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## Losing the Weight of New Year's Resolutions

This year, I'm letting God write my resolutions.

Lee Eclov | posted December 28, 2016



We saw a stage presentation of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* last week. At the end, the new-man Scrooge resolved, as he always does, to "honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year." Then Dickens assured us that Scrooge was "better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more."

Of course he did—it's fiction.

But when I make resolutions, my record isn't so good. For instance, a couple years ago I resolved to be kinder because my wife gave me a little stone that said, "Try kindness." It's hard to measure such things, but I doubt anyone—especially my wife—noticed a marked improvement.

Those of us in ministry come to the season of New Year's resolutions with a certain apprehension. At least you do if you've been at it as long as I have.

Church people—*our* people—don't just resolve to go to the gym or call their moms more often. They ramp it up. They resolve to get up at 6 a.m. for quiet time, to read the whole Bible through in a year, to have family devotions every night. They resolve to boycott ungodly stores and write their congressmen more often. They volunteer at soup kitchens and take up tutoring. I can't keep up with them!

Lord knows, there are plenty of resolutions that would do me good. It seems like I could do so much more for God's kingdom if I just buckled down. I hear all these stories of *good* pastors who do things I don't. They write each person in their church on their birthday. They lead people on spiritual retreats, complete with fasting and silence. They read Calvin's *Institutes*. Personally, I wish I simply prayed more—not only for the items on my list, but also for contemplation and worship. I wish I took better care of my flock—more phone calls, notes, and visits. I wish I listened better. I could go on, but you probably know what I mean.

That said, I have a sneaking suspicion that my Father comes at these things differently.

God doesn't so often tell me what to do as how to *be*, and often that, too, is restful.

Last year, three months before New Year's, a couple of Christians who didn't know me prayed with me. They sat quietly at first, listening to the Lord. Eventually, one of them, picking up on a phrase from Acts 6:8, said, "You are a man of grace. You give it away freely because you understand the power of grace, the need for grace in people's lives as well as in your own." He prayed that grace would abound more and more in my life.

Another person, referring to a picture of a lion she had seen, said, "You are that lion." (I am *so not* like a lion, if you ask me.) Afterwards I wrote down, "The church needs to see my confidence in the Lord." That became my resolution. A few weeks later, a friend was showing me pictures from her African safari, including a beautiful picture of a lion, vigilant but resting. So I taped that picture under my resolution, right at the side of my desk where it is to this day. That was God-given, emboldening, and challenging without being a burden.

I've had another resolution. As I recall, I first wrote it at the top of one of my prayer lists in June—not January. It is a prayer: "Lord, I want to enjoy you." I pray that quite often because, while I like *working* with the Lord, I have trouble simply enjoying his company apart from work. It's a good resolution that I'll refresh again this year.

The thing about God-given resolutions is that they are of the "easy yoke and light burden" variety. The incentive is great, but the pressure is off. Awhile back, when I was preaching on Jesus' feeding of the 5,000, I was thinking in particular about the part where the disciples gave out all the food to the crowd. I realized Jesus is in production; we're in distribution. He produces the bread of life and enlists us to hand it out the way we do in Communion services, always knowing there is more where that came from.

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"You *are* gifted in wisdom," God might remind you. "Speak into people's lives."

God might tell you, "You have been very faithful, even when no one was watching. I'm pleased with you." So your resolution might actually be to relax in God's favor.

God might stir into flame the very thing you've most dreamed of doing but didn't know how.

We are no good at thinking these things up. We need to listen to the Lord. Instead of resolving to correct our weaknesses or shoot for higher goals, we have to ask the Lord to show us his ways. Be quiet. Be patient. Ask others to pray and listen on your behalf. Read Scripture with open ears. I'm pretty sure God will set before you something sweeter than you expect, something grace-flavored and nourishing. You may see a yoke, looking heavy and oaken, only to lift it and find it fits you perfectly.

