

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, January 4, 2009**

**RESOLUTIONS**

**Proverbs 3:1-10**

Are you a “resolver”?

By that I mean: Are you among the millions of Americans who annually make New Year’s resolutions when we turn the page of time from one year to the next?

Or, have you resolved never to make another New Year’s resolution as long as you live?

Perhaps you can identify with Calvin, the mischief-loving boy from the old comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*. In one of the last strips before it ended its run several years ago, there was this exchange between Calvin and Hobbes, his stuffed tiger come-to-life.

Hobbes said to Calvin: “Are you making any resolutions for the new year?”

“Yeah,” said Calvin.. “I’m resolving to just wing it and see what happens?”

“So you’re staying the course?” Hobbes asked.

To which Calvin replied: “I stick to my strength.”

Maybe that is your New Year’s resolution, too, whether consciously or not. But allow me to suggest that there is a better way than just “winging it” in the year ahead. And there is a better, more biblical way than just resolving with all the willpower and determination we can muster to do better, to be kinder and more loving, to exercise more, to eat in a more healthy way, to watch less TV, to spend more time in God’s Word and prayer, to live a more evangelistic life, to minister to and disciple others, to care for the poor and the hurting in the church and the world (do any of these sound familiar?) – as noble and virtuous and admirable as any or all of these may be.

Why do I say this? Because if it is all about our willpower and determination, there is a fatal flaw in our plan. It will never work. The fatal flaw is that willpower and determination alone won’t get the job done. They can’t.

Earlier this morning we ordained and installed new Ruling Elders and Deacons to their offices of ministry in the life of our church. These incoming Elders and Deacons were asked to make a series of vows and promises, including the promise to be faithful and diligent in carrying out their ministries, and to live their lives in a way that brings honor to the name of Christ and builds up His church. That is not possible in their own strength, but only by relying on the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. It is possible only as the Lord Jesus lives out His life in us and through us. By His power.

That is the only way it can work. That is the only way any of us can hope to fulfill the vows or promises or resolutions we make. All the willpower in the world isn't enough by itself, because our will has been corrupted by sin. Apart from the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit at work in me, I cannot do what I know God wants me to do, and I cannot be the man I know God wants me to be. It is only possible by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. As it says in Zechariah 4:6: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord.

The good news is that God's grace and power are both available to us and sufficient for us to do God's will as we seek to live out our lives under His loving and gracious rule. The promise of God's Word is that we can do *everything* – that is, everything God calls us to do, everything God wants us to do – through Christ who gives us strength (Philippians 4:13). The strength to fulfill our vows and keep our resolutions isn't our own. The power to do it doesn't come from us. It is the power of Christ, who is able to do far more than you and I could ever imagine or hope in our wildest dreams (Ephesians 3:20).

If the power is His, so is the glory. So is the honor. And the praise.

Today, on the first Sunday of a new year, whether you are a "resolver" or not, I invite you to consider a resolution or two taken from God's Word. These are resolutions which I believe will contribute to a God-honoring, God-blessed life in 2009.

The first is found in Proverbs 3:5:

### **1. I WILL TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL MY HEART.**

This is really a two-sided resolution. The flip side of it is: "I will lean not on my own understanding." This verse, along with the one following it, has provided enormous encouragement and inspiration to believers down through the centuries. Many of you have likely committed it to memory. If not, I encourage you to do so. Hide these verses in your heart. Let them saturate and permeate your life.

What does it mean to trust? To trust is to rely on someone or something for security. If that is the case, then it follows that where you put your trust makes all the difference. Is the object of your trust trustworthy? There may be different levels of trust in life, in the various relationships and spheres of life, but there is only One who is worthy of our ultimate and absolute trust.

You can thank God for the blessings and privileges of living in America. I do. But do you really want to put your ultimate trust in the "full faith and credit of the United States of America"?

Take a moment to think back to the year just ended. The New Year's Day edition of the *Washington Examiner* ran this headline referring to 2008: "THANK GOD IT'S OVER!" What a year it was! Gasoline prices went on a roller coaster ride, hitting more than \$4 a gallon just 6 months ago. Home prices plunged, foreclosures piled up, stock markets tanked,

Wall Street giants collapsed, the U. S. auto industry suffered a melt down, unemployment increased. It was the worst year for the economy since the Great Depression. Investors lost \$6.9 trillion in 2008, with a catastrophic impact on the retirement funds of millions of Americans. For the year, the Dow was down 35 percent, and the NASDAQ average lost 41 percent. Elsewhere, it was even worse, as stocks worldwide lost 48 percent of their value.

All the brightest minds in Washington and Wall Street combined were not able to prevent it from happening. And there are a lot of bright minds in Washington and on Wall Street. For those who had put their trust in Washington or Wall Street or the security of their financial investments, it was a terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad year. You see, where you put your trust makes all the difference.

So, where is your trust today? In your possessions? In your position? In your job? In your accomplishments? In your character? In your marriage or family? In the government?

Or is it where it really belongs? Have you resolved to “trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding”?

On his first skydiving experience (just for the record, I haven’t had *my* first skydiving experience yet!), before making the jump, Bill Hybels turned to his instructor, patted his parachute and said: “Can I really trust this thing to open?” A good question, don’t you think?

The instructor said: “There’s only one way to find out.” Then he chuckled, and added: “All I can say is that mine has never failed me yet.”

Most of what we experience in life is not as dramatic or traumatic as jumping from an airplane (though I know some of you have done just that), or an economic meltdown like the one in which we find ourselves. But all I can say, in all of my life’s experiences, is that the Lord has never failed me yet, whenever I have put my trust in Him. And I am willing to bet my life that He will *never* fail me. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I resolve to trust in the Lord with all my heart, because He has proven again and again that He is trustworthy.

In his book *Thoughts in Solitude*, Thomas Merton wrote what has become known as “the Merton Prayer:”

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.  
 I do not see the road ahead of me.  
 I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
 Nor do I really know myself, And the fact that I think  
 I am following Your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
 But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You.  
 And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.  
 I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.  
 And I know that if I do this You will lead me by the right road,  
 Though I may know nothing about it.  
 Therefore I will trust You always.

Though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.  
I will not fear, for You are ever with me,  
And You will never leave me to face my perils alone.

That is a powerful prayer. Maybe you would like to make “the Merton Prayer” your prayer for the year (and years) ahead. It is a prayer of radical trust, a prayer of radical dependence upon the wisdom and grace and power of God at every moment of your life.

The flip side of trusting in the Lord, as we have already seen, is to “lean not on (our) own understanding.” Never assume that you know better, that you are smarter or wiser than God. Most of us aren’t even smarter than a 5<sup>th</sup>-grader. What makes us think we are smarter than the God who made everything there is and upholds it all by the power of His word (Hebrews 1:3)?

As the Bible tells us in Isaiah 55, His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways His ways (55:8). The Lord doesn’t think the way we think. And He doesn’t work the way we work. So, don’t try to figure out everything on your own (Proverbs 3:5b, *The Message*).

Verse 7 picks up this same theme and expresses it in a different way:

Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

If we are “wise in our own eyes,” if we think we know it all and can figure out everything on our own, we will lean on our own understanding, instead of trusting in the Lord, and turning to Him for the wisdom and guidance we need. That is a recipe for trouble. Trouble of our own making. So, be careful not to think of yourself and your wisdom and abilities more highly than you ought to think (as Paul warns in Romans 12:3).

Instead of thinking you can figure it all out on your own, instead of thinking you can find a solution to every problem you may face, run to the Lord. Call on the Lord. Cling to the Lord. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. With every breath you take. With every ounce of strength you have.

There are more spiritual gems to be mined from this passage, but it is time to stop for today. Before I close, though, notice, if only for a moment, the wise counsel of verse 6:

In all your ways acknowledge Him  
and He will make your paths straight.

In *all* your ways. At every moment and in every activity. On Saturday night and Monday morning just as much as on Sunday morning when you come to church.

In all your ways acknowledge Him. Acknowledge His power and majesty. Submit to His sovereign authority. Rejoice in His love. Revel in His grace. Seek His wise counsel. Follow His leading. Obey His Word.

Make it your resolution to acknowledge Him and exalt Him as Lord in all your ways.

Who could have predicted that 2008 would unfold for us the way it did? Only God knows exactly what 2009 will bring in the way of blessings and challenges. But you and I can face the new year confidently, and we can live this year victoriously if, in the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding. May we acknowledge Him as Lord in all our ways, trusting Him to direct our paths and keep us on the track of godliness.

May it be so in your life and mine, to the glory of His name. Amen.