the end of the year approaches. I always think, oh, boy, this year, how's next year going to be better?

[14:07] How am I going to work harder by the grace of God to be pleasing to him? So I'm just going to give you three quick examples. First, resolved to increase my affection for God by spending more time in the

created world.

I spend too much time in a study with books. Sometimes it makes me want to implode. And I feel so moved to worship when I'm outside.

So next year I intend to do more of that, which probably means I'll be outside with a book. But I'll be outside at very least. It's good for my soul, I have noticed.

It's taken me 40 years to learn that about myself. It's very good for me to be outside. My affection is increased for God in doing so. I think I could do so flippantly. And so I'm saying I want my affection for God to be increased in spending time outside.

I'm setting that for resolved. I'm going to work on that this next year. Second, resolved to endeavor to know God in my Bible reading, not just know about God.

[15:16] I find this little drift in my soul from time to time that I open up the text and I read my Bible a lot. You guys know this if you know me. I'm in the scripture quite a bit. But I often do it as kind of a fact-finding mission.

I'm gathering info as if it's just another one of the books that I'm reading and not the Holy Writ, this inspired book, right? God condescended to become an author and to write a book and I can meet with him in this text.

And so I want to be better at that. I want to set myself to knowing God and spending time with God in a fresh way this next year, in a way that I struggle with at times.

You've probably heard me make the distinction between reading the Bible for me and reading the Bible for you. I often read the Bible in that way. Like, oh, this will be a great cross-reference for that thing. Or this will be really good for so-and-so to hear.

Or I find myself making notes and prepping stuff. And I just need to sit with the Lord in the scripture this next year. Third, I've shared this one with you before.

[16:16] Again, I'm going to make an effort at it. Resolved to read 50 books this year. I've only gotten to 36. So, yeah, but it wasn't this past year. But 50 books this year.

But specifically that increase my awe of God, right? To expand my vision of who God is. So I'm going to select books carefully to that end and set myself to reading 50 books that will expand, increase my awe of God.

Okay, so there's some examples, just three examples in my life of how this next year I am resolving to be holy, to grow in holiness in this next year.

So, resolve to be holy. Number two, resolve dependently. You are powerless to change yourself in any meaningful way.

You may be able to do little things. You may be able to do some temporary things. But you are powerless to change yourself in any meaningful way. But God is all powerful and desires to change you into the image of his son.

[17:29] I hear a lot of people make excuses for the way they act because of their personality. Just to posit as a little aside, the spirit of God is more powerful than your personality. He can overcome and change you in meaningful ways.

This is why Paul so readily prays for the church. I give you that repetition. He is praying for the church that they would grow in holiness because he knows that only God brings about meaningful change.

They must be active. They must be doing something. But it is God who will accomplish it. So verse 11, 2 Thessalonians chapter 1.

Verse 11 says, He is constantly in prayer for these believers, right? That our God may make you worthy of his calling.

He may fulfill every resolve for every good work of faith. By his power. In verse 11, right? Not by their power. That God would do it by his power.

[18:36] So the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him. Last part of verse 12. According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ, right? Paul wrote in Philippians chapter 2, verse 12 and following.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you.

Both to will and to work for his good pleasure. So meaningful change takes effort on our part. And, and more importantly, it takes the grace of God.

If we resolve to be holy, we can have confidence that God will work in our working toward that great end. God desires that you would be holy.

This is consistent with his will for your life. So if you're making resolutions to be holy, you're aiming them at that end, you can have a confidence that as you're working, he will work.

[19:43] Again, Edwards. He says in his preamble, 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.

Right? So far as they are agreeable to his will for Christ's sake. So resolve to be holy. Do so dependently. And third, resolve for the glory of Christ.

Why did Paul want to see the Thessalonian believers grow in holiness? What was the aim of that? What was the purpose of that? He tells us in verse 12.

So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you. That Jesus would look more as he is as these people grow in his likeness.

That he would be displayed to the world in which they live. Resolutions aimed at making you a better you miss the mark. When your end goal is your glory and not the glory of Christ.

[20:57] In your intention you have made yourself a God. And you have bowed before a paltry throne. A resolution to be more healthy, for example.

Fall short if it is merely for your image. If you just want to look better to people. So you want to be more healthy. Or you just want to feel better.

It's aiming too low. If it is aimed properly, I would say to you, it's a good thing. You could actually resolve to be more healthy in this next year.

If you being healthy is to give yourself in service to others. I want to feel better so I can love my family better. I want to be more sharp.

I want to have a keen awareness of how I eat things. And what goes into my body that affects the way I think. Sweet stuff dampens my ability to think clearly. Many people don't know this about Jonathan Edwards as we're talking about him.

[21:54] But he went through an experiment in his eating. To figure out what would maximize his time in study. And he essentially became a vegetarian. He wasn't quite there. But he ate lots and lots of vegetables.

Because it fed his clarity of mind. So he was looking for ways in which he could be healthy. But not for his own sake. But for the sake of others.

To the glory of God. This is the way in which we ought to be making resolutions. Samuel Rutherford once said, Build your nest upon no tree here. For you see, God has sold the forest to death.

We are meant to be aiming ourselves at the world that is to come. Not at the world that is. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 in verse 31.

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do. Do all to the glory of God. And in Colossians chapter 3 in verse 17. In whatever you do in word or deed.

[22:55] Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. Just giving thanks to God the Father through him. So whatever we're doing. Word, deed, eating, drinking. Whatever it is that we're doing.

Whatever possible thing that could be included in a resolution for next year. Should be aimed at the glory of God. It is the high calling and the greatest joy of the Christian.

To know God and to make him known. Peter wrote in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 9 and following. Here we are.

Right? You were not a people. You've been made a people. But you're strangers in the place that you live. Peter says to abstain from the passions of the flesh.

Which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable. So that when they speak against you as evildoers. They may see your good deeds.

[24:17] And glorify God. On the day of visitation. We are set to this task as Christian people. And it ought to be our greatest joy to do so.

Again Edwards in his preamble. Being sensible that I'm 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. For his glory. That he would be known. So resolve to be holy.

Do so dependently. And do so. For the glory of Christ. In conclusion. I'd like to ask you. Some questions. For the sake of application.

Just to keep you thinking in the right direction. If you're not already. And move you along. And there are questions with sub questions. So I'll tell you. There's going to be seven of them. So here we go. Number one.

[25:19] What about you most needs to change? Any of us could think of anything that needs to change about us. What about you most needs. Most fundamentally needs to change.

What sins seem to ensnare you? What habits do you neglect? Do you read your Bible enough? Do you pray enough? Are you regularly sharing the gospel?

You've come here today and gathered with the church. That's wonderful. Do you regularly gather with the church? Do you work hard? Are you setting yourself about the task that God has given you?

Do you rest well? It's time to turn it off. Do you turn it off? What about you most needs to change?

Number two. Why would you like to change? Is your desire for change for God's glory and your good? Or is it selfish? Is it aimed at your glory?

[26:17] Number three. Number three. How are you going to change? By God's grace?

But what is the plan? What are the actual steps you'll take? Right? That you hope that God will empower to help you change. What are you actually going to do?

I'm getting to a place where if I do not put something on my calendar, it will not happen. It just won't. I've got too much going on. I get there's too many things going on in my brain. When I was a child, my dad had a big like day planner, like big portfolio day planner, leather thing that he put three whole punch things in.

And bought this set every single year. He wrote calendar things down and to-do lists and all of this stuff. And he kept it in a, like a satchel that he took to work with him. And he called it his brain. And he would say, Nathan, go get me my brain.

And I always thought it was hilarious. Both that he called it his brain and that he couldn't remember. Stuff like that. Well, guess what? I'm there. Now we have these amazing devices where we can record everything, right?

[27:21] If something important needs to happen, I have to take steps to make sure that it happens. Number four, what is most likely to prevent your change?

What circumstance needs to change in order for you to change? Perhaps your schedule, the people that you're hanging out with. Have you failed to change so many times in the past that you're afraid to even try?

Does your mindset need to change? Fifth, what truths do you need to believe in order to change?

What do you need to believe in order to change? I hope I've said some things to you this morning that would orient you rightly in your thinking. Change is possible by the grace of God.

Let me give you two other quick examples. Romans chapter 8 and verse 1. Paul says, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[28:27] Some of you don't put yourself to the work of changing. You don't go to God in Christ because you don't really believe this. You feel condemned because you know you need to change.

I'm not living up to the measure. I may not be worthy. If you're failing to believe the gospel, if you're in Christ, he has given you his righteousness. And so you have the ability to go to this God of grace and ask that he would help you to grow.

Help you to honor him. Maybe failing to believe this. This could be a truth that would help you to change. Or Philippians chapter 1 and verse 6.

Paul says, You might have justification sorted in your head.

Yes, I am saved in Christ. But you've forgotten altogether about God's sovereignty in sanctification. He is going to bring it to pass. He is going to work in your working to help you be holy.

[29:37] So what truths do you need to believe in order to change? Number six. Are you committed to change? We are such a comfort loving people.

It seems that we are losing the ability to know what it means to work hard at much of anything.

Beloved, anything worth doing in this world will be hard to do.

There is so little, so little worth anything that's easy in our lives. Changing takes work on your part.

Are you ready?

Are you committed to change? And lastly, number seven. How can the church help you change?

We are meant to be a people pursuing change together.

Pursuing holiness to the glory of God together. So how can people come alongside you and do that work with you? We want to do that. We want to be involved in that.

[30:43] For the glory of Christ and the place in which we live. Let's pray together.