

Church Resolutions 2020

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[0 : 00] Well, I'm sure all of us, or at least most of us, as I look around, I see children, so some of them may not know, but I think most of us are familiar with personal resolutions.

I believe that most of us at one time or another have set resolutions at the beginning of the year. Perhaps you've even done it this year. And we know that resolutions are plans or commitments that we make to accomplish or to practice particular things in our lives.

And we especially tend to do it at the beginning of a new year. And we know that when we make resolutions, we don't cease to do all the other things that we were doing and doing well.

We just add these new things to our lives, things that we want to accomplish, things we want to practice. And I think for most of us, we recognize that making resolutions, we shouldn't try to do too many of them.

We should try to do a small number that can be manageable. But church resolutions are very similar. Church resolutions are resolutions, things that we seek to embrace and resolve to accomplish as a church.

[1 : 32] And these resolutions that I want to share with you this morning are resolutions that cover different aspects of church life and different aspects of the Christian life. And we will resolve, by the grace of God, to try to grow in them and to practice them in this new year.

And although we're being called church resolutions 2020, obviously we're not going to stop them when 2021 comes. We're going to continue them because they are appropriate for us to continue them because they are appropriate as long as the church exists on the earth.

Now, right away, you probably recognize that this sermon is going to be different than the way we would typically bring a sermon where we would read a text and then we would try to exposit that text and explain that text.

This one is different this morning. I won't be reading a single text and trying to exposit it. I will refer to several texts, but this is not an expository sermon.

So I thought I should mention that for those who may not be aware that that's where we are going to go this morning. This morning, I want to share with you five church resolutions that I want to encourage us all by the grace of God to embrace.

[2 : 59] And again, we embrace them not just for this new year, but we want to embrace them beyond this year because these are what the church is all about.

Not just this church, but the church, God's church. And we want to want to practice them. So let me just take a moment to pray and then we will look at the resolutions.

Lord, thank you once again for. This amazing privilege that we have together as your people. Thank you for your work in our midst.

Thank you for all that you have accomplished and desire to accomplish in our lives. Lord, we pray that you would help us to see the need for us to grow and change in these areas that will be mentioned this morning.

Lord, we know that it takes more than us just resolving to do these things. We need your grace and your spirit to help us. So would you help us this morning? We ask in Jesus' name.

[4 : 13] Amen. The five resolutions I want to share with us this morning are not in any order of priority. They're all important.

And the first one is in the area of suffering. It's not one that we like to talk about often.

But I believe it's one that the Lord would have us to resolve concerning this year. And that is to resolve to prepare for suffering.

I believe that, by and large, as a church family, we have come to accept that suffering is a part of the reality of living life in a fallen world.

Both scripture and our own personal experience bear this out. Our world is filled with suffering in various shapes and forms, and Christians are not exempt.

[5 : 24] And again, I believe that we accept this, by and large, that it is a reality of life.

We, ourselves, some of us, have suffered in particular ways. And we know loved ones who have also suffered and walked through different situations that bring grief.

And for some of us, it has been in the form of relational breakdown, through betrayal in relationships, through separation, through divorce. It might be through job loss or prolonged unemployment, maybe business failure, maybe financial reversal.

It may even be in the form of some disability or disease, or even the death of loved ones. And I'm sure if I were to take a poll this morning, every single one of us has been to some degree or another, whether personally or through others connected to us, we've experienced suffering and the grief that it brings.

But this first resolution is not about expecting suffering, because as I said, we tend to see that as a part of our fallen world.

[6 : 45] This first resolution is about preparing for suffering, and there's a difference. Let me try to illustrate it by talking about something we all know about.

We live in a hurricane zone. And for six months of the year, we are prone to hurricanes. And so what we do is we typically would take precautions.

We would try to insure property. We would put up storm shutters. We would get hurricane supplies.

We prepare. But not everybody prepares for various reasons, any number of different reasons.

So expecting something and preparing for it are two different things. I think that, by and large, we expect suffering. But I would say that not many of us prepare for suffering.

We kind of hope that it never comes our way, that it goes somebody else's way. No one in particular, but we just hope that it doesn't come our way. But preparing for a hurricane is very much like preparing our soul for suffering.

[7 : 57] And so I want to ask us this morning, in a very personal way, are you prepared for suffering? Are you prepared for the reality that suffering is a part of our fallen world?

And it may come to our doorsteps, whether personally or relationally. If you say you're prepared for suffering this morning, if your preparation doesn't include these three things, I want to put it to you this morning, you're not prepared for suffering.

These three things are not exhausted. There are other things you can do to prepare for suffering.

But if you would say, I'm prepared for suffering, and your preparation does not include these three things, my brother, my sister, I'm saying to you, you are not prepared for suffering.

The first way we prepare for suffering is we walk close to God. We seek to walk close to the Lord. And by this I mean that we have a prayer life. We pray and commune with God daily. We seek to walk close to him. Walking close to God means reading his word.

[9 : 21] It means meditating on his word regularly. And by this I mean that the Bible is not a foreign book to you. It's not a closed book to you.

You read it. You hide it in your heart. You embrace opportunities like we have now as a church where we are memorizing scripture together. Walking close to God means that we embrace and avail ourselves of the means of grace that's offered to us in corporate gatherings.

This morning during our pre-service prayer time, we took time to pray for those who abode low in their circumstances, those who are discouraged, those who are facing difficulties and despondency in their lives.

And one of the things that happens is when we feel that way, sometimes our natural inclination is to want to be by ourselves and not want to gather.

And that's the time that we need community. That's the time we need to embrace community.

Preparing for suffering, having a close relationship with the Lord, embracing times of corporate gatherings like this, where we get to sing, we get to pray together.

[10 : 49] We embrace also means like our discipleship groups, where we can know each other more personally, and we can be known more personally.

Times like tomorrow night when we'll be gathering corporate prayer, when we can pray. And brothers and sisters, there's nothing like hearing a fellow brother or sister pour his or her heart out to God in prayer. Those things prepare us for suffering by drawing us closer to God, who is the ultimate person we need when we face suffering.

In addition to walking close to God, we prepare for suffering by walking close in community. And I've touched on this already. And when we talk about community, it's more than just broad community.

community of maybe family, although they can be supportive for us at times. But I'm talking about biblical community, the community of brothers and sisters with whom we are running the race of faith.

Those who will surround us and those who will support us in word and deed during seasons of suffering and trials. And they will do so with their time and with their talents and their treasures.

[12:14] Biblical community is the means that God uses to care for his people. It's one of the most obvious and visible ways that God cares for us in our times of suffering.

And then third, we prepare for suffering by developing a biblical perspective on suffering. One of the telltale signs that a person is not prepared in a biblical way for suffering, that they do not have a biblical perspective on suffering, is when suffering comes, a natural reflex is to think about the devil. One of the telltale signs that we don't have a biblical perspective on suffering. When trials come, instead of our minds turning to God, as Job's mind did, when he faces trials, he turned to God and said, the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Having a biblical perspective on suffering turns our hearts to God when we face trials and when we face difficulties.

Listen to just a few brief samples of clear scripture that promise that suffering is going to come to every one of us who lives in this world.

[13:44] First one is Job 14, one through two. Man born of, man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers.

He flees like a shadow. And continues not. That's all of us. Every single person born into this world is born of a woman. And this is our lot.

Our days will be few and they will be full of trouble. John 16, 33, Jesus said to his disciples, I have said these things to you that you may have peace.

That in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world. That's the truth of living in a fallen world.

We will have tribulation. And the truth is when we live in a fallen world as we do, we should not be surprised by suffering.

[14:48] By suffering. We shouldn't be. We should be surprised by the absence of suffering, not the presence of it.

Because it's a part of living in a fallen world. We will have tribulation in this fallen, broken world. So when we have these seasons where we don't experience it, let's be surprised at that.

And grateful for that, but not be surprised when trials come. Jesus says, that's our lot in the world.

And then there's some sufferings that are unique to Christians. For example, in Philippians 1, 29 through 30, Paul writes, For it has been granted to you, believers, that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engage in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Then 1 Thessalonians 3, verse 4, he writes, For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.

Then in 1 Peter 4, verse 16, Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

[16:20] I want to encourage us to prepare for suffering. And one of the ways we can do that, a practical way, is I encourage you to maybe try to identify a book over the next three months or so that you'll read on suffering.

And we have a few good titles in the bookstore that may encourage you. One of them by John Piper, a book titled Suffering and the Sovereignty of God. I encourage you to avail yourself of that.

And so let us prepare for suffering whenever it comes, whether in our lives or the lives of those we know and love. Second, Kingdom Life, by God's grace, let's resolve to embrace community.

I've touched on this already about the importance of biblical community when we walk through suffering, but I want to further encourage us to embrace community in the life of this local church.

I think the best picture of the communal life of the church that we can find in scripture is found in Acts chapter 2 verses 42 through 47.

[17:33] So if you would turn there for a moment, Acts chapter 2 verses 42 through 47.

Acts 2 42 through 47. This is on the day of Pentecost, souls had been added to the church, some 3,000 of them.

And we read in verse 42, and they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers, and all came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

And all who believed were together and had all things common, and they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as they had need.

and day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people, and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

[18 : 48] One of the first things we see about this passage is the community life of the early church was both spiritual spiritual and social. They were devoted to teaching and prayer, but they were devoted as well to fellowship.

And that word for fellowship is a Greek word called koinonia. And it is a word that speaks about shared life, how we band together, and it's almost like, if you want to think of it this way, it's like partaking of each other's lives.

It's like breaking off part of one another's lives, as it were, and sharing in that. It's the word that is used when two persons go into a kind of partnership where they join their endeavors together for a common goal.

And so what we see with the early church is that they were worshiping together in the temple and they were in their homes eating and thanking God for his provision for them.

And so I think this social life and spiritual life is really what community is all about. Now I think for many of us, if we were to assess what community life looks like for us in this local church, I think largely for us is going to be this gathering or these kinds of gatherings.

[20 : 23] But what we see with the early churches, they had both. They were in the temple and they were in their homes. And they had a concern for one another.

We see that as there were needs among them, there were people who would sell property and they would meet their needs. They had a genuine concern for one another. This only grows out of community life.

When we are embracing community, how are you, how you're doing becomes more than just a greeting.

It becomes an expression of true interest. How are you doing? How are things going? And not just moving on to the next part of what you want to talk about, but having a genuine concern about that person with whom we are joined together.

And so we need to take this call very seriously. But more than this picture that we see, we have in scripture these calls for us to be a body.

[21 : 38] And so, for example, in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 26, the church is likened to a physical body with many members. And so we read, if one member suffers, all suffer together.

If one member is honored, all rejoice together. And then Jesus said these words that are so profound in John 13, 35.

He says, by this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. when we embrace community and we truly love one another, we want to be with one another.

Beyond just our structured times, where we come together. This, how Peter says, in a very similar way what Jesus said, 1 Peter 1, 22, 23, having purified your souls for obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love.

Love one another earnestly from a pure heart since you have been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God.

[22 : 55] And John says it even more plainly. You know, we know from heart John 3, 16. Most of us know it. but if we are going to really embrace community as we ought, there's a similar passage that we need to also know and take to heart.

It's 1 John 3, 16. 1 John 3, 16. I'm going to read to verse 18, but here's what verse 16 says. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. What does that mean? What does that mean? What does it mean for us to lay down our lives for one another? And this is not lay down your life for every single person who says he or she is a Christian.

That's not what it is. This is not a scripture that speaks to the universal church in the broad sense. The practical of working of this is those we know to be brothers.

And I often use the example you know we have like five churches that are clustered in this immediate area right here. We don't even know who those people are largely. But we know these people.

[24 : 16] And we need to think about what does it mean, what does it look like for me to lay down my life for my brother, for my sister? I think one thing we know is it obviously has not included dying for them because we're all here.

it does speak about other ways that we can lay our lives down for them, whether it's with time, whether it's with abilities that we may have that can help them, whether it's resources that we have that could bless them.

And whenever we give, we are in certain ways laying our lives down for one another. but he goes on, he says in verse 17, but if anyone has this world's goods and see his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

When you think about this, you realize that this is so fundamental to what it means to be a Christian, that John is actually hinging a person's Christianity on this.

He's saying, if someone has the ability to see his brother or sister in need, he sees it, she sees it, and then closes his or her heart to that need, John says, is it that maybe you're just not saved?

[25 : 44] Is it that God's love is just not in you that you're able to do that? And then he says to us, little children, let us love, not in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

Our discipleship groups are a wonderful opportunity for us to build community and embrace community in a way that we aren't able to do it so much as we are gathered this morning.

And it allows us to demonstrate the kind of compelling brotherly love that would catch the attention of a watching world. There's something attractive about seeing people, God's people, just clustered together in some way.

Just yesterday morning, as we were at Amanda's baptism, baptism, there was a lady who just stopped and she was observing and she said, well, I just saw the baptism, I just couldn't help but stopping and just watching.

But it was pretty clear there was more than just that that was attracting her. There was just something beautiful about it. There was something precious about us being together in that moment, rejoicing with Amanda she was baptized.

[27 : 20] It was just attractive. And actually two ladies just stopped and observed. Brothers and sisters, this is a picture that Jesus says when the world sees it, they'll know you belong to me.

And so I encourage us this morning. Let's be intentional to grow in our relationships, in this community, so much so that we can truly rejoice when the other one rejoices and mourn when the other one mourns.

Third, this year, brothers and sisters, by God's grace, let us resolve to practice hospitality. Now this is connected to community in some way, but I want to highlight it and single it out on its own.

When we think about hospitality, we're thinking on two different levels or towards two different groups. The first is obviously hospitality to insiders, hospitality to brothers and sisters.

Hospitality to brothers and sisters in this local church. We considered this command last week as we considered some one another verses from 1 Peter chapter 4. Peter writes, show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

[28 : 45] We're called to open our hearts and lives to one another. And again, for most of us, practically speaking, this will be in the context of the place where we spend a whole lot of time, which is in our homes, whether it's over a meal or just some social time of interaction.

And we're called to do it without grumbling. And then there's hospitality that we are to show to outsiders, those who come among us.

Hebrews 13 verse 2, we are called to show hospitality to strangers. Here's how the writer to the Hebrews writes it. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Let's resolve to welcome strangers. Let's resolve to welcome strangers, those who walk through our doors. Some will come on their own.

Some will come not knowing anyone. And when we have times, like when we greet, let's be intentional to reach out to them, to go to them, thank them for coming, welcome them.

[30 : 03] Let's not run off and talk to the people we already know while strangers stand around on the outside looking in. And I want to encourage us to even as we think about how we can be intentional to prepare to do this, I think it's appropriate in male, male, female, female situations or family situations, where there's a guest and you have a conversation with them to see if maybe they have plans for a meal after church and invite them, extend ourselves to them.

And welcoming strangers is more than just those who walk through our doors, it's those who come into our lives. Maybe it's somebody at work, a new employee joins, we can be intentional to reach out to them.

maybe it's a new family that has moved into the neighborhood or maybe a single person who's moved in, we can reach out to try to get to know them and to seek to befriend them in some way. Our students, maybe there's a new student who has come into your class or into your college and we can be intentional to reach out to them in these ways. I want to encourage us, let us resolve to do this.

Let us resolve to practice hospitality to insiders and also to outsiders, to those we know and also to those who we don't know.

[31 : 40] And let me just say this before I move into the next point. Strangers are not necessarily people who walk through the doors for the first time.

can I submit to you that even right now, when Shambi welcomed all of us, he said, we have no business this morning. But can I submit to you that as small as we are as a group right now, there are some present who are strangers to some of us present.

They're strangers. We know their face, may even know their name, but in most cases we don't even know their name. We just know their face. I've seen this person before. These are strangers.

brothers and sisters, we can reach out and we can be intentional to get to know them.

And you know what? These things last. These things matter. A lot of things that we give ourselves to, they really are neither here nor there. When this life is over, they are over.

They are done. But this has a lasting value. God is doing something in his church that goes beyond this world and that is eternal and that is precious.

[32 : 55] It's come to us through the blood of Jesus that was shed on Calvary's cross. So let us be intentional to reach out to the strangers who are within as well and let us extend hospitality to them.

or fourth. This year, by the grace of God, let us resolve to grow in discipleship.

It's very fitting that we are memorizing this month, Matthew 28 verses 18 through 20, because that is all about discipleship.

And here's the truth. Every single one of us, if you have trusted Jesus as Lord and personal Savior, you are a disciple. the only question about our discipleship is this.

Will we be a good one or a bad one? Will we be a faithful one or an unfaithful one? Will we be one who is taking a very long time to mature and grow because we have not made it a priority?

[34 : 08] one of the things that God has given to us to grow as disciples?

Again, brothers and sisters, when it's all said and done, this is more important than all the other things that we do, unless we do those things with this in mind.

because I'm not trying to build a case for what we would call the secular and the sacred, believing that only the things we do here on the Sunday morning are important.

I'm not saying that at all. The things that we do in our lives broadly matter and make sense if they flow out of this life and we can connect them to this life that we have in Christ.

and really that's what's supposed to happen. Our discipleship is supposed to touch every single aspect of our lives and how we live our lives. That is the way we redeem it.

[35 : 12] That's the way it is actually redeemed. So Matthew 28 verses 18 through 20, Jesus came to them and said, all authority in heaven and on earth is given to me.

Therefore go and make disciples of all people, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Teaching them to observe everything I've commanded you and the promise is behold I am with you always to the end of the age. Jesus never intended that the original disciples, the 11 to whom he spoke as he was ascending into heaven that they would go to the ends of the earth.

He knew they wouldn't live long enough. But the plan was that they would make disciples who would make disciples. And the only reason that we are here this morning is that there were some disciples who were faithful and they brought the gospel to others who brought the gospel to us.

We need to think about that as well in our own lives in terms of who the Lord would have us to bring the gospel to in our world. We know these verses as the great commission but some have rightly said it's the great omission because we have omitted to obey and to follow what the Lord has said. [36 : 47] We've taken the lazy approach and we go out and we get decisions, we get converts. That's not what he called us to do. You can get decisions like that, you can get converts like that. But becoming mature disciples takes time.

And so let us embrace this call to be disciples. That's what the Lord has called us to. And fifth and finally, let us by God's grace resolve to keep the gospel central.

This needs to be an ongoing resolve for us as a church because we can easily drift away into all kinds of things that take us away from the centrality of the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verses 1 through 3, the apostle Paul writes to a church that he himself founded these words.

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved.

[38 : 01] If you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain, for I delivered to you as of first importance, would I also receive that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

The Corinthians needed to be reminded of the centrality of the gospel. Paul planted the church, he told them that they were standing in the gospel, they received it, they were standing in it, and yet he sees the need to say to them, I want to remind you, I want to remind you, because we need to be reminded of the gospel, because we so easily forget it.

The gospel is the matter of first importance, and we can, if we're not careful, we can find ourselves distracted into fads that come and go, like the prosperity gospel, that some of you may be aware is no gospel at all, and recently one of its biggest promoters, Benny Hinn, now says he doesn't believe in it.

It's a fad. They come and go, but the gospel remains and the gospel needs to be central. And one of the ways that we can grow in keeping the gospel central is to grow in our understanding of it. When we understand the gospel, we keep it central. I used to think that you start with the gospel and then you move on to deeper and bigger things. And how wrong I was, how arrogant I was to believe that.

[39 : 51] And I've heard it said that we never move on from the gospel. We only move on to a deeper understanding of the gospel. We need the gospel not only for salvation, we need the gospel for life.

love. And when we grow in our understanding of the gospel, we will grow in the priority we place on it, when we really understand it.

And when our understanding of the gospel grows, you know what else happens? Our amazement of the gospel grows. Because we recognize that in the gospel, God displays amazing grace to undeserving sinners.

So how can we specifically grow in our understanding of the gospel? Just a couple of things.

Number one, be obvious, read our Bibles. Primarily, read our Bibles.

Another practical way I would encourage us is to read Table Talk. Read Table Talk Magazine.

Table Talk Magazine, and I say this without fear of contradiction, having seen many resources over many years, Table Talk is perhaps the best supplementary Christian resource out there in the Christian world.

[41 : 16] The way it's designed to be a daily devotional, the way it's designed to take themes, this month we'll be studying the parables. We can learn so much from men who have given themselves to the study of God's word, and who will be teaching us in these particular ways.

And we can grow in our understanding of the gospel. And what I like about Table Talk is they keep the gospel central. So you don't read the parables and get some moral be a better this or be a better that.

They point us to Christ. And so Table Talk is a great resource. I want to recommend a little book we have in the bookstore. It's a little black book called What is the Gospel? I encourage you to get that and to read it.

And so brothers and sisters, those are the five resolutions. To summarize, our resolutions for 2020 are suffering.

This is the first one. Let's prepare for it. Community. Let's embrace it. Hospitality. Let's practice it. Discipleship.

[42 : 26] Let's grow in it. And finally, the gospel. Let's keep it central. And I want to encourage you starting today and maybe during the course of this week, think about those five things and ask yourself the question, what can I do to grow in this area?

Beyond some of the things I may have suggested or choosing from some of those things in terms of how you might be able to grow and embracing these church resolutions for this year.

And why are we doing this? Why am I proposing to us that we embrace these resolutions? The reason I do is because we belong to God.

And we belong to God, not just in creation, but we belong to him. Those of us who have trusted Christ, we belong to him in redemption.

Jesus died to make possible what we have. And when we live our lives as an expression of that, it's a beautiful thing, it's a precious thing in the sight of God.

[43 : 39] He sees the result of his son's sacrifice at work in our midst. And so I want to encourage us to embrace these church resolutions, let's live our lives for the glory of God and for the fame of the name of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together. Father, we look to you asking that you would help us as a church to embrace these resolutions and to live them out.

Help us, Lord, to recognize the part that each of us has to play in causing this to be a reality.

Would you help us to prepare for suffering? Would you help us to embrace community? Would you help us to practice hospitality and grow in being disciples?

And most of all, would you help us to keep the gospel central? We pray and ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.