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A New Goal for the New Year

January 4, 2023



Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

There are many worthwhile battles to fight in life. The most important, most necessary, and most dangerous is the war we must wage against sin, flesh, and the devil.

A new year means new opportunities to grow as Christians. This article written for WORLD Opinions, encourages believers to focus on spiritual development this new year instead of fighting battles outside of themselves.

Transcript

[Music] Greetings and salutations. This is Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung.

Happy New Year! This is my latest article at World Opinions, fitting, I think, for this week entitled A New Goal for the New Year. I understand the criticism of new goals for the New Year. They never stick.

They are legalistic. They rely on willpower. I get it.

There are dangers with New Year's resolutions like there are dangers with everything. But I like the fresh start of the New Year. I like the opportunity to establish better habits and I like that resolutions concentrate my head and heart on the one person I have most control over in my life and on the one person who causes me the most problems.

Me. Like most people, I spend a fair amount of time reading things online and what I see there can be ugly. People are often mean, nasty, proud, braggadocious, petty, spiteful, defensive, sarcastic, and angry.

The Internet has lots of people like that simply because the world has lots of people like that. And if we're honest, sometimes we are like that. It is easy to get fired up by grand plans to change the world or to take back the country from the Libs or to overthrow the patriarchy or to denounce the misdeeds of famous Christians or to tear down the evil cabal known as white evangelicalism.

We can labor long to exercise dominion in the world while at the same time doing little to exercise mastery over ourselves, our sins, and our worst impulses. Several weeks ago, I stumbled upon an old video of John Piper warning what seemed to be a group of pastors or students about our culture's addiction to television. The clip looked to be 20 years old or more.

Some Christians might roll their eyes and mutter typical fundamentalists or they might wax eloquent about all the artistically beautiful and culturally significant new shows we need to see. But I found the clip refreshing not only because Piper is surely right about our entertainment addiction. If he was right two decades ago, his admonition needs been even more needed today.

But because his exhortation was, in a manner of speaking, a call to personal greatness. Many of us, especially when we are young and especially men, are looking for a great evil to overcome and a noble cause to be a part of. That's good.

Then we don't have to choose only one evil to battle or only one noble cause to pursue. But here's what I don't hear nearly as much of as I did 10 or 15 years ago. Go hard after the sin in your life and run hard after God.

To be sure, we do not have to choose between public and personal transformation, but the Bible seems much more concerned about the latter. After all, what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? That's what Jesus said in Matthew 16:26. "People can justifiably have multiple passions and many loves, but I worry for the person who strives to put everything in place in our world and strives to put everyone in their place online and never seems to strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." In the last minute, Hebrews 12, 14.

Over the past month, I've been reading through Aquinas' little book, "Taken Out of His Much Bigger Book, The Summa Theologica, on the Cardinal Virtues." How many modern Christians, let alone modern people in general, are pursuing and praying for prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance? The ability to liberate and reason well, justice, a right relationship to others, fortitude, controlling fear and moderating anger and acts of bravery, temperance, restraining inordinate desires and unlawful pleasures of the senses? Are the people we listen to and follow marked by these virtues, and not just one, but each of them in cooperation with the others? Are the books and blogs we are reading pushing us toward these virtues? Are we interested in acquiring these virtues as much as we are interested in social, cultural, and national change? Even better than the Cardinal Virtues read through the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount or the definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13 or the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. There are many worthwhile battles to fight in life. The most important, the most necessary, and most dangerous is the war we must wage against sin, flesh, and the devil. I don't know God's plans for America or for Western civilization.

I do know His plans for the Christian and for the Church. He who began a good work in us will carry it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus, Philipians 1, 6. Of all the goals you may have for the New Year, at least make some of them about the things that God has promised to work in us through His Word by His Spirit with our faith-filled efforts. In other words, the New Year lets go hard after the sin in our lives and run hard after God.

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