

Keeping Our Resolutions

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by Carolyn Mahaney

I recently read that "experts in the New Year's Resolution field estimate that 25 percent don't make it past Jan. 8."

Now I certainly don't think it takes a band of "experts" (whoever they are?!) to figure that one out. We already know it's true just from talking to others and reviewing our own track record for making and breaking New Year's Resolutions.

So what will it be this year? Are we going to once again join the 25 percent group who doesn't make it past Jan. 8? Maybe you're discouraged because it's only January 3rd and your resolutions have already bit the dust. Or possibly you identify with my friend who purposed to start this New Year off by getting up early and overslept the very first day. She and I had a good laugh about it when she told me.

Or could it be different in 2007? Is it possible to make a resolution this year and truly keep it? The answer to this question is "YES"! Now, that's a bold assertion, I know. But there are some simple and specific ways to make a resolution that we can actually stick to. And we will take the next few days here at girtalk to talk about them. We hope you will join us for this discussion.

Righting Wrong Resolutions

by Nicole Whitacre

"Is it possible to make a resolution this year and truly keep it?"

Yesterday, Mom made the bold assertion that "yes" it is possible to truly keep our New Year's—or any other—resolution. Before we look at "how," we must first consider why, so often, our resolutions don't have the shelf life of a gallon of milk.

For starters, they might be the wrong resolutions—by that I mean self-exalting instead of God-glorifying.

In his book, *A Godward Life, Part 2* (p. 62), John Piper cites a newspaper article based on a book entitled *The Body Project*. The author examined young girls' diaries from the 1800's to the 1900's and found that "In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, girls' diaries focused on 'good works' and perfecting the character. In the 1900's, the diaries are fixated on 'good looks,' on perfecting the body."

Now of course, it's not wrong to resolve to lose a few pounds or to take better care of our bodies, which are, indeed, temples of the Holy Spirit. But if "good looks" or any other goal is driven by selfishness, or a desperate grasp for glory and attention, we are merely resolving to sin against God.

If James 4:6, "God opposes the proud" means what it says (and Scripture always does), than God is actually opposing our efforts instead of blessing them. No wonder we fall flat on our vain little faces!

"But..." as James 4:6 goes on to say, "[He] gives grace to the humble." If we depend upon God to do good works and perfect our character in order to reflect His glory, we can anticipate His grace to blow life into our feeble efforts. By His power, we can sustain our resolutions beyond the "best if used by" date.

Pick One

by Carolyn Mahaney

"Is it possible to make a resolution this year and truly keep it?"

Absolutely! And now that we have righted our wrong resolutions, we should eliminate most of them. That's right. Let's reduce our resolution list down to one. Let's choose that single area where we most desire to grow in godliness.

But there are twenty ways I should be growing right now, you might protest.

That's true for all of us. But what's also true is that we can't change in every area all at once.

Author and speaker David Powlison makes this insightful observation:

"We are simple people. You can't remember ten things at once. Invariably, if you could remember just ONE true thing...you'd be different. Connect one bit of Scripture to one bit of life.... Apply one

relevant thing from our Redeemer to one significant scene in your story. Bring one bit of the Bible to one bit of your life....You can't deal with it all at once. Scripture never does.... Life goes one step at a time."

So we see that the mark of true spirituality doesn't require ten giant steps forward. One step at a time is sufficient. In fact, you could argue that choosing one area for growth in godliness is an expression of humility. It's a humble acknowledgement of our serious limitations as "simple people".

And what's more, growth in one area almost always affects every other area of our lives. So rather than lament about the twenty ways we need to grow in godliness, let's be encouraged that as we isolate just one and devote ourselves to change in that area, by the grace of God it will affect the other nineteen.

Oh, and one more thing. We need to make sure our resolution is specific. "Overcome anger" is too vague. However, if we choose to take the next 30 days to memorize and meditate on Eph. 4:29 – 5:2, list the circumstances that tempt us to anger and pray about and plan how to respond humbly at those times – now that would be a detailed resolution!

Don't Try This At Home

by Janelle Bradshaw

"Is it possible to make a resolution this year and truly keep it?"

Yep, it sure is. As Nicole and Mom reminded us last week we start by "righting those wrong resolutions" and "picking one." But we still need help to keep our resolutions.

Mescience0131 I remember a field trip that I took to the Baltimore Science Museum when I was in junior high. (Yes, here is a picture of me participating in an electricity demonstration—thus the crazy hair! Please try and ignore the outfit.)

There were a variety of experiments that you could watch and participate in—some, like the electrical experiments, were more hazardous than others. An oft-repeated phrase to the children watching was: "kids don't try this at home." Why? Because kids can't safely perform complex science experiments on their own. They need help.

A similar warning should be issued to all of us when it comes to keeping our resolutions: “Don’t try this on your own!” Any resolution, big or small, is impossible to keep without the help of the Lord. If we try, it will simply blow up in our faces—like a science experiment gone awry. We are dependent creatures. We cannot take our next breath without the Lord granting it. What makes us think we can keep resolutions on our own?

But the Lord is gracious and eager to help us. I love the words of Charles Bridges on this subject, “Take one step at a time, every step under Divine warrant and direction. Ever plan for yourself in simple dependence on God. It is nothing less than self-idolatry to conceive that we can carry on even the ordinary matters of the day without his counsel. He loves to be consulted.”

Did you hear that? “He loves to be consulted.” Start right now. Take that one, God-glorifying resolution and consult your gracious Father. Ask Him to help you carry out this task. Ask Him for the strength to be diligent and faithful. Depend upon him for the grace to accomplish all that He has set before you. And watch Him work!

Tell Someone

by Kristin Chesemore

“Is it possible to make a resolution this year and truly keep it?”

Most certainly, yes—but you also need to tell it to someone!! Tell your husband, your mother, your friend. The more the better! Make keeping your New Year's resolution a “group project.” Ask each person to commit to regularly checking in with you to see how your plan is going.

Now as Janelle said yesterday we are dependent upon the Lord for growth in godliness. No person can replace the importance of the Spirit’s work in our lives. He alone sanctifies. But He changes us in community. Our family and friends are a gift from God, designed to walk with us as we seek to grow in grace.

Who are the ones you live life with? Ecclesiastes says, *“Two are better than one...for if they fall one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! A threefold cord is not quickly broken”* (4:9-12).

If you want to keep that New Year's resolution, pull in the help of others. It will require humility. But we can anticipate experiencing an outpouring of God's grace as we open up our lives.

This weekend I'll meet with a group of friends whom I get together with monthly and I will share my New Year's Resolution. Who are you going to share yours with?

Keep At It

by Nicole Whitacre

"Is it possible to make a resolution this year and truly keep it?"

It is possible, as long as you prepare to stick with it, even when you fail. For one of the main reasons we give up on a resolution is discouragement over our not-so-perfect keeping of it.

Proverbs tells us that: "the righteous falls seven times," but goes on to say that she "rises again." She doesn't sit down and cry boo-hoo over her failure. She gets up, dusts herself off, and keeps at it. Or, to put it in more biblical terms, she repents from sin (where necessary), receives Christ's forgiveness, and perseveres.

It doesn't matter how many times you've failed to keep a resolution in the past. God's Word challenges us to persevere. It also reminds us that we are not on our own. We have the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, and sustain us.

We also have a sweet reward. James 1:25 promises that "the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, *and perseveres*, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing" (emphasis mine). So let's shut down our pity party and persevere in pursuing God's blessing!

Not For Merit's Sake

by Carolyn Mahaney

Is it possible to make a resolution this year and truly keep it?

I hope by now you are convinced that "yes, it is possible"! (If you haven't read the posts that discuss this question, check them out here.)

But as we carry out our resolution, we must not forget:

“There is nothing in us or done by us, at any stage of our earthly development, because of which we are acceptable to God. We must always be accepted for Christ’s sake, or we cannot be accepted at all. This is not true of only when we believe. It is just as true after we have believed. It will continue to be true as long as we live.... It is always on His ‘blood and righteousness’ alone that we can rest.” *B.B. Warfield*

Let’s make this our prayer:

Heavenly Father, help me today to _____ (fill in the blank with your resolution) – not for my sake, not for merits' sake, but for your name’s sake! And if I should fail, help me to look to the precious blood and righteousness of your Son alone for my forgiveness and acceptance before you.*

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