

Romans 12:2

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[0 : 00] We have been preaching verse by verse, expositionally through the gospel according to Mark, but this morning we're going to take a small break from that. And I'll ask you, I invite you to turn to Romans chapter 12 with me.

We're going to do this for two reasons. Firstly, I often fail at teaching very practically. Giving you, spelling out for you the next steps that our text presents to us. And I've recognized this for some time as a bit of a failing in my preaching, and I'm working on it. Because I know altogether a theoretical Christianity is really of little value. Just knowing the doctrine isn't quite enough. The application of the doctrine is of massive importance. And so I kind of had that rolling around inside my heart. And sat down to work a little bit on announcements. There are some things that came to my mind that I think need to be addressed that would be fitting at this end of the year.

[1 : 11] Second reason is that as I did this and prayed about what ought to be done, having sitting before me completed notes for Mark chapter 14 verses 12 through 25.

Done. Completely done. Ready to go. And having to start over and create notes altogether for this morning. In fact, my prayer was that that's not be what God would have me do. So I didn't have to create the notes, but I'm convinced that this is exactly what he would have me do this morning. So for those two reasons, we're going to begin in Romans 12, the first part of verse 2. And then we'll have some topic beyond that as well, which I'll tell you about in just a moment. So let me read that to you. It says, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

Let's pray together. Father, we do thank you for your word that we have opened before us. It is a great gift to your church, and we have it in abundance.

[2 : 07] Copies upon copies and tools used to understand it. All of the application of these things is possible ultimately and finally by your spirit, who illuminates our minds to understand, to rightly understand what your text has to say to us.

I pray today that that will be the case, that you will work a miracle amongst us in my speaking and in the hearing, that we will be changed by your word. You will get at the very core of who we are and that our hearts will be transformed.

And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. So Paul exhorts in chapter 12, after his beautiful systematic theology through the first 11 chapters of the book, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

So there's a process by which we are transformed as Christians. Putting off the world itself, not being conformed to it, and being changed.

And the prescription he gives here is by the renewal of our minds. Right here at the end of the year, we've entered into a season where many people make New Year's resolutions.

[3 : 17] They resolve to do something or another better, or to start doing something good, or to stop doing something harmful to them. Always with this positive idea in mind, positive resolves, bent on improvement and moving forward, putting aside the failures of the previous year and looking forward to the year ahead.

I've always found resolutions to be a little bit trite, because most people keep their resolutions for a very brief amount of time.

This effort to get in shape is one that's often thrown out there. In fact, the survival of gyms depend on New Year's resolutions. If you happen to know a gym owner, and if you talk to them about what they must charge to keep the place running, the people who actually show up and work out at the rate they pay could never keep a place like that open.

What they depend upon is all the memberships they sell at the beginning of the year, and all the people who never come as a result. They drop their resolution. I've always said to myself, why not make resolutions at any other time of the year?

Why must we wait until January 1st of the year? Why can we not start at the moment we realize we should be doing something differently to move forward? However, a lot of people do think in these terms around this time of year.

[4 : 40] Fresh starts. And as I know that some of this may be rolling around in your mind, I think it's appropriate that we make some suggested resolutions to you.

And this was going to be part of my announcements, and it suddenly turned into two and three and four and now almost five pages of notes. So I just thought, let's do a sermon on it instead.

Let's start by talking to you a little bit about the resolutions of Jonathan Edwards. In Jonathan Edwards' biography, he wrote 70 resolutions, excuse me, in his diary.

In 1723, when he was just 20-year-old, 20s-year-old, 70 things that he was committing his life to, these resolves, so to speak. To give you an example, the first and longest one, he says, 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.

Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this whatever difficulties I meet, how many and how great whatsoever.

[5 : 58] So he set forth these 70 things by which he would live his life. And in much simpler format today, I want to give you seven suggested resolutions.

I will say to you that these are things for me that I am still working in, that I am still growing in, that I am still not being conformed to the world, and I'm still being transformed by the renewal of my mind. Paul's writing in Romans chapter 7 resonates with me so much, beginning in verse 21, So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So that I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Chapter 8, verse 1, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So as we devote ourselves to new things or improvement of things, in the new year we can celebrate that we are found righteous before God, that we've begun by grace and that we continue by grace.

[7 : 18] So seven suggested resolutions. Firstly, pray more. Pray more. I know that this is a church that prays, that values prayer, but we can certainly pray more.

As those who hold the sovereignty of God so high and seem to understand it so well, I fear that we often set prayer aside as if it doesn't matter at all because we know that God is ultimately and finally in control.

But God uses the prayers of His people to accomplish His will. I think we often have the attitude of Job in Job 21.15 where he says, What is the Almighty that we should serve Him?

And what profit do we get if we pray to Him? Paul's exhortation is much different than Job's attitude in chapter 21. 1 Thessalonians 5.17 He exhorts the Thessalonian believers to pray without ceasing. And in Philippians 4.6-7, he says, Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

[8 : 36] And then a promise comes with that. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. I consider myself a praying person.

I lift lots of things up to God. But I have recently been convicted of my faithless prayer. But I often ask things of God, not really expecting that He'll answer my prayers.

An example of a story that happened not too recently, I serve as the chairman of the board of directors for the Dahlenega Care Center here in town. And after our last board meeting, there were some issues that were particularly vexing to me.

And after our meeting, Wes and I talked about them at length. A couple of days later, in fact, this was Monday on Wednesday morning, I gave him a call with the very same issue on my mind.

It had been bothering me all of that time. The thing that was constantly running in the background of my mind. And I realized as I was talking with him that I was having the exact same conversation. [9 : 41] Like nothing had changed from Monday evening to Wednesday morning. Nothing had been resolved. There was really no new thing to address concerning it. And I realized that I had yet to really pray about it.

Mentioned it, sure. But yet to really say to God, God, ultimately, you are fully and finally in control of this thing. There's nothing I can do about it apart from you. And I'm giving it to you. I'm not going to be anxious about it.

I desire the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. And so when I got off the phone with Wes, I was driving the boys up to my mom and dad's house to spend the day. And I mean, a 10-second prayer.

Lord, I don't know how to work this thing out. I don't know what's going to become of this circumstance. But I know that you have to do it. And I set it aside. And in the hour I was visiting with my father, I got an email which needed a phone call in response about an entirely different thing. And the thing I was concerned about came up in that conversation and was totally resolved. Like fixed. Set. Forever. This issue was.

[10 : 47] Incredible. And the thing that popped into my head as I'm having this conversation is the words, you do not have because you do not ask. One of Edwards' resolutions, Resolution 29, he says, So in plain English for you, he says, never to count it as a prayer unless I know that God can answer it.

And if it's a confession, that God will accept that confession. And I find this to be true of myself sometimes. And I think the same would be true of you. We ought to pray more than we do. And we ought to be very intentional about the way in which we pray. I think we're all guilty of saying to somebody, somebody's sharing with you, something going on in their life, and you say to them, I'll pray for you.

We've all done this. And then we never do. Why not stop in the moment and pray? It doesn't have to be a lengthy prayer. Say to somebody, I'll pray for you.

In fact, why don't we pray now? Or, set some specific time aside. Write down the prayer. Be sure to pray for that person.

[12 : 17] Think about the people in your life and make lists. We have wonderful things. Writing utensils and digital ways that we can record things. Why not set specific time aside and pray through the concerns of our life and those who are around us?

Set specific time aside. Closet time. Quiet time. Where you get alone with the Lord and offer up to Him those things that concern you. In addition to that, utter prayers throughout the day.

Spend time in prayer. Pray continually, without ceasing, as Paul exhorts, as you're encountering the little things of the day, to stay connected to the source of all good things and offer those things up to Him.

Journal. Is anybody in here journal? Prayer journal? I don't. It's something I'd really like to do. Good for you, the two that do it, I think I saw. Right? What a wonderful way to keep an account of the things that you've been praying and the way in which God answers those prayers.

There are wonderful biographies that you can read that are essentially people's prayer journals. The accounts of the way in which they petitioned God and the way in which He answered. Use these as tools.

[13 : 30] I think that most people these days have smartphones. I'm an iPhone user, so speaking to those of you who have iPhones, there's this really, really great app that comes with it called Reminders, and you can set reminders for yourself to pray about things specifically.

Our church leadership doesn't know this, but I have reminders programmed into my phone throughout the week to be praying for them, and it pops up a reminder, and I'm prompted then to pray for our church leadership.

There's wonderful tools at our disposal. Reminders will remind you at a location. It locates you by GPS and tells you to pray when you get to a place or when you're leaving a place. We have such wonderful things at our disposal to pray more in 2015.

So let me encourage you to make that a resolution this next year. Secondly, be resolved to read the Bible more.

To read the Bible more. Beloved, our God has given to us a book that He wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit by various authors, but a book nonetheless that He wrote.

[14:39] It was breathed out by Him, and we neglect it. We do not know the Bible the way that we ought to. Resolve 28 of Edwards, resolved to study the Scripture so steadily, constantly, and frequently as that I may find and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

He wanted to be able to mark out and measure that He understood and He knew it from day to day, week to week, month to month, that He was coming to a growing knowledge of the very Word of God.

There's a promise that comes with this. Proverbs 3, 5, and 6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.

I want my paths to be straight. I hope you do too. There's a joy that comes from studying and knowing and keeping the Word of God. Psalm 119, 9-16.

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to Your Word. With my whole heart I seek You. Let me not wander from Your commandments. I have stored up Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You.

[15:52] Blessed are You, O Lord. Teach me Your statutes. With my lips I declare all the rules of Your mouth. In the way of Your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.

I will meditate on Your precepts and fix my eyes on Your ways. I will delight in Your statutes. I will not forget Your Word. The very essence of Christian living is that we are fueled by the very words of God.

There's a sanctification and there's an equipping that comes by it. 2 Timothy 3, 16-17. Paul writes, All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

That the man of God or woman of God may be complete and equipped for every good work. It's the way in which our minds are transformed and we're no longer conformed then to the world.

It's by the Word of God. So practically, you need to make a plan for how it is you will study the Word of God.

[17:02] Beloved, Sunday morning is not enough. The 30-45 to an hour that I give you is not enough. You must be saturating yourself with the Word of God.

It is the very bread of life for you. So here's a couple of suggestions for you. A new one for me, the first one. Choose a book of the Bible. Start with a short one.

It's good to build habits with achievable goals. Start with a short one like an epistle. Let me suggest to you the book of Ephesians. Read that book in its entirety.

Whether you do that in one sitting or you do it over chapters at a time or a couple of verses at a time, read that book in its entirety. Then repeat step two 20 times.

Repeat step two 20 times. Read it in its entirety in whatever format you do it 20 times and repeat the whole process for every book of the Bible. You can have a great deal of understanding of the Scriptures if you'll do something like this.

[18:05] You could plan to read the Bible through in a year. There's lots of Bible reading plans for yearly Bible reading. It's a great way to do it. There's nothing particularly holy about it. It doesn't make you a better Christian because you cram it in into a year.

You've got to keep up and you've got to struggle through some things like Numbers and Leviticus. But many Christians have never read all of the Scriptures. Have no idea what it says in some places.

And for those of us who have you go back sometimes and you read and you go what? Like nutty stories that happen and we just totally forget them. That they even exist. So let me encourage you at some point in your life to do this and maybe to do it periodically.

To set yourself on a schedule. To plan on reading it through in a year. We have a really really fantastic chronological Bible reading plan that helps you lay out the Scriptures in the way in which they happened in history versus the way they're organized in our Bibles.

I don't know if you know this or not but the Old Testament is organized by types of books. So it can get a little confusing as to when these things actually happened. A chronological Bible reading plan is a great way to see the Scriptures unfold before you.

[19 : 11] There are many other fantastic ways to do that. Lastly, let me suggest to you which has been my typical habit in studying the Scriptures and that is to choose a book of the Bible.

Again, pick a short one. Ephesians is a fantastic one to work through. And in day one, the first time you sit down, read the entire book. Remember that the book was written as a book.

In this case of Ephesians, it's a letter. So it's addressed to a particular people. Read the whole thing. That's the way they would have heard it. Not given to them a verse at a time but they would have heard the entire thing.

So read the entire book and get the context set properly for you. And then in the following days, read carefully the text. Read it carefully until God arrests your attention.

So read it until something sticks out to you and you go, that is an interesting word and I never noticed it before. What does it mean? Does something arrest your attention and your heart is turned towards God?

[20 : 06] Right? The sleepiness of the morning, right, or the troubles of the day suddenly are far and distant in your mind and all you want to know is God revealed to you in the text. What you're reading right there before you, right?

Your heart is saying, oh, what is this new thing that I'm now seeing and I want to understand in a greater degree? And then take that thing and meditate on it throughout your day. Right? Do this until you get to the end of the book and then pick a different book and keep moving on.

Right? A fantastic way to study the scriptures. There are many other ways to do the same but those are three that I think are useful in your study of the Bible. So, think about, consider making that a resolution in 2015.

Thirdly, read more books. Just in general, read more books. I'll say Christian or otherwise, although I would strongly encourage Christian writing upon you.

And I say read more books, not just read more because there's lots of reading to be done these days on the internet. There are lots of articles. We call them blogs so readily and they have value but it's very, very difficult to totally divulge all that there is to say about a particular topic in an article.

[21 : 18] Right? There's lots of holes that are left in that type of thing but books tend not to do that. Good books tend not to do that. There are plenty of poor books out there. Christian books are fantastic.

If they're well written, they expose to us the Scriptures themselves. A great way to test this is to look at the back of the book and see if it has a Scripture index. And if there's many, many pages of references, probably a good book.

Many books claim to be Christian books and barely use the Scriptures at all or they use them very, very poorly. But we can come to a better understanding. Beloved, we have access to theologians throughout history through books.

They have written down what they believe to be true on a particular topic and we can sit down with that person and understand what they would have to say. I hope, and this may not be true of all of you, but I hope that if suddenly Jonathan Edwards were here, they could sit down with us and we might ask him a question like, what do you think about the freedom of the will?

And that we would sit there and eagerly listen to the answer that he would give us. I hope that you would jot down many, many notes. Guess what? He wrote them down for you. He did it. He organized it in a way that you can sit down and approach and wrestle with and come to understand in a greater degree.

[22 : 38] It's a blessing. There's too many books out there. I will say, we could get rid of probably 90% of them because they're junk, but there's a lot of really good books to be read. The average person reads 300 words per minute.

The average page of a book contains 300 words. The average book length is, it's actually 350 pages, but let's go with 300 so we can remember easily across the board.

So which means if you read for 30 minutes a day, five days a week, for 50 weeks, so we're going to give you two weeks off in the year and two days a week off, you can read 25 books in a year.

It's pretty incredible, right? And it's not okay to be a Christian who just doesn't like to read. Oh, I just don't like to read. Well, guess what?

The way that communication is translated is through words. And Sunday morning is not enough, so where's it going to come from? Got to get into books. The book and books that talk about the book.

[23 : 38] Right? So let me challenge you to something. I'm not going to challenge you to read 25 books this year. I wipe some sweat off your forehead. Let me challenge you to read five.

Five books. Read five books. And let me challenge you to specifically read some Christian books. Five Christian books in this next year. They're bountiful. You can get PDFs of books, right? Free. All over the place. I'm going to suggest a few to you. So here's my short list. Really difficult to do for my study to pick five books. There are many other really fantastic books, but I'm going to suggest five to you.

So if you have no idea where to start, here's five really fantastic books. The Pursuit of God by A.W. Tozer. I'm going to jot this down. I'll leave them up here after the service. The Pursuit of God by A.W. Tozer.

A really, really fantastic read. Finally Alive by John Piper. Finally Alive by John Piper. The Trellis and the Vine by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne.

[24 : 41] Sorry, Tony Payne. Right? Wonderful book. Worship, The Ultimate Priority by John MacArthur. It's not about music. And then Good Biography is always fantastic.

So George Mueller of Bristol, this particular copy, not this particular printing. George Mueller of Bristol by A.T. Pearson. Right? Good Biography will encourage your Christian living.

Right? All about 350 pages. Okay? Can be done in a year. Let me encourage you to set yourself to that. And you may be saying, well, Nathan, but you're a pastor. Like, you've been given time.

Like, we pay you to study and to understand things and to know things. It's easier for you. I agree. For me to read five books in this year is not a difficult task.

Right? Not a difficult task at all. Well, let me tell you what I'm doing in this next year. I'm reading 50 books in this year. Right? So I've got to chew through one a week to be able to accomplish this goal.

[25 : 43] If you step down into my study, you'll see the big stack on my desk, which is that. Those are the books that I'm intending on reading in this year. So if I can do this by the grace of God, the last couple of months I've been practicing getting to that pace of reading a book a week.

If I can accomplish this, you can certainly do five. Pick good books that point you to the Word of God. So make it a resolution to read more books in 2015.

Fourthly, I think I'm on the right count. Fourthly, eat better. Yes, eat better.

And most people don't know this by coming here and first glance, but we are a Southern Baptist church and Southern Baptists are notoriously good at observing some things, some things that aren't even law, and really great at neglecting others.

Proverbs 23, 1-4 says, When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite.

[26 : 54] Do not desire his delicacies for they are deceptive food. And to understand a little bit more what's being written here, do not toil to acquire wealth, be discerning enough to desist, to stop, to recognize that there is an abundance in our consumption, that we go above and beyond what we ought to consume.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10-31, So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. And the major point that I would make to you is that we as a people, as an American people, are relatively unhealthy in the way we eat.

And it seems to me that if I want to fit myself for service, if I want to be active in kingdom building, that the less I struggle with physical ailment, the better off I am to serve the Lord in the things I'm doing.

Now certainly sin exists in this world, just eating well and exercising does not accomplish that in its entirety. Sin still runs rampant. There are going to be people who eat the strictest of diets and avoid everything that everybody says causes cancer.

They're going to stay completely away from all of that and they're still going to get cancer and die. It's going to happen. But, the knowledge is at our fingertips. We know what is and isn't good for the most part for us.

[28 : 21] It seems to be changing kind of from week to week too, doesn't it? But we ought to strive, we ought to endeavor to be as healthy as we can be for the sake of serving the kingdom.

Again, listen to Edwards. Resolve 20, resolved to maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking. Resolve 40, resolved to inquire every night before I go to bed whether I have acted in the best way I possibly could with respect to eating and drinking.

And elsewhere in his diary he wrote, By a sparingness in diet and eating as much as may be what is light and easy of digestion, I shall doubtless be able to think more clearly and shall gain time, number one, by lengthening out my life, number two, shall need less time for digestion after meals, number three, shall be able to study more closely without injury to my health, number four, shall need less time for sleep, and number five, shall more seldom be troubled with the headache.

Edwards had actually systematically really paid attention to what he ate and how it affected his ability to serve in the kingdom. Edwards, on most days, studied for 16 hours.

A phenomenal application of his mind, and he tailored his diet in such a way that he could achieve that very thing, like an athlete, training his body so that he could understand the word of God and then rightly tell it to his people.

[30 : 03] As a side note, Edwards primarily ate vegetables with little bits of meat, so just a little note for you there. We have, again, resourced, our church has a lot of families in it that eat very, very healthy, so if you're interested in changing the way you eat, please do.

I will tell you again a little personal story. I have for over a decade, since I was about 21, I'm now 34, about to be 35, experienced lots of muscle and tendon pain, been in quite a lot of pain.

Like most days, I just didn't want to get up and get going. And this last year, through a massive change of diet, which is how I discovered I'm allergic to couscous because I never would have eaten couscous previously, have found that much of my pain and discomfort is tied to diet.

I feel phenomenally better. Still experience it, still struggling with it, I think I'm still in a bit of a healing process, but feel way better. Sugar, being the primary thing that seems to cause me to ache.

In fact, when I stopped consuming sugar altogether, started drinking primarily water, I felt like I had been kind of living in a fog. It was really hard to keep focus.

[31 : 22] And it's like the fog lifted and I could think more clearly. I could apply my mind more readily. And I have, in the meantime, cheated a few times and immediately, I mean immediately, I feel like I'm back in that fog again.

Difficult to think, just want to go to sleep. Right? It's killing us. All this refined sugar and corn syrup and things that we're eating. Right? Some people process it better.

We all know people who are going to live really, really to old ages and eat horribly. Right? But let me encourage, generally, for you to do some research, ask some folks in our church, and eat more healthy in 2015.

All right. Fifthly, lead your family better. Lead your family better. And I mean, specifically, by leading in family worship.

There are a lot of things that we need to be doing, men, women as well, in the leading of our family better. But specifically, let me think about, talk to you about, by leading in family worship this next year.

[32 : 25] And I will tell you up front that I struggle with this one. The schedule of our house, trying to deal with a four-year-old and a two-year-old, trying to get them to sit still in our home.

It's a little bit easier here, in fact, but trying to get them to sit still and try to pay attention. Speaking to them at their different levels is really challenging. Sam and I ebb and flow out of success in leading family worship well.

But the Scripture says to us, Deuteronomy 6, 6 and 7, And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise.

Many Christian homes are altogether devoid of the Word of God. We spend lots of time doing lots of other things, lots of energy, but yet we don't teach our children the most important thing, the only thing that's going to have eternal significance for them.

If Christians would spend even half the time teaching their children the Word of God that they do, running around teaching them to be good ballerinas and football players and baseball players, etc., our children would be so much better off.

[33 : 45] God has a multi-generational idea in mind in the presentation of the Gospel. Psalm 78, 5-7 says, God established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel which He commanded to our fathers to teach their children that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children so they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God but keep His commandments.

I don't know for sure but I think Paul has this in mind in Ephesians 6:4 when he says, Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. We need to be leading our families.

Fathers in this room, you are the pastors of your families. I'm your pastor, you pastor, your family. And the things that I think are necessary in family worship, it's going to vary dramatically from age to age but we need to be reading the Scriptures to our children or something that speaks of the Scriptures to the little ones, discussing it, asking them questions, making sure they understand, praying with them, singing with them, and memorizing with them, memorizing Scripture or working them through a catechism.

The reason Aletheia Way is so simple is that it's not my job to teach your kids. I'm hoping to give them something that will get some energy out of them that gives you some support. So you can go home and sing the songs that we sing on Sunday mornings.

We've got a Scripture memory verse that we're doing approximately one per month. You can pick up your favorite version of a catechism and work on that with them that we build the truth into our children.

[35 : 25] Some people call it brainwashing. I don't care. I want their brains to have access to really, really good, solid information so that their hearts will be changed. Pump the information into them.

We'll say to you that when you do this isn't all that important. The Puritans, which value family worship very highly, did it both in the morning and in the evening of every single day. There is no way I could pull that off in my home.

I have really seriously considered getting it done. There's just no way that we could pull it off. We typically do really well doing it once a week at dinner time. We pick a dinner time, a day of the week that we're going to do it.

Consistency, I think, is the most important thing that we're spending a very consistent amount of time with our kids. There are wonderful resources for the young ones. The Jesus Storybook Bible, many of you are familiar with. I have this read with me which actually is not really great theologically, but this same guy, Dennis Jones, has a see with me Bible that's just pictures and they're awesome.

This is Sam's favorite illustrator. So just to give you an example, there's John the Baptist. You guys can see from far away. Really good, right? Like, totally shifted the way I thought of John the Baptist, but pretty awesome.

[36 : 38] He's got a big split between his front teeth. It's cool. So really, but the see with me is really, really fantastic if you want to just tell your children the story. I read this morning, intentionally, read this morning from you from the Big Picture Storybook Bible.

Very Christocentric as well as the Jesus Storybook Bible. fantastic ones for the little ones to tell the stories to them. If any of you are friends with us on Facebook, you'll note the one thing I asked for for Christmas was a felt board set, which I found out to my great pleasure that it was copyrighted in 1966, which means it's the exact same felt board set that I would have seen as a child.

Unfortunately, I have to cut out every one of the pieces myself, which I'm not looking forward to, but I'm going to start doing some storyboarding at home with the kids to help them engage in the story. So, set aside a time, make it a resolve for you for 2015 to lead your family better in the act of family worship. Number six, resolve in 2015 to give more generously.

To give more generously. Luke 12, turn to Luke 12 with me. Get a drink of water. Get a drink of water. Luke 12, it's one of my favorite parables that Jesus told.

[38 : 07] Luke 12, beginning in verse 13. Someone in the crowd said to him, Teacher, tell my brothers to divide the inheritance with me. But he said to him, Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you? And he said to them, Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Now, let me stop for a minute and note there, he says, be on guard against all covetousness. Not just having stuff and coveting it, but also wanting things, right, that you don't have, thinking that the abundance of possessions will bring you joy.

Verse 16, And he told them a parable saying, The land of a rich man produced plentifully. And he thought to himself, What shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops. And he said, I will do this.

I will tear down my barns and build larger ones. And there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, be

merry.

But God said to him, Fool, this night your soul is required of you. In the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.

[39 : 15] Right? Let that sink for a moment. Now, this parable is not a warning against saving. It's a warning against storing up for yourself to the degree that that is the consistency of your life.

Like we said before in verse 15, life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. The Proverbs tell us to observe the ant who stores up for the time when there is no food.

It is okay that we do these types of preparatory things. In fact, year before last, Sam and I were very carefully saving, getting ahead. We had gotten ourselves a month ahead in our savings.

We had money sitting aside in the savings. If we somehow didn't have an income, the guys decided to get rid of me, we would have had a month stored up. It was really fantastic and I felt so very good about that, but I wasn't really sure exactly why we were being led to save in this way.

And then, we got our taxes all taken care of and discovered that the accountant that was taking care of our deductions here for the church had done it wrong and I owed quite a bit more than I thought that I had anticipated owing.

[40 : 24] And in fact, it came up within, once I paid the accountant the fees to sort it all out, within about \$20 of what we had saved in that year previous. So, as Sam and I kind of lamented that our savings was gone, I said, well, at least we know now what God was having us save it for, right?

He was very aware of what was going to happen. But we ought to give generously to the kingdom of all of our resources, our money, our time, and our talents.

I know many people in this room are young and they don't really have money, but you have time and you have talents and we must prioritize giving to the kingdom of God.

The example in the Old Testament of giving is the tithe that it was meant to be done off the top, the very first, the first fruits, right? Not what's left over at the end. Let me take care of these obligations and then I'll give by setting first and foremost an obligation to the Lord to say, this is ultimately and finally His.

I will give to kingdom work. And the other, and I will say to you that if you have a home and you have a car, which is okay to own, you own those things, you also need to see those things as belonging to the Lord and use them in ways that serve His purposes as well.

[41 : 42] You've got to prioritize it. Let me encourage upon you envelope budgeting. Set money aside specifically for the expenses that you know you have coming up. I would include kingdom giving in that.

Sam and I plan every single month exactly what we budgeted out for the year, exactly what we're going to give as a standard, and then we try to go above and beyond that at times to prayerfully consider if we should give more.

We consider that as an overflow when God is very, very good to us in our finances. Envelope budgeting ensures that you'll have what you need for your necessities as well as being able to give.

The average family that uses envelope budgeting, some kind of a system, saves 10% of their household income. So, you're having difficult time giving to the church? Well, guess what? Start paying attention to your budget and the statistic holds that you're going to have 10% free up.

Wouldn't that be a wonderful, wonderful thing? The average evangelical only gives 2% of their income, which means a lot of evangelicals don't give anything at all, and a lot give much, much more than that, but 2% is a sad, sad number.

[42 : 55] Prioritize. As far as giving your time and talents young people, use a calendar. It is a fantastic tool. A day planner if you would like to.

Once again, technology serves us so well in this way. You have tools at your disposal. Plan time to study. Plan some time to hang out with your friends. And if it's not that time, then do something good with your time.

I know you feel very busy, right? I sympathize with you. I was there once upon a time quite a while ago. I know you feel very, very busy, but you have so much time. Go ahead and start being a good planner of time and using your time well because if you don't start doing it now, you're going to find that once you get married and have a job and a family, you're never going to make time to do things for the kingdom.

Jesus gives this warning in Matthew 6, verse 19-21, Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves

treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The way in which we spend our resources says something about what we care about. I hope that you'll be resolved in this next year to give more generously.

[44 : 17] 2 Corinthians 12-15, I want this to be something that sticks in your mind that we could repeat these words that Paul writes to the Corinthians. I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.

Seventh, and lastly, be resolved in 2015 to make more disciples. Most of us are familiar with Matthew 28, 19-20.

It's called the Great Commission. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. Beloved, it is our job as disciples of Jesus Christ to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

If we were to follow Him, we're to be about His work. The Great Commission is a commission to go. It's a in your going, as you're going.

[45 : 20] The Great Commission is not just for the foreign missionary, but it is for all of us who claim the name of Christ. And it's go.

It's not invite to come. And it's okay if you invite people to come, but it's take the gospel with you. It's not lean on a trained professional, and I have no training by the way.

But, the professional to present the gospel, but it's you going and sharing, passionately loving people with the truth of Jesus Christ. There's an old nomiker that is thrown out all the time in mission circles.

You have three options. Go, send, or be disobedient. I think that's been incredibly damaging to us. You have two options. Go, or be disobedient.

The sending can be part of the going. Certainly, the way in which we go and love and serve can certainly mean that we support those who are going further, who are going beyond, those who may need to make a full-time living in the advancement of the gospel.

[46 : 22] But rightly, we should all be going. And the question always gets asked, though, but am I equipped to do this? I don't know. I don't know that I know how to go and make disciples.

And there are some practical things to learn and to do to gain knowledge in, to be sure. I hope if you're sticking with resolution number two to read your scriptures more, you're gaining all of those things that you need.

But I'll say to you very simply, if you want to know if you're equipped, if you're a Christian, yes.

You've responded to the gospel so you understand it enough to share it with somebody else and you have the Spirit of God.

In our study of Mark chapter 13, remember what Jesus said to the apostles? He's talking about all the things that are going to happen to them, the places that they're going to go, all the stuff that's coming their way. Ephesians 7, verse 11, and when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

We have a helper. The Great Commission says, and lo, I'm with you even to the end of the age. We have a helper, one who even goes before us. Prepare the hearts of people to hear the gospel message.

[47 : 34] Once again, this is a thing in which we need to be deliberate. I have walked into, happened upon, gospel conversations, but more often than not, these things happen when I prepare for them, I have a person in mind, a time I'm going, I know so-and-so works at such-and-such place at such-and-such hour, and I've been praying toward a chance to meet with them and to share the gospel with them.

Be deliberate. Take some time this morning, right now, to think of three people in your life that you know are not believers, and set in your mind in 2015 that you're going to look for opportunities to share the gospel with them, that you're going to pray for them, that it might be a hope that they too will become disciples of Jesus Christ.

If you love and cherish the gospel, you adore the glory of our Lord, you should want people to be following you in that way. Think of three people that you could share with.

Think of more, by all means, right? Three is not really enough. Think of those spheres that you walk in. You may be the only person that can share the gospel of Jesus Christ with an individual in those circles that you run in.

Think of three people. Do it now, right now. Think of three people. They don't pop into your head readily. Spend some time doing that today.

[49 : 07] This is trite. I would never issue this as a serious and real challenge to you, but just as a thought.

Just a thought. What if? As a what if circumstance. What if we each made one disciple next year? Whether that's somebody who's a fairly nominal Christian who's maybe responded already in faith to Jesus Christ but needs to be brought along and grown up to the place where they can then share their faith and bring people up in the same way.

Or somebody who doesn't know the gospel at all and you present the gospel to them for the first time. Your discipleship of them begins with your teaching them the gospel itself and they come to faith and you work with them to the place where you grow them up that they can also then go share their faith and make another disciple.

Do we believe that God desires to save people? I hope we do because He does. It's what He is here about and He's given us this commission to be His ambassadors in the world to be about the ministry of reconciliation.

We're a small crowd this morning. Not our normal crowd. Our after Christmas college students home. A lot of people sick. Crowd. I think there are about 70 people in the room.

[50 : 32] So let's just use that as a number. And if all of us in this next year were to make a disciple that 70 would become 140. And the next year that 140 would become 280.

And that following year that 280 would become 560. And that following year that would become 1120. I'm going to lose the math here in a second. We need to begin moving away from addition. A little here and a little here and a little here. Our church grew by 10 people this year. Praise God for those 10 people. But we need to be moving beyond that from addition to multiplication. Believing that God has plans for this place.

And it includes the redemption of His people. And that's not a small little crowd but a number that will not be able to be counted one day in heaven. We need to set ourselves to this task.

These things are the things that make up the Christian life. The other stuff is the details. The jobs that we work, the family activities that we involve ourselves in, those are just the details. But the way that we're supposed to be driven is towards these types of things.

[51 : 41] Edwards' resolution number six resolved to live with all my might while I do live. Number seven resolved never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

We waste far too much time. Let me encourage you to make it a resolution to make more disciples in 2015.

Let's pray together for the grace to do so.