



From the Desk of Pastor Meyer

As we end 2023 and enter 2024, many make New Year's Resolutions. A recent Forbes.com article, [New Year's Resolutions Statistics \(2024\) – Forbes Health](#), has some very interesting reading. Over 60% of Americans feel some level of pressure to make New Year's resolutions. The article says that the most common resolutions involve improving fitness (48%), finances (38%), and mental health (36%), which are followed closely by losing weight and improving diet. Laudable goals, all! What I find remarkable is that over 80% of those polled feel they will be successful in their plans with only 6% lacking confidence in their goals. Have you set your resolutions, yet? Did they touch on any of the Top 5? How confident are you in meeting those goals and plans for 2024?

I hate to tell you this, but the statistics are stacked against you. Sadly, looking at the historical trend, goals fall very short, and they do so very quickly. The article cites their own survey that says the average resolution lasts less than 4 months. On average, only 8% of respondents stuck with the goals for a month, 22% lasted two months, and 13% lasted four months. "In fact," the article says, "failing at New Year's resolutions is so common that there's even a slew of dates commemorating such failures—some sources cite 'Ditch New Year's Resolutions Day' as January 17 while others denote the second Friday in January as 'Quitter's Day'."

I wonder why we are so poor at maintaining our resolutions. Is it the loftiness of the goal? Is it that we weren't really invested in achieving the resolution? Is it that the only motivation behind the resolution was "change for change's sake?" I don't know. That might be an interesting study for some PhD somewhere. I'll offer an uneducated opinion: usually, resolutions are merely made with ourselves, a self-promise to do X, Y or Z. If we fail, no harm, no foul. Unless pressed at a New Year's Eve party to publicly share our resolutions, most people around us have no idea we have made such goals in the first place. In short: we lie to ourselves – we lie that we will do this *thing* knowing full well it was a smoke-and-mirrors idea in the first place, then we lie to ourselves that *it's no big deal*, or we play games of semantics, *it's not like I promised my wife I was going to stop watching Dukes of Hazzard reruns at 4am when I can't sleep...* Finally, we dismiss it to alleviate our soft guilt – *there's always next year*. And, of course this begs the question, if we are guilty of not keeping our word to ourselves, how do we do in keeping our promises to others? Hmm...

As we come out of the Advent and Christmas season and prepare to move toward the season of Epiphany, which begins January 6 with the arrival of the Magi to see the infant Jesus (Matthew 2), it always amazes me to consider the promises of God and how they were fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. From the promise of God to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, of a Seed who

could crush Satan's head, through the promise recorded by Micah that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Ephratha (Micah 5:2), they all pointed ahead to the coming of Jesus.

Remember, what we call the New Testament wasn't "new" at the time it was written. God's people in the first generation after Christ's birth simply considered themselves the living extension of what had been written in the Torah, the Law, and the Prophets. So, Paul, for example, in his letters did not conceive of them as being "New Testament." He saw himself as a proclaimer of what was written in the Scripture which, at that time, was what we call the Old Testament.

I make this point because in the longest of Paul's recorded sermons is in Acts 13: 13-41, preached at Pisidian Antioch in modern Turkey. The theme of this entire sermon is how God keeps His promises of salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, "From the offspring of this man [David], according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus" (13:23). "To us the word of this salvation is sent out" (13:26). "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children [or, to us, their children] in that He raised up Jesus, as it also is written ..." (13:32-33). The sermon falls into three parts, each beginning with Paul's direct address to the congregation: The promise given (13:16-25); the promise kept (13:26-37); and, the Church's response (13:38-41). Take some time and see how Paul skillfully leads the congregation through God's promises (hint: that's an easy resolution to keep!).

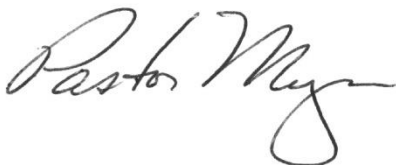
What you discover is what God's people have known and proclaimed in both Old and New Testaments: God's Word endures forever (Isaiah 40:8) and His promises do not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17). While He may appear slow in keeping His promises, that is because our consideration of time is not the same as His. For Him, a day is like a year and a year is like a day (1 Peter 3: 8-9). Even in the birth of Jesus Christ, it was in the fulness of His time (Gal 4:4).

This means you can always trust God's Word. You can always trust His promises. This includes the promises made to you in your Baptism: your sins have been washed away, you are made His dearly loved child, and the eternity of heaven is already yours. There is never a time you are not forgiven; there is never a time you are not His; there is never a time you are not loved by the Father for the sake of Jesus, your Savior. This is no mere human resolution; this is God's promise for you.

As the New Year dawns and the Old Year fades into the rearview mirrors of our minds, we pray the Lord's blessings as you ponder His promises for you, His beloved. In the words of the hymn:

**Let us all with gladsome voice, praise the God of heaven,
Grant us now a glad new year. Amen, Jesus hear us. (LSB 390:4)**

Peace & Joy,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Pastor Meyer". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.