

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

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[0:00] Good morning, I hope everybody had an enjoyable week that was full of joy and thanksgiving and I hope some moniker of rest.!

Well, on the one hand, we 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 and into another. Doesn't it always feel like we are turning a page in a book, closing the chapter that we call 2024 at opening the chapter we call 2025.

I was born in 1980, and I can remember the openings of movies that were set in the future being set to 2025. And here we are in the future.

Doesn't it feel like an opportunity for a fresh start? Because of the grace of God to us in Jesus Christ, we always have the opportunity to start afresh.

[1:29] Isn't that wonderful? But our minds are often drawn to make new commitments at the beginning of the year that we most often call resolutions.

We are surrounded by people making resolutions. If you've not already heard this language, it's coming this coming week, and you're going to see lots of suggestions for resolutions, and many of them are good things.

But this morning, my prayer for us is that we can look to God's Word together and consider how we can make resolutions that please the Lord. Some have asked if resolutions are biblical.

Should we make promises to change? And I say to you, absolutely yes. Yes, we most certainly should. To believe in change is Christian.

We are a people who have been changed from enemies of God into friends, from dead to alive, because we have placed our faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[2:39] Further, we have set for us a pattern in the Bible of God's people making promises that are pleasing to God. Let me just give you two examples, one from the Old Testament and one from the New, and then we will turn our attention to today's text.

First, Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the Babylonian king's food or wine. Daniel chapter 1 and verse 8.

Secondly, Paul resolved to make his way to Jerusalem to fulfill a Nazarite vow that he had made. Acts chapter 19 and verse 21. So we have some examples set for us of this type of behavior.

So, let us resolve to change, believing that change is really possible. May we do so not just 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.

So our text today is 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 11 and 12. Before I read it, let me remind you, Beloved, this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good, and so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

[4:06] Paul here writes to the Thessalonian believers, 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.

The outline for this morning's text is as follows. Number one, resolve to be holy. Number two, 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.

The first resolution reads, and this quotation is on the back of your bulletin this morning, quote, 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.

[5:45] Nineteen years old. Boy, have we come a long way in our writing, haven't we? This young man's name was Jonathan Edwards. In the preamble to his resolutions, he wrote the following, which is found in the sermon note section of your bulletin today.

He said, 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.

Now, 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 should be making resolutions.

So the first point, resolve to be holy. If you make resolutions that are not aimed at your holiness, those resolutions, again, not altogether bad, but if that's it, 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 falling miserably short of that which God has called us to. Holiness is our high calling in Christ Jesus.

[7:09] 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 were brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

As obedient 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 11.44, You shall be holy for I am holy. Be set apart. Be transformed. Different from this world. Live lives that are righteous and pleasing to God because you are found in Him. In our text, I first want to draw your attention to the specific what that Paul's pray for, the Thessalonian believers.

Verse 11, he says, To this end, we always pray for you. What is that end? What is he aiming at? That God would make them worthy of His calling and may fulfill every resolve or see desire for good and every work of faith.

[8:32] It's not an aimless prayer that Paul is praying. He is not primarily concerned, notice, about their circumstances. That they would have jobs or find houses or be in good health.

All good things to pray for. But rather, his concern here is about their holiness. Their greatest, their highest good.

Paul prays, notice, for two specific things. That they would be made worthy of God's calling. Some translations say there, count you worthy.

Paul's prayer is that they are in fact counted worthy of God's saving call. Which is just to say that the evidence of their call is the practice of their faith.

That they would show themselves to be in Christ. And that their desires, their resolves for good and works of faith would be realized.

[9:40] 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.

You hear me say this all the time. We cannot, we are not saved by our works. We're saved through faith. But if we have this faith, this conversion faith, and it is going itself to work.

It's going to show itself. It's going to evidence itself in the way that we live our lives. Now I don't want you to lose sight of our text in 2 Thessalonians, but let me show you how concerned Paul was with the holiness of those who profess to follow Christ by looking at the prayers he mentions in four other epistles.

His prayers for the saints are constantly full of this holiness language. In 2 Corinthians chapter 13, the first part of verse 7, he says, but we pray to God that you may not do wrong.

And in the same chapter in verse 9, that their restoration is what is being prayed for. In Philippians chapter 1, verse 9 and 10, there Paul says, 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.

[11:18] In Colossians chapter 1, verse 9 and following, there he says, 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 and 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 then lastly, 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 11 through 13, now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you and 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 chapter 5 and verse 23 of 1 Thessalonians, 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.

biblical sanctification is progressive. We are from one degree of glory to another being made to look more like Christ.

And so it's good for us at the beginning of a new year to set our gazes in that direction. Back to the Edwards quote, 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.

[13:06] There's his concern, right? He's looking toward what is it that God would have me do? How am I to live? Edwards resolves, and I just greatly encourage you to look up.

I think you'll be prodded on by them. All of his resolves, those 70 of them, were aimed at his character, his personal habits, his relationships, and his service.

Now I'm going to give you just three examples of my own for this year. And at the end of this, I'll ask you some questions to help kind of guide your thinking, and I'll put those in your sermon note section as well.

You can go ahead and be looking at them if you would like to. So, in addition to my resolve to not make any errors in the bulletin in 2025, resolved to spend more time praying for and with my family. I find that I often pray too little for and too little with my family. And I want to be better at that this year for the glory of God.

[14:16] Secondly, resolved to create more margin in my schedule for reflection. And by margin, I mean times that are unplanned, times that are not packed to the very brim, which so often seems to be the case, just to slow down and to think.

And of course, I want to think about good things. I don't want to think about just anything. I want to think about good things, the things that God is doing in my life and the things that God intends for me. I want more space this year for reflection.

And then thirdly, resolved. This is a long-standing one many of you have heard. To read 50 books this year, I normally do that. I regularly get into the mid to high 30s.

I haven't yet reached 50. I'm kind of sad to say. But, I set a goal and I work toward that goal. This past year, I did an abysmal job at it.

Many of you know I've been building a house. I'm in the low to high teens from this past year, depending on how you want to count audiobooks. So, read 50 books and I typically set some direction for that reading.

[15:30] And this year, I want to read 50 books that increase my affection for Christ. So, those are three examples. Three examples of resolves for me.

And there are other things that I'd like to do to change. They're practical things. Goals for this next year. This is the kind of resolution that I'm talking about. I think these are the kinds of things we

should be committing ourselves to.

Right? Aimed the same way Edwards did at character and personal habits and relationships and service. So, let us resolve to be holy.

But as we do that, let us resolve to be holy dependently. 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. God supplies for all of those changes that He asks of us. And we need to make resolutions dependent on Him to work in our efforts.

[16:44] This is why Paul so readily prays for the church. Right? All of those examples that I give you, he's asking that God would do this work because he knows that only God brings about these types of meaningful changes.

We cannot just stay on our heels. It requires effort on our part, but it must be God-empowered. It must be imbued by Him for it to accomplish its end goal.

So again, notice our text. 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. Paul says, To this end we always pray for you that our God make make you. And he launches into it.

It's worthy of his calling. And notice at the end of verse 11, By His power. And verse 12, According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Most of the words in these two verses are about God's power working in the lives of believers. Paul wrote in Philippians chapter 2 verse 12 and 13, 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.

[18:14] Meaningful change takes effort on our part. We should think. We should make plans. We should apply.

We should jump over hurdles. We should kick down doors. It takes effort. Too many people, too many people want to change and want to make no effort to change at all.

But, here, it also takes, 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.

If you are in Christ this morning, God loves you immeasurably. It's difficult to even comprehend how much God loves you.

And He loves you so much that He is working to conform you to be like His Son who had no sin, no baggage of it, didn't carry around the guilt of it, had no separation of fellowship with the Father.

[19:31] God loves you so much that He's working to give you Himself by making you look more like Christ. Great high end for you to the praise of His name.

So, if we aim ourselves in this direction, if we're looking to grow in our holiness to look more like Jesus, we can have the confidence that God will help us to that end.

And, oh, do we need His help. remember Edwards' preamble. He says, being sensible, being reasonable, 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, we should resolve to be holy, we should resolve dependently and we should also resolve for the glory of Christ.

The third point. Why did Paul want to see the Thessalonian believers grow in holiness? Why does Paul desire that we would grow in holiness?

[20:51] Look at the beginning of verse 12. So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you. not just about us.

Our good is a good thing to aim at, but it's more than that. It's also for the glory of Christ.

Resolutions aimed at making you a better you miss the mark.

When your end goal is your glory and not the glory of Christ, in your intention, you have made yourself a god and you have vowed before a paltry throne.

A resolution to be more healthy. For example, fall short if it is merely for your image. Is it bad to be more healthy?

Of course it's not. But if the aim of it is that you would look good to others, then it's falling too short. If it is aimed properly to be healthy in order to give yourself and service to others, then it's a good thing to resolve to.

[22:08] Samuel Rutherford, Puritan preacher, once said, build your nest upon no tree here, for you see, God has sold the forest to death.

We should invest in that kingdom that is coming. And that means good things happen here. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 31, so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

And in Colossians 3 verse 17, and whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, representing Him, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

It is the high calling and the greatest joy of the Christian to know God and to make Him known. A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession.

Why? Why do we belong to God? Peter doesn't leave us guessing that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

[23:21] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people, changed. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles 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 of you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Our resolutions should be for holiness and they should be dependent on God to work in them and they should be for the glory of Christ. Again, Edwards 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 so far as they are agreeable to His will for Christ. sake.

So let's resolve to be holy, let's do it dependently, and let's do it for the glory of Christ. So in conclusion, I want you to think, and I want to help you do that by asking you seven questions with some follow-ups, and these are again in your notes.

[24:43] What about you most 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? Do you work hard? Do you rest well?

All just examples, all just thoughts. What about you most needs to change? I gave you some examples for myself. things that pop in to change?

What are the motivations that come up underneath those things that pop in to your mind? Is your desire for change for God's glory? That way, you need to go back to number one.

What about you most needs to change? What should be motivating that change? change? Thirdly, how are you going to change?

[25:49] What is the plan? Beloved, most of the biblical counseling we do here as a church is helping people come up with a good plan for change. They typically know what needs to change.

They know the goal. They know where they're trying to go. They just need help making a plan to get there. What's the plan? What are the steps you're going to take to change?

God has given us so many tools at our disposal and he works in those tools. Scripture reading and prayer and gathering with the church.

Just some examples. Fourth, what is most likely to prevent your change? You know the obstacles. The things that most need to change about you are probably things that you've tried to change before and you've bumped your head. You've fallen over the hurdle.

[26:47] What circumstances need to change in order for you to change? Your schedule? Your friends? Maybe some influences in your life that are not conducive to change?

Have you failed to change so many times in the past that you are afraid to even try? Fifth, what truth or truths do you need to believe in order to change?

Paul says a nation for those who are in Christ Jesus. When I fail to change, I need to be reminded of this. I need to be reminded that God loves me in Christ and I am not condemned because of my failures but I'm set free from them.

I'm liberated from them. This is such a motivation to change, to pick up and to keep moving on. Or how about Philippians chapter 1 and verse 6 where Paul says I am sure of this, that he who began

a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ.

I need to be reminded sometimes of Paul's confidence in the saving work of God to give me the courage to press on and to change.

[28:14] So what truths do you need to believe in order to change? Six, are you committed to change? Are you a half-hearted attempter at change or do you believe God intends for you to?

He's got good plans for you. He's going to empower the work because it will take work on your part. Are you committed to change?

Are you ready? And lastly, how can the church help you? How can those people sitting to your left and to your right, how can the elders of our church, how can we help you change?

To help you think about those things you need to put to death, those things you need to be putting on for your good and for the glory of Christ?

So let us resolve to be holy. Let us resolve to do so dependently and let us do it for the glory of our Savior and Lord.

[29:20] Let's pray. as