

In 2023, be it Resolved that ...

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I've written before that I don't usually make New Year's Resolutions. I hate setting myself up for failure that way.

In fact, I collect jokes and comments which make fun of these kinds of resolutions. I'm a bit of a skeptic when it comes to them.

"A new year's resolution," says one, "is something that goes in one year and out the other."

Or as someone else has said, "Many people look to the new year for a new start on old habits."

"My new year's resolution is to stop lying to myself about making lifestyle changes."

"I think I made too many new year's resolutions this year. It took me almost a full day to break them all."

One of my favourites comes from Jay Leno: "Now there are more overweight people in America than average-weight people. So overweight people are now average. Which means you've already met your new year's resolution."

Most of us have a tough time keeping them. Our closets are filled with unkept resolutions. We try to hide them and forget about them. They embarrass us ... like a relative who picks his nose at the dinner table.

I think my mind is changing on this. I was listening to "The Debaters" on CBC radio the other day, and it suddenly occurred to me that the word "resolution" is related to a technique used in debating. In a formal debate, a certain proposition is put before two parties who are then charged to speak either for or against that proposition. It is worded: "Be it resolved that ..." and then the particular subject for debate is stated.

As I was reflecting on this, it occurred to me that a resolution is not just a single moment in time that can be accomplished just like that. It is a process, in much the same way as a debate is a process.

It occurred to me that a resolution is an internal debate I hold with myself. I participate in a process of growing and learning, hoping thereby to become a better human being.

G.K. Chesterton once wrote, "The object of a new year is not that we should have a new year. It is that we should have a new soul." Growing a new soul doesn't happen quickly or all at once. It happens as we live deeply, as we reflect on our lives, as we learn and change and grow.

Here, then, are some of the things I want to keep working at in my life.

1) Be it resolved that in 2023, I will make mistakes. I will! I don't like to be wrong, but making mistakes means that I'm trying new things. Making mistakes is what happens when you learn, live, push yourself, change, and grow. Thomas Edison once said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

Author Neil Gaiman encourages us to "Make New Mistakes. Make glorious, amazing mistakes. Make mistakes nobody's ever made before. Don't freeze, don't stop, don't worry that it isn't good enough, or it isn't perfect. Whatever it is you're scared of doing, Do It."

2) Be it resolved that in 2023, I will continue to learn to listen to others, particularly those with whom I disagree. My kids were fond of pointing out to me when they were younger that "You don't know everything, Dad." They were right. I do try to discern the truth, but my perspective is always limited by my own life, my own experiences, my own place in society. I'm a white, straight, male who has largely lived with privilege and with little or no hardship. Therefore, I want to keep learning to listen, and as I do so, I will stay open to being changed.

3) Be it resolved that in 2023, I want to strive to be an agent of reconciliation and compassion. In Nelson Mandela's words, "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

4) Be it resolved that in 2023 I will continue to articulate a vision of Christian faith which welcomes questions, which recognizes the mind as an instrument of God's truth, which seeks to accept the reality that there is Something More in our universe which is beyond the ability of our senses to touch or see or hold on to.

At the same time, 5) be it resolved that I will try to articulate this vision in a way which recognizes that I have much to learn, both from those who hold to a more traditional view of Christian faith, and from those who have given up on any notion that faith is a possibility in our world.

Let me wish you all a deeply joyful year in 2023. Let me wish for you a journey of growth and discovery, a journey filled with serendipitous wrong turns and many mistakes, a journey in which love and compassion become the lodestar by which we make our pilgrimage in life.