



THE CHICAGO CONNECTION

Connecting Chicago disciples with each other, the Midwest and the world

www.chicagochurch.org

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Simple Resolutions for a Spectacular 2007

I love pecan pie. I don't indulge it in very often, but when I do, it is usually a sizable piece with a massive dollop of whipped cream on top, and I eat it slowly, savoring every delicious bite, deliberately ignoring the fact that each bite likely means that I will need to spend about 30 minutes on the elliptical trainer to offset the caloric intake. And as you are well aware, we are soon to be in the midst of the holiday (pecan pie) season, when delicacies such as pecan pie and plenty of other tasty treats will be consumed by many of us, no doubt leading to work-out resolutions which may or may not be kept throughout the coming year. In light of these well-intentioned health resolutions and other promises we will need to make for 2007, I would like to propose some biblical resolutions that we all can and should agree upon and embrace, because these are commands of God that we must strive to be keeping, and that we all have, to some degree, been neglecting.

Resolution #1: Discover and Utilize Your Individual Gifts

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4:10)

Consider the things you're good at, the natural talents God has blessed you with, the opportunities and training you have received through the years and the righteous passions which compel you to focus on certain activities. You might have the gift of encouragement, the gift of serving, the gift of giving, the gift of music, the gift of visual arts, the gift of leadership, the gift of administrative skill or any one of a number of other gifts which God has bestowed upon you. The Bible identifies more than 30 specific gifts given out of God's inherent goodness to individuals within the corporate body of Christ. You can find these gifts in Old Testament passages such as Exodus 31:3 and 35:31, and Ecclesiastes 3:13 and 5:19, among others, and New

Testament passages like Romans 12:4-9, 1 Corinthians 7:7, 12:8-9 and 12:28, Ephesians 4:11-12 and 1 Peter 4:10-11. Peter's inspired message leads us to an important truth: **To selfishly hoard our gifts, those given to us by the grace of God, is to deny that facet of the grace of God to others.** May it never be!

In the Central Region, it has been a joy to see our musicians, who for many years did not feel they had the license to bless others with their gifts, explode onto the

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worship scene, generously sharing their time, talent and passion with the entire region. Ty Ellis, Dave Markowski, Paul Banas, Jun Elizaga, John Becker, Shayne Purdue, Cynthia Neal, Jarmel Barnett,

Seth El-Jamal and others have committed themselves to developing their musical gifts, honing their talents and investing themselves in helping others worship God more passionately. They are a model to the believers and have steadily grown in their joy and depth of spirituality as they have embraced a critical role in the region. In like manner, Bill Sanders, who has been given a great gift of administrative skill, serves the entire church here in Chicago, as well as churches throughout the Midwest and Eurasia, helping to build budgets, understand the laws of the United States and Eurasia and make certain that we're doing what is right in the eyes of both God and men. In every region, we could point to dozens and dozens of people who have identified their gifts and are absolutely determined to energetically serve God with them—consider the Hope coordinators, Kingdom Kids servants, ushering crews, house church leaders, musicians, choir members and many, many others.

At the same time, however, there are hundreds of others in the church who, sadly, are allowing their amazing gifts to remain dormant, buried and unused. What a tragedy, both for those individuals and for others to whom they would be a great blessing! What if we all decided right now—every disciple in the Chicago Church—that we would

(Continued on page 2)

Simple Resolutions for a Spectacular 2007 (Cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

identify, hone and use our gifts to serve others? The truth is, brothers and sisters, we all made that decision when we bowed the knee to Jesus and died with Him in baptism. We pledged Him as the Lord of our lives and surrendered our skill sets to Him! So, in making this resolution, we are simply recommitting ourselves to being obedient to the Scriptures as we continue to grow spiritually.

Resolution #2: Worship Continually

It seems to me that we have had a hard time through the years in the church ascertaining the difference between our mission and our purpose as laid out in the Scriptures. But the mission of the Chicago Church has been clearly laid out—to never stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is both Lord and Christ. This is not our idea, but God's! It is the mission that Jesus laid out, the mission the apostles strove to fulfill and the mission that was exemplified by the first-century church. Therefore, as a New Testament church, we have adopted that mission as our own, as we should.

But our purposes are much broader than that. Consider the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:11-12: *In Him we were also chosen ... in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.* The word **be** is used in this passage as the verb of ordinary existence; thus, this verse points to one of our vital purposes as human beings, a key purpose in all of our lives—to bring honor and glory to God! Over the years, we have talked around and around this verse. For example, we might say that we bring honor and glory to God by living a pure life, or by bringing others to Christ, or by loving the poor, or by a hundred other things, all of which are biblical and true. But I believe we have, to a large degree, missed one of the simplest truths of all, **that we bring honor and glory to God by bringing honor and glory to God.** We praise God by praising God! If we are 'to be' for the praise of His glory, then we should, at the very least, excel in praising His glory. This takes in both what we do corporately (as a body, in worship services and house churches) and individually (in our personal times of worship and praise).

Then, in addition to that, there is this direction from the Hebrew author: *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess His name. (Hebrews 13:15)* In this passage, the Hebrew writer challenges us to “worship continually.” The blessings of continual worship are clearly documented in the pages of the original songbook

of the Church, the Book of Psalms. Praise activates our faith, it awakens us to the presence of God, it brings abundant joy from depression, it leads us to purity and it welcomes us into God's courts. Truly, there is nothing negative, and everything positive, about living a life of focused praise and worship. The better we get at this, the better we do spiritually. The more we worship, the less we sin. The more we praise, the more we preach. Again, by doing this, we are simply being obedient to the call of God in the Scriptures.

Resolution #3: Love Your Neighbor

Though we all could go through our history as individual disciples (and as churches) and catalogue numerous mistakes that we've made, I also firmly believe that we can all agree upon these following three statements: 1) There has never been a time when we loved our neighbors too much. 2) There has never been a time when we shared our faith too much. 3) There has never been a time when we invited too many people to church. The Chicago Church has baptized more than one hundred souls in 2006. And we rejoice in each baptism!

But for a church of 2,000, wouldn't you agree that it seems God could have used us to do much more than that? Haven't we spent enough time beating ourselves up over our past mistakes, licking our wounds and simply “holding services” to give us time to get our spiritual lives back in order? We're greatly overdue! (I'm speaking to myself and every member of our congregation!) It's time to get back out into the harvest field, to love deeply, to care outwardly, to invite boldly, to teach patiently and to baptize frequently! This is good, and pleases God, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth! God's will is still to see as many souls as possible be brought into His family!

Yes, I'm greatly looking forward to my pecan pie! And no, I probably won't exercise enough to keep those few extra pounds from invading my mid-section. So I'll resolve in January to eat like a rabbit, drink water like a fish and exercise like a beast of burden because, as the Scriptures teach, physical training is of some value. But godliness and our obedience to the truth are of much greater value and put a big smile on God's face. Let us each resolve to obey these clear commands of God, using our gifts to His Glory, worshipping Him for His Glory and loving our neighbors to bring Him Glory.

Dave Eastman

There has never been a time when we loved our neighbors too much. There has never been a time when we shared our faith too much.

Reviews and Previews

Teen Ministry

There will be a **Congregational Teen Devotional** on Saturday, January 20th from 4:00-6:00 p.m. This will be an important devotional focused on guy/girl relationships, purity and dating. Parents are encouraged to attend due to the nature of the topic. This devotional will be held at the DoubleTree Hotel in Oak Brook, located at 1909 Spring Road. (Note: This is *not* the DoubleTree Hotel in Downers Grove where many congregational events are held.)

Teens, be sure to mark your calendars for the annual **Midwest Teen Winter Blast** to be held February 3-4 in Camp Lake, Wisconsin (just north of Antioch, Illinois). It will be a weekend of fellowship, worship and fun with teens from other Midwest churches. For more information and to register, see your teen ministry leader.

Corporate Meeting Announcement and Board of Directors Nominations

The Chicago Church of Christ will be holding its annual corporate meeting on Sunday, January 14th at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont. The meeting will follow the 10:00 a.m. congregational worship service. During this meeting, there will be a brief update as to the status of the corporation of the church and directors will be nominated to the board.

Disciples Today

Are you in that annual dilemma of what to buy for Christmas presents? How about something produced by disciples? Disciples Today provides you with one place to find music, video, audio, books, Bibles and other items produced by disciples. Just go to their One-Stop Shop on the web at: www.dtbookstore.com. Find books by Chicago's own Curt Simmons, Robin Weidner and Virginia Lefler, and a great acoustic guitar CD by Steve Pederson, also of Chicago. Or, you might be into Big City's, *Holy Hip Hop—The New Era*, featuring the #12 song on XM satellite radio. All of the new Disciples Today videos and the KNN dramatic videos are here as well! Of course, you can always stay up on the latest news among the International Churches of Christ at www.DisciplesToday.net.

The Sower's Shop

Books, Bibles, teaching CD sets, music CD's and more are available through *The Sower's Shop*, a business operated by Curt Simmons. These items are available at all of the congregational worship services, but can also be purchased at other times of the year by calling Curt or e-mailing him with your request. You can reach him at (630) 428-0885 or e-mail him at csimmons@chnts.net and work out a payment plan and a plan to receive your purchased items.



Did You Know?

Recent legislation has changed the record-keeping requirements regarding tax-deductibility for cash donations to charities such as our church. Going forward, in order for a cash donation—of any amount—to be tax-deductible, it must be able to be documented by a bank record (such as a cancelled check). This change only affects those who give in cash (not checks) and who itemize their charitable contributions on their tax returns.

The Chicago Church does not keep records of the financial contributions of its members. We encourage members to keep the appropriate records of their donations if they will need that information to prepare their taxes.

We will continue to provide detailed statements of \$250 and greater donations (on a given day) per IRS guidelines. Please call the church office at (630) 833-0606 if you have any questions.

As we rejoice over the many individuals who were baptized into Christ in 2006 in the Chicago Church, let's be reminded of a few passages that symbolize the importance of this holiday season and that remind us of the amazing miracle and meaning of the birth of Christ.

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21)

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests. (Luke 2:14)

Newly Baptized Disciples

Central

• Rick & Carol Keller

West

• Kristi Alton

**Conversion
Corner**

My Lord, I Agree

The following is a poem about the amazing events that transpired before, during and after the amazing and miraculous birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God used ordinary people in extraordinary ways to bring us Jesus, and He longs to do the same in our lives today.

There's no time to tarry
So God selects Mary
The Savior to carry
The challenge quite scary

"But how will this be?
This way I can't see
Do you really want me?
My Lord, I agree"

Mary believes
The angel leaves
The devil grieves
The Spirit conceives

It's God in her womb
But bad rumors loom
Locals call for her doom
Many tears in her room

"Oh God, help me bear
This doesn't seem fair
Do you really care?"
Hear Mary in prayer

"There's nothing to fear
Oh Mary, my dear
I will always be here
To wipe every tear"

Wherever she came
The news brought her shame
A horrible name
And unwanted fame

But Mary stayed strong
For nine months long
And this was her song
"My God can't be wrong!"

Then nearing the hour
She refused to cower
And relied on His power
As her fortified tower

There's a census to take
There's a journey to make
There's a world to shake
There's a curse to break

Bethlehem had no clue
What all heaven knew
There's no room for this Jew
So a stable must do

It's early in the morn
Mary's body is worn
Her heart is torn
Her baby is born

"I thank you a ton
For my beautiful son
Lord, look what you've done
Of equal there's none"

Her insides leap
Her eyelids weep
While watching him sleep
Her thoughts run deep

Some shepherds nearby
Look up to the sky
Hearing news from on high
That the Savior is nigh

The angels sing praise
For God's marvelous ways
In a manger now lays
The Ancient of Days

The shepherds run
And find God's Son
They sound the gun
Claiming He's the One

Mary is told
The truth can be cold
So you must be bold
And the future behold

Spreading like yeast
From greatest to least
Now men from the east
Join in God's wondrous feast

Amazed they all were
Many questions for her
That's Him, we are sure
Gold, incense and myrrh

More grief she will face
To a cross she will race
But the plan's now in place
And the world will find grace

For she answered God's call
And she stood very tall
She climbed over each wall
And rose up from each fall

And should you call me
Like Mary to be
Lord, set my heart free
That I, too, might agree?

Curt Simmons