

New Years Eve 2017

Sunday, December 31, 2017

<http://www.rivercc.org/2017/12/31/new-years-eve-2017/>

Here we are on the eve of a new year.

In just a few hours, 2017 will be in the past... and we'll be thinking about all the things we want to do or change in 2018.

These thoughts are what we what we call "Making a New Year Resolution."

So earlier in the week I got to thinking about the meaning of the word "resolution." It's an interesting word.

A resolution is a strong decision to do something—It's what we do when we determinedly take action to solve a problem or change a situation or condition.

We can spend a lot of time thinking about things we want to change.

...but I wonder how seriously we take those thoughts?

Most New Year Resolutions are broken before January is even over.

Yet making a "New Year's Resolution" is what we do this time of year.

I'm no different than anybody else, I make them too!

I've been thinking about my own life, there are things I want to do differently in the new year.

Here are a few of them:

I'd like to: lose some weight, get in better shape, eat healthier, read a little more, invest in my grandkids... along with a whole host of other things that I'd like to do.

And if I was a betting man, I'd bet you have some of the same goals in mind too...

In fact, I'd probably win that bet!

That's because most of the resolutions we make, don't change much from year-to-year, and they tend to look like everybody else's.

Here are the Top 10 resolutions for 2018:

Spend more time with family and friends

Find more time for physical fitness

Lose weight

Quit smoking

Enjoy life more

Quit drinking

Get out of debt

Learn something new

Help others more

Get organized

Take a look at them... do they look familiar?

They look a lot like the ones from 2008, which look like the ones from 1998, and strangely enough, look like the ones from 1988! Isn't that funny!!!

My point is not to bash these goals. These are good goals to set...

But know this: Ultimately these goals fall short of meeting our deepest need for 2018.

It's true. Our deepest need—the absolute best thing we could do this year—would be to know Christ better, and to grow in his likeness.

Out of all my goals for 2018, Christlikeness is the **centerpiece**... It's the goal that trumps all other goals!

Everything pales in comparison to this single goal

Oh, that we would catch a vision for Closing the Gap in Christlikeness for 2018 and beyond!

And here's the cool thing: This Goal is nothing new... It's the timeless principle we find Paul talking about in Philippians.

Let me read it to you starting in Chapter 3:10...

10 My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, 11 assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead. 12 Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I

make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, 14 I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. (CSB)

Paul's goal—growing increasingly into Christlikeness— it captivates all of Paul's energy and it should do the same to us.

We grow and mature spiritually as we: trust in Christ, learn more about him, draw closer to him and obey him.

That was Paul's objective.

Notice too that Paul's goal of knowing Christ was always before him...it was never behind him...

He never thought he would make it to the place where he could say, "I've obtained perfection, I'll just stop."

No...Remember: it's not perfection that counts, but rather the direction of our lives that matters.

We're to continually be growing in Christlikeness. That's the example Paul give us...

You see, he actively pursued Christ from the time of his conversion to the end of his life. His conversion was only the beginning of the chase!

He continued to "press on!"

He even tells us how he did it... he said:

13... But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead...

Picture the focused attention of an athlete in training... think of a runner coming to the finish line leaning forward—straining towards the finish line—with one goal in mind...

...Everything behind him doesn't matter, what matters is that he crosses the line.

So he doesn't take his eye off of the goal... no, he strains and reaches towards it.

That's how Paul lived...

Paul wasn't just spouting off lofty words—he lived what he preached.

By the time he's writing to Philippians he's been a believer for more than 30 years!

Think about his life...what he had left behind, the things he had done in his past... both good and bad.

He put it all behind him, it was time to move forward towards knowing Christ more fully.

What a great example for us to follow!

So, as we move into 2018, how do we follow Paul's example and keep the goal of knowing Christ before us?

I think there are three things we can do in 2018 that will go a long way in helping us close the gap in Christlikeness...

- 1. Forget about yesterday. Forget about past victories and defeats. Focus on pressing forward, regardless of the circumstances.**

Don't let your past failures derail you. "If you've messed up, fess up, and move on"

Think about Paul:

Before his conversion, he was the one who held the cloaks of the men who stoned Stephen.

There is no doubt in my mind that Paul had sorrow in his heart over this, but he didn't let it sideline him.

There may be things in our past we're ashamed of, we may have failed in some big ways...

...But those failures don't have to sideline us.

We're not to dwell on the past.

Listen, it doesn't matter where you are in your walk with Christ, whether you've been walking with Jesus for a short time or long time. The goal—of knowing Jesus—continually moves forward as we press on; as we strain to know Him better, it is never out of our sight.

So, let's you and I both look forward to a fuller and more meaningful life because of our hope in Christ.

- 2. Fix our eyes on Jesus**

Heb. 12: 1-2 Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, 2 keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith.

Jesus is the one we're running to! He's the Goal

We can be encouraged because others have run the race before us.

We don't have to struggle alone.

Think about that for a moment...the good news is that we have others right here—where God has placed you, in this community of believers—that can run alongside you...

...To help you throw off all that hinders, so we can live a life with purpose and intentionality.

If we're going to run with endurance, then we may have to do some things differently.

We'll have to overcome some things that we've trained ourselves to do over many years.

Will it be hard to do? You bet it will!

But it's doable, it's not impossible! It just means it'll take hard work and self-denial.

Closing the gap in Christlikeness means that we've got to keep our eyes on Him.

We do this by focusing on the essential disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and worship.

3. Understand that Your life has Purpose!

2 Timothy 1: 9 says:

He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

We've been called to live a Holy Life!

That means your life has purpose!

That purpose is to know and love God and make his love known to others.

Here's another way of saying it: Your purpose is to close the gap in Christlikeness!

It's our ultimate goal and purpose!

Think about that for a minute... think about all that you're gonna to do this year, to include those "little" goals we talked about earlier, all can play a role in glorifying God—it's part of your calling.

But only if we get the order right.

Closing the Gap in Christlikeness comes first, and then all those "little goals" we're working towards can fall under the umbrella of Christlikeness.

The challenge for 2018 is to close the Gap!

I want you to know that I'm "in" on closing the gap in Christlikeness.

I want it to be the number one priority of my life this year.

Then when 2019 comes around, I want to be able to say, “the gap is smaller!”

But I want to be honest with you... I can't do this on my own, I'm going to need your help, I'm gonna need you to come alongside me this year to spur me on.

And I want you to know this: I'm gonna come along side you this year as well!

And together, let's ditch anything that distracts us from being Christ like and let's lean in and close the Gap.

Prayer:

Father we want to change this year... we want to know you better, we want to live a single-story life. Teach us the happy art of attending to temporal with a mind intent on things eternal.
