

A New Year's Resolution
By Jason Huff
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Proverbs 22:6; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Ephesians 4:11-13

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Ephesians 4:11-13. May God speak to us through the riches of His Word. “It was he [Jesus] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Every year, we start off making resolutions – things that we plan to do to make life better than it was the year before. You might have broken some already! But today I want to talk briefly about what we will be doing together as CrossWay Church in 2017.

As our primary Scripture today says, God has given us many different kinds of workers to prepare us to serve God well. My job as your pastor is to prepare you, to equip you, to make you ready to do the things God has called you to do. Ultimately, preachers and teachers and pastors exist to build up the church. Paul tells us three ways that happens – unity in our beliefs, the knowledge of Christ, and maturity in faith so that we might be more and more like Jesus.

It strikes me that we have done a lot with the first two. Since we started CrossWay in 2014, we have taught what it means to be part of the church. Through fellowship and worship and study, we are unified together – and we're ready to bring more people into the faith. We've also come to know who Jesus is. Since many of us have worshipped together for 8 ½ years, together we've walked through Luke's gospel, John's gospel, and the majority of Matthew's gospel. We have a solid portrait of who Jesus is, the Son of God and our Savior and Lord.

Our next step is maturity – maturity that will increase the Christ-likeness in our daily lives and drive us to follow God every day in every situation. To become more mature, we not only need to know who Jesus was, but we need to have a full portrait of what Christ accomplished for us – how through His grace alone we are saved. And so, beginning next Sunday, we're going to dive into the book of Romans.

Romans has changed the world and changed people on the fringes of faith into people on fire for Jesus. Let me give you three examples. In the early 4th century, there was an incredibly smart yet highly immoral man whose mother prayed daily that he might become a believer. He had no real intentions of giving up his life of pleasure and his mistress for the faith. Yet one day he heard children playing, singing a song with the refrain, “Take up and read.” He turned to the book of Romans, and it forever changed his life. The man was Augustine, one of the greatest minds the church has ever known, and whose writings greatly inspired the Protestant Reformation.

Another story...a 16th century monk, desperate to please God yet full of incredible fear, he nearly hates God because of the overwhelming guilt he feels at all his sin. Nothing seems to overcome his self-loathing and fright. Then he reads Romans and realizes that he isn't saved by his works or his sinlessness but by God's grace shown to him on the cross. That man was Martin Luther, who reintroduced the Christian world to the grace of God that had been all but lost in the Middle Ages and kindled the entire Protestant movement.

Final story...an 18th century pastor. He was part of a holiness club in college with his brother and two other friends. He came to America as a missionary only to mess up terribly; he's forced to return home to England. He is in despair because, despite the fact that he's a pastor, he's not even sure he believes in Jesus at all. Then one evening, he hears a sermon on Romans. He says his heart is strangely warmed, he believes that Christ died for him and showed him grace – and John Wesley began the Methodist movement that has introduced millions to Christ around the world. I can't promise that Romans will affect us like it did Augustine and Luther and Wesley, but if it inspires us to cling to the grace that saves us and drives us to tell others about that grace, that will be enough.

We're also going to start a new Bible study, and it's going to change not just the topic but the method. For several years, we've used DVDs and the occasional book to study biblical concepts. They've been very good. But again, my job is to equip us for the work ahead of us. And so we are going to learn together in our study time how to do inductive Bible study.

That word "inductive" might sound intimidating, but it's not. "Inductive" Bible study means that the Bible is our primary source of study – not outside material. It teaches us a systematic approach to Bible study that helps you understand Scripture to see what God is really saying through it. Inductive Bible study is going to give us a pattern to follow that can help every form of reading you do. And we're going to learn it together.

While I haven't scheduled them yet, I also see us having special days of prayer together on a regular basis. We can learn all these great things, but without prayer, without discussing them with God and seeing where He's leading, they're worthless. So we will also be equipped with prayer. Alongside our youth confirmation class, those are the equipping things we're going to do together in 2017.

As we're being equipped, we'll have opportunities to reach out to the community and put what we've learned into practice, some that we do now and some new ones, hopefully. We'll shape those opportunities together as the year progresses. We want to serve, we want to share, and we want to lead people to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Will you pray that you will be open to the Spirit's leading this year? Will you commit to being equipped to do the tasks God has ready for you to do? If you do, I believe that God will do incredible things through CrossWay in the coming year.