

Setting Priorities for 2015

By Steve Viars

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Faith Church
5526 State Road 26 E
Lafayette, IN 47905

Website: <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>
Online Sermons: <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

I hope you enjoyed a happy New Year celebration with your friends, with your family this week. A marvelous time of the year, huh? For a lot of reasons including the fact that many have taken time to think through your New Year's resolutions within the past several days. I recognize some may be in church today for the very first time or maybe the very first time in a long time as a result of making a resolution just like that. Now, I understand, I have been in this pastor business for a long time and I realize some may be a bit cynical about the whole New Year's resolution process. Some would see it as a waste of time, some have tried to make resolutions over the years and they didn't last like 2 weeks and so you may have decided, "Why in the world even bother?" Well truthfully, enjoying a new year and making some kind of set of resolutions about needed areas of change and growth, that's very natural for followers of Jesus Christ. Do you realize that the God of heaven and earth is the one who invented the concept of "new" including the very obvious and predictable way our seasons transpire and so we have a new year every 365 days or so. That was his idea. If you think you like giving someone something new at Christmas time, Scripture would suggest that God loves providing newness for his creatures in all sorts of ways, big and small. And the corollary of that is this: that we as his children have a unique relationship with and a special appreciation for all that is embodied in this concept of new year. Happy new year means a lot to us.

Here's a few brief reasons why that would be the case. Why would followers of Jesus Christ have special reasons to love the concept of newness? Well, one reason is that because in Christ we enjoy a new standing with the heavenly Father. If you accept the Bible as your source of truth, I hope you do about God and man, there are 2 theological truths that become apparent as soon as you open the book and one is the absolute holiness of God and we're glad for that, aren't we? Affirmed in places like Psalm 99:9, "Exalt the LORD our God And worship at His holy hill, For holy is the LORD our God." In fact, this afternoon if you were to do a word search from your Bible about all the uses of the word "holy" or "holiness," that would keep you out of trouble for most of the day because the Bible teaches us that God's central and controlling attribute is his holiness.

Well, the second obvious theological truth is the absolute sinfulness of man. Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," which when taken together leads to this eternal question, then like the Psalmist said, "Who then may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who then may stand in his holy place?" We know that sin has

separated us from our God and the older we get, the older that sin and guilt and separation becomes. That's why for some a happy new year is just a depressing old year because the weight and the burden and the consequences of sin become heavier and heavier each time the calendar turns over. That's why the shed blood of Christ is so precious to us. As Paul said in Colossians 1, "for he rescued us." That's what we needed, huh? A new stand. "For he rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins." And when you combine that, forgiveness of sins with the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ as placed on our accounts the moment we trust Christ as Savior and Lord, what does that mean? Now we have an entirely new stand before a holy, heavenly Father. There is nothing newer and there is nothing better than that.

This concept was pictured fabulously in the Old Testament book of Zechariah where a priest named Joshua, not the Joshua of the book of Joshua, this is a priest during the days of the prophet Zechariah, is introduced representing the defiled nation of Israel. "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him." He does that, you know. The book of Revelation refers to our adversary as "the accuser of the brethren who accuses us before the throne of God day and night." That'll get old. That'll get way old. "And Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this,' Joshua, "not a brand plucked from the fire?" Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, 'Remove the filthy garments from him.' Again he said to him, 'See, I have taken your iniquity away,'" thank God for that, "and will clothe you with festal robes.' Then I said, 'Let them put a clean turban on his head.' So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the LORD was standing by." That's a marvelous image of what happens the moment a person places his or her faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord, everything about your stand before God becomes new and that effects your priorities. That effects your motivations. That effects your dreams. It effects your potential. It effects your direction. Last year, next year, every year, it's all new and so your heart rightly awakens to the thought of making resolutions about the days ahead. You should embrace, you should celebrate, you should build on the newness.

Also because in Christ we enjoy new mercies every day. There is some good news, huh? It's true even for Old Testament saints who proclaimed, "The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are," what? "New every morning," baby. It doesn't get any better than that. "Great is Your faithfulness." And if that was true about someone looking forward to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, how much more so for people like you and me this side of the cross and the empty tomb? And the reason that matters this morning is because if some people give up on resolutions after the first bad day because the lie of the devil is, "Well, you've failed once and so as a result you might as well focus your efforts on trying to cover your failure up or blaming it on somebody else or denying it or just stop trying altogether." Well, we have something that is new every morning to combat all of that, the mercy of God and therefore we can quickly acknowledge how and where and when we fail. We can ask

forgiveness of God and the appropriate people and then we can get back on the right path again without being crushed by this load of guilt that comes from doing otherwise. You see, for us it's not just a matter of Happy New Year, it's a matter of Happy New Day. God's mercies are new every morning.

Well, as a result of that because in Christ then we enjoy singing a new song. It's interesting how many times in the Bible you find the word "new" associated with your song. Now, that's not talking about your musical taste and frankly it's not talking about your musical ability and I don't mean that in some sort of offensive way. One of my resolutions is to not needlessly offend our church family but some of you, it is going to take the resurrection of that body of yours before your voice is going to be worth much. I don't know how else to say it. So we're not talking about...well, that didn't come out right, but the phrase "new song" is shorthand in the Bible for the way you think about and talk about your life. Here's a delightful example also from the Old Testament looking forward to Christ. I love this passage. Psalm 40:1, "I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. He put a," what? "New song," a new way of thinking about life, a new way of talking about things, "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear And will trust in the LORD." There is newness for sure, huh? Far better than a new iPhone or a big screen TV. No wonder God is pictured in the book of Revelation as saying, "He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'" All things new.

Then we have in Christ, new hope. If you know your Bible, you've probably already been thinking about this verse and wondering when I would get around to bringing it up in this conversation. It's 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." Friends, that's the power of the blood of Jesus, huh? That's why this little phrase in the Bible "in Christ" is so significant theologically and it's also why making resolutions comes so natural for us because we're longing for and we're hoping for and we're planning for the next round of newness.

By the way, this is as good a place as any, I suppose, to insert that God's newness is far different than man's. Do you recognize that? For example, if you're married, your husband probably bought you a new car for Christmas. I'm just assuming but all the ladies of the church house rolled in here in a new Caddy this morning and you should have. And you should have. Just play along with this illustration, okay? But here's the problem with getting a new car, what is it? It's not long before it starts getting old, right? Absolutely. Well, in God's economy, do you realize that's not the case? It would be like getting a new car which keeps getting newer day after day after day. That's why a new year and new resolutions and focused priorities just come so natural for us because we're new creatures characterized by perpetual and potentially improving newness. Do you realize that? Yeah, perpetual and potentially improving newness. That's why at lunch today you can look at over at your spouse and say, "You know, I think you're even hotter today than you were yesterday." You ought to say that. You ought to say things like that

to your honey. There ought to be times in the Christian home where the kids just want to run from the table, "Ewww, ewww." Good, chase them around the house smooching your honey and just let them ewww all they want because you are characterized by perpetual and potentially improving newness. I'm a little bit off my notes but there is some truth in there somewhere.

Well, because in Christ we also enjoy the process of progressively becoming more pleasing to him. Are you thinking about 2015 from that perspective? Paul said it this way in his crucial text on sanctification, Ephesians 4:22, "that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self." There is some good news, huh? "Which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit," there it is, "and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." That happens positionally the moment you come to Christ and then that happens practically as you continue to grow each and every day. That's why you see people in this church who are in their 70s, their 80s, still excited about growing spiritually. They are continuing to make New Year's resolutions. They are continuing to refine their priorities. They are experiencing a lifetime of newness. Do you realize you can have that in Christ, a lifetime of newness.

Here's one more for the sake of time, it's because in Christ we enjoy a new destination. I recognize I am going to be speaking to some today at both of our campuses who are going through deep waters physically. 2015 for you might mean your entrance to heaven. Here is some good news: that's a new place. In fact, Peter said it like this, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for," what? "New heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells."

Now, that's just a quick survey of this topic for sake of time but clearly our God is the author of the concept of newness so it's just natural for those of us who say we are his children because of the effect of the finished work of Christ, to embrace a new year and to take the process of making New Year's resolutions seriously. Now, to provide direction for the process let me invite you to open your Bible now to Colossians 1. That's on page 156 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. We'd like to spend the rest of our time this morning thinking about setting priorities for 2015 where we make Christ first in everything. Why should we do that? And how can we do that?

While you're finding your place there, let me just point out that because of what we've just surveyed about the potential newness in Christ, that explains the insatiable zeal of our church family for evangelism and outreach. Do you realize we saw a number of men and women place their faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord as a result of the Christmas outreach ministries we've just enjoyed together? In fact, just this past week, we had a special winter break ministry that was just made available to parents around our campuses who have to work but whose children were out of school for 2 weeks and just needed a safe, reliable place for their children to spend time while their parent was at

work. So we put some ministries together and I'm so glad for our interns, so glad for some of our pastoral staff members, a host of volunteers, who just wanted to serve the community in that way. I received word that one of our teenage young men had the opportunity to sit down with another young man from our town and lead him to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ this week. What a great way. You talk about Happy New Year. Well, if what we're talking about this morning theologically is true, you'd better believe that focuses our effort and our energy because now there are new men and women going into the new year as new children of God. It doesn't get much better than that.

Now, let's allow this passage to guide our thinking as we consider areas of life in which resolutions need to be made and what it means to keep all of that where Christ has first place. I'm in Colossians 1:1,

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Did you see that little phrase, by the way, "in Christ"?

3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus [there it is again] and the love which you have for all the saints; 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel 6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 8 and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. 9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him [by Christ] all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold

together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church [do we agree with that?]; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,

Now, notice the hina clause, the purpose clause,

so that [why?] He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross [don't you love that?]; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach - 23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Don't you love the word of God? I'm talking about setting priorities for 2015, making Christ first in everything and now with the time we have remaining, let's talk about 6 areas of life where we can and we should especially make Christ first.

Well, it starts by making Christ first in your personal life. All of this is keyed off of one of the central verses in this passage, it's verse 1:18, "Christ is also head of the body, the church." So whose church is this? It's Jesus' church. He is the head of the body, the church. "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." Why? "So that He Himself," think about your 2014, think about your 2015, "so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." Well, where does that start? Where does that start? The answer is in that place, that part of us that nobody else knows, in a place that few will ever observe. You see, before it's anything else, Christianity is the cultivation of an intimate and personal relationship with a risen, living Savior. Friend, if the growth of that relationship is not a priority for you, then everything else that falls under the heading of Christianity or religion or whatever you want to call it in your case, it's going to be a very hollow shell and it will be dead. It will be old. That means we want to start, you talk about resolutions, we want to start with daily communion with God. Like the Psalmist said, "In the morning, O Lord, you will hear my voice." Could you have said that to God last year? Was that 2014 for you? That the cultivation of a personal walk with you was a priority? You made resolutions about it and if you got anything else done, you got that done. You see, my guess is for many of us, our cell phones know that. "Early in the morning, you'll feel my finger." Right? "Early in the morning, you will feel my touch." We're not talking about our goofy dumb phones. Right now, we're talking about our relationship with God. Could he honestly expect time with us and could we with integrity say, "In the morning, O Lord, you will hear my voice. In the morning I will order my prayer to you and eagerly watch."

I would encourage all of us to think back over 2014 and then just answer the simple question: how much of a priority was the cultivation of your personal relationship with the Lord last year? And I'm not asking you that in some sort of a legalistic fashion. I mean, that would be contrary to everything that we're talking about but let's face this: we live in a world of competing priorities, huh? And we have to decide on the front end what we're going to be sure gets accomplished and for many here today you'd be able to honestly say, "Well, Jesus had first place in my personal life." Well, if that's true, my guess is you've already set resolutions either formally or informally to continue those habits this year but I also believe there is probably a number who are going to hear this message this morning who would say that area, the cultivation of my personal walk with the Lord, that needs greater focus. Well, can I pastor you a bit? That is why I earn my check, right? Well, why not decide today exactly what steps need to be taken.

Now for some, let me try to make this as practical as I can: it might mean that you're going to try to spend time in concentrated reading of scripture and prayer for at least 5 minutes at least 4 days a week for the first time in your life. Now, I chose all of those words on purpose in order to make a couple of points. One is: perfection is often the enemy of accomplishment and so if you're starting at 0 in this area, it would be better to set a reasonable goal and then attain or exceed it than to set an unreasonable one and flame out after a week or so. Now, if you're just starting out at this and you would say, "I don't even know what to read." Well, some people starting out like to read one chapter in the book of Proverbs each day because it's convenient for one thing, there are 31 Proverbs so they very easily correspond to the days in the average month. It's also a good idea because the Proverbs by and large are very easy to understand and it's very easy to cultivate practical applications from them. So that may be a starting place for you. You could also add to that a simple prayer list that might be organized with a few daily requests, a few weekly requests, a few monthly requests. You could learn this simple acrostic if it helps you in organizing your prayer life: ACTS, A, adoration, certainly our prayer would include statements of our love for the Lord; then C, confession, taking time to confess our known sin to him; then T, thanksgiving, praising him for all his many blessings; and then and only then the list, the supplication of things we're asking for.

Now, you may be well beyond that. If you are, sometimes folks like to add 5 Psalms to their 1 Proverb every day because there are about 150 Psalms so the math works out about the same. My wife, Chris, likes to have her devotions on her iPad and there are more electronic versions available all the time. She likes to use the daily audio Bible. You might want to check that out. If you have an iPad, you have access to that kind of technology, there are all sorts of options out there to help you. I like to read through the Bible every year so I use this particular guide prepared by the college that I attended and it just walks you through a system of reading a certain amount every day and you read through the Bible by the end of the year. And if you would like to use that, there are copies available at both of our campuses today.

I realize you might say, "Look, I've tried that kind of thing before and it didn't last very long." Well, that brings us to another very important piece of this personal growth puzzle, I think, and that is even the private aspects of Christianity are best lived out in the

crucible of community. You say, "What?" What I mean by that is: if cultivating the personal disciplines is challenging for you right now, then bring some other people around you who can and will hold you accountable in this area of your life. I know of a group of ladies last year who decided to hold one another accountable for reading the entire Bible in a year and then they would meet periodically and discuss what they were reading and what they were learning and what they were applying. By the way, if you are just starting, I didn't tell you that to say, "Start by trying to read the whole Bible in a year," that wasn't my point. I told you that to illustrate the power of friendships and relationships in a church family. If you're in a small group or an ABF or a Point Man group or a ladies' Bible study, you could ask those persons to periodically check up on you to just determine how well you're doing at cultivating your personal walk with the Lord. If you're a member of our church, you're assigned to a deacon as part of his deacon's care group. Now, we've just elected some new deacons as a result of church growth and so some of those lists are being shuffled around a bit but if you haven't already, you'll be hearing from your deacon soon. If for some reason that doesn't happen, feel free to contact the church office and we'll tell you who your deacon is but I can tell you right now, your deacon would love it if you would say to him, "Hey, do you mind checking on me from time to time just to see whether or not I'm following through on cultivating my personal walk with the Lord?" The point is, there are plenty of people who would be happy to join arms with you in this endeavor.

The same is true when it comes to personal spiritual growth. I understand that those verses I read from Colossians are kind of up in the air theologically. I understand that but Paul certainly gets very, very practical in the following chapters saying things like Colossians 2:6, "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude." Walk this out. I'm sure that there are many, many who would say this morning, "Pastor Viars, there is no question, there is an area of my life that is not pleasing to the Lord. It is hindering me in a number of ways. Perhaps I've tried to handle this on my own. I haven't been able to make any progress, and so when we talk about resolutions, we talk about my personal walk with the Lord, boom, the Holy Spirit pretty quickly helps me think about an area that needs work."

Well, let's talk about that. Can we talk about that in the light of day in the church house? You've come to the right place. Do you realize that? You've come to the right place, the church of Jesus Christ, because we all have ways in which we still need to grow. And you realize, you don't need to be defensive about that. You don't have to be ashamed of that. You don't have to try to run and hide and blame shift it. Why? Because if Christ has first place in everything, then it's not about my reputation and it's not about your reputation. It's not about what other people might think if they found out. The supremacy and perfection of Christ erases whatever might stop you from getting the help that you need from your church family so we can all grow together. It's like the Apostle Peter said. I love the fact that these are the last words we have from him recorded in the Bible. It's 2 Peter 3:18, "but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Last year. Next year. Every year. "To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

So the question I think becomes this: what area do you need to especially focus on growing in this year and what resources do you need to take advantage of in order to help you succeed? And let's be clear about this: we would be more than happy as your pastoral staff to sit down and design a personal growth plan that includes whatever resources might be most beneficial to you. It might be formal counseling. If that's what you need, then why not get that this year? It also might be all sorts of different levels of informal mentoring. You realize, we have a lot of older followers of Jesus Christ in this church who might be a bit further along spiritually than you. They would absolutely love to sit down with you. They would absolutely love to mentor you in some way and your pastors and your deacons would be more than happy to try to facilitate those kinds of connections.

Now, let me address something that sometimes comes up in that part of the conversation. It's when people say, "Well, the pastors are busy. I don't want to bother them." Let me just address that head-on: that's simply not true. Now yes, we have plenty to do but we are not too busy to serve you. There is a very important verse that guides us in a lot of ways as a church. I didn't get this far into the text for sake of time but it's Colossians 1:28, "We proclaim Christ, admonishing," who? The super-saints? The cream of the crop? No, no, no, no. "Admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man," every person who is part of our ministry, "every man complete in Christ." That's one of the essential reasons we exist as a church so please let your pastors serve you in that way.

Now, one caveat to that caveat: I want to encourage you to be willing to accept the ministry of whatever pastor is available to serve you at the time. You see, one of our church's core values is serving others meaning serving other churches and mission fields and so we do travel a lot. In fact, I was just going through my travels schedule last week for the first 6 months of the year. I said, "Who in the world agreed to this?" And so we do travel a lot, no question about that and every so often somebody adopts the attitude that, "Well, it has to be Pastor Aucoin." Or, "It has to be Pastor Green." Or, "If Pastor Viars didn't do it, then it really didn't get done." Please don't do that. View us like, our pastoral staff, like one big hunk of baloney. Okay, emphasis on baloney, not hunk. But one big hunk of baloney. We divide up as a staff any given day in order to address whatever needs and opportunities exist on that particular day and there's not a whole lot of difference in the quality of the hunks. We're all C- kind of guys, have you noticed that? And that's fine because Christ is the one who is supposed to be given the preeminence around here anyway so he's our focus so if that's true, then the identity of the particular messenger isn't that important. In fact, Colossians is the great place to make that point: you realize Paul is writing to people he's never met. The person that was used to start this church was someone that Paul sent and trained on his behalf, a man named Epaphras. So what I'm saying is we want to help and we have a variety of trained persons ready to help. The question for you is: what decision, what resolution do you need to make in order to progress in 2015 where Christ has first place even in your personal life?

Now, let's start layering these other key effectiveness areas. We're not going to have as much time to talk about them but the conversation starts becoming the same. What about making Christ first in your family? Do you have some resolutions about that? And this book has some very specific instructions to husband's and to wives and to parents and to children. But let me first make a couple of comments about our singles. Do you realize the Bible specifically places high value on single men and women in a church family and we recognize that phase of life often has some unique challenges and opportunities and I want to be sure that I've said this morning that if you find yourself in that position and if designing resolutions to make Christ first this year brings with it some special challenges, we want to serve you just as much as we want to serve anybody else around here. You may be in a situation where you're divorced and as you think about 2015, one of your resolutions is just to try to interact with your ex-spouse in a way that is more pleasing to God. There's nothing wrong with that at all and we would be happy to talk with you about that and study Scripture with you about that and try to help you get to a better place. You might be struggling with bitterness and maybe that's been especially bubbling up the last couple of weeks over Christmas time or loneliness or jealousy or some form of sexual temptation. Whatever it is, I want to be sure that I have specifically said on behalf of our church family this morning to single persons, we value you. We are glad God has made you part of our church family and we want to serve you as a single every bit as much as we want to serve married couples.

Now, having said that, what about people who are married? Well, Scripture has all sorts of specific instruction like Colossians 3:18, "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." The question here is a simple one: what would it take for you to be a more Christ-centered spouse in 2015? What would it take for you to established a more Christ-centered marriage? And in some cases, you wouldn't have to do any more than just ask your honey, "How could I be a more Christ-centered husband this year? How could I be a more Christ-centered wife this year?" And then make resolutions accordingly and I recognize for some married couples who will hear this message this morning, you might say under your breath, "Even posing that question would set off World War III at our house." Well, if that's the case, why not get some help? If what we're talking about this morning is true, do you realize there may be a quality of Christian marriage that you have never yet experienced and why not get the kind of resources necessary in order to make steps in that direction? Just think about, for example, from the perspective of mentoring. If you're really struggling even communicating to your wife, can you imagine having dinner with an older, more godly married couple in this church and just saying to them over dessert, "Listen, we can't have a conversation about the ways we need to change without drama. Could you please just show us what that's like?" and actually have an older, more mature, Christian couple talk honestly over dessert about ways they need to change and without crying, without drama, without the exposure of firearms. I mean, just to be able to have a conversation that honors the Lord.

Also in your parenting, "Children, be obedient to your parents in all things," there's a resolution, "for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart." I would just ask every parent: have you taken the time to

think through where each one of your children is spiritually? And have you crafted some specific areas in which they need to change? Have you sat down and discussed with each one of your children: here's what's going well, here's what we praise God for about your life and here's what we're going to try to help you change in this particular year.

Perhaps one of the steps for you and your spouse is to decide you're going to read a good book on parenting this year. There are some great resources available in our East Side Resource Center. Why not take advantage of them? For some it might mean just simply, "We're going to commit to being in God's house faithfully in part so that our kids can be under the teaching of the word of God." Look, I love you enough as your pastor to tell you that if for 2015 you're going to find yourself in the church house about 20 times, Jesus doesn't have first place in everything. Can we just be honest about that? And your kiddies need you teaching them the word of God at home and they need other people teaching them the word of God supplementing your teaching in the church house.

We just went through Christmas together with our family and we had everybody together. What a delightful time and one of the things that I thought about as I walked away from that experience is that I'm so thankful for all the Sunday school teachers, all the Wednesday night club teachers, all the Christian school teachers who helped Chris and me pour the word of God into the lives of our kids and now we're able to reap the benefit of that. I have two godly son-in-law's. I would give anything for them and their parents were faithful enough to have those young men in church and they heard the word of God at home, they heard the word of God in their church whether they wanted to or not and now I as a father-in-law have the great joy of reaping the benefit of people who worked hard at the matter of godly parenting and brought other people into their life in order to make that a reality.

Now, time just doesn't allow us, if you think one of my resolutions was shorter sermons, you pretty much figured out that ain't happening. But what are some of the other key effectiveness areas I just want to throw out there: what would some resolutions look like in making Christ first at your job? "Slaves, in all things," Paul said, "obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily." If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, you ought to work hard and I would encourage you to even, in some cases, sit down this week with your boss and say to him, "Hey listen, going into the new year, what are some ways I can be a better employee?" And I'll tell you, some workplaces they'd have to call 911. Bosses are not used to having people ask about that and I would encourage you to think about: what does making Christ first place at the job look like regarding just the way I do my work?

Make Christ first at your church. If you're not a church member, by the way, we're starting the Intro to Faith class this Wednesday night for the next 4 Wednesdays and we'd be delighted to have you in that class so you could have questions answered about the Bible, about Christianity and what it means to be a faithful member of a church.

Make Christ first in your finances. If you would say, "I'll tell you, my wife and I, we can't have a discussion without an argument about money." Hey, God's word is filled with principles to help you. In fact, we have a Financial Peace class that starts this Wednesday night. Why not do that and take God at his word?

Make Christ first in your health. There is much we could say about what it means to have a Christian ethic when it comes to the way we treat these bodies.

Plenty of other areas that we could use in this discussion for sure but hopefully that's enough to give you your marching orders. Do you feel like you've been given your marching orders? Of making resolutions in the key effectiveness areas of your life where Jesus Christ can be first place in everything. Hey, let's not be cynical about new year, let's be thankful for a God who stands ready to make all things new.

Would you stand with me for prayer?

Father in heaven, thank you for the opportunity of studying your word. Thank you that you are a God who has designed newness. And Father, I pray that we would relish our new life in Christ and I pray that we would seek to make things progressively new in the way that we live for you this year. And Father, right now in this moment, I pray that we would make specific plans and then bring the resources around us in order to accomplish those plans this year. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.