

There is no doubt that there will be times in our lives that we will be soaring on the mountain top, or perhaps burdened and feeling deep in the valley with trials and tribulations. God calls us to bring all of these things to Him in prayer. He calls us not only to pray for ourselves but for others as well...even our enemies. And He gave us this promise in Isaiah 65:24, that, "Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear." Today's resolution is to practice "prayer without ceasing." Use the Psalms or a written prayer book if you need help to refine this discipline. Share your thoughts and words with the Lord and experience the peace we receive in His answered prayers and providence, as well as in simply knowing we have a God who cares enough to listen to what we have to say – any time, any place. Amazing!

Saturday — You are Not in This Alone

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

As you have read this week's devotion, you may have said to yourself, "Wow Mike, you are asking a lot here!" And perhaps I am, and true, the thought of all this may seem daunting. But Word, worship, service, and prayer are some of key marks of being a disciple of Jesus. It's God's intense desire that we are able to achieve these "resolutions" and that we keep striving to be more like Jesus in every way. Will it be easy? In a word, no! But with the help of God, these can be accomplished. Start practicing each one of these disciplines a little each day, and the next thing you know, they will not be resolutions, they will be part of you. If you find that you are struggling, we are also blessed with the most amazing support group to help you become successful...the members and fellowship of Immanuel Lutheran Church. Peace and blessings to you all in 2018!

This week's *Bring it Home* devotions were written by Mike Zsolczai
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Bring It Home

*Devotions for
the week of
December 31, 2017*

What Now?

Looking ahead toward what 2018 might hold for you, what are you hoping and praying for? Will it be a new time and a new season? What, by God's grace and with His help, will you work toward in this coming year? As you make resolutions and set goals, consider and pray about these two interrelated questions:

1. What does the Lord want to work in you this year to strengthen your faith and to draw you closer to Himself?
2. How does the Lord want to work through you this year in order to touch the lives of other people with His grace and love?

Write down some thoughts and put it in your Bible or in a place where you can pray about it regularly.

If you would like to receive daily *Bring It Home* devotions by email, please contact the church office: churchoffice@immanuelloveland.org

Monday — Resolute

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

I recently saw a quote, “No one can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.” Maybe this concept is what the New Year’s Resolution is all about. What’s your New Year’s resolution for 2018? Do you have one? Is it more exercise or the old favorite of shedding a few pounds? How about giving up a bad habit or maybe starting a new good one. Sadly, statistics show that 80% of people fail at their resolutions by February. Not very encouraging, is it? Paul tells us that because of our relationship in Christ, our old sinful self is gone and now we have hope for a new ending...one that involves an ever-growing relationship with God and life like we’ve never known before. As a Christian, it is not about saying I will do this and won’t do that and then dropping the idea and falling short. It’s about asking the Lord to help us each day to grow in our faith and love of Him, and by His power seek to live a more holy life (sanctification). I propose that this year we make spiritual resolutions that will help us have a deeper commitment, a deeper love, and deeper worship of our Lord. Tomorrow we tackle the first one. Today give thanks for the new creation that you have become through your baptism into Christ.

Tuesday — Be in the Word

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” (Psalm 119:105)

I met a man in 1995 who would end up being my Christian mentor and perhaps the most influential person in my own faith walk. His name was Doc MacFerran and he was one of the most learned Christian men I have ever met. To this day, I don’t think that I have known anyone that had a closer, more intimate relationship with Jesus than Doc. This was not by chance. Doc visited Jesus constantly by reading God’s Word. He always had his Bible in His hand, and what a Bible it was! It looked like it was barely held together by its binding and could fall apart at any moment. It was crammed full of notes, every page was dog-eared and thumb-worn, and almost every available margin and paragraph break was filled with scribbles and his thoughts on how God’s Word had reached Him in that moment. I never saw him without it. It was part of him. God’s living Word is the conduit that connected not only Doc to Jesus, but connects us as well. Today’s resolution is to take a moment each day to be in God’s Word via a devotion or reading plan, or maybe get involved in an ongoing Bible study group. Bring your Bible to worship and everywhere else you go. Make reading God’s Word part of your daily life and be prepared to have Him shape and mold you each and every day, more and more into His Son’s likeness.

Wednesday — Be in Worship

“One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” (Psalm 27:4)

Something amazing happens when God’s people get together to give thanks and sing His praises. Jesus said, “For where two or three are

gathered together in my name, I am in the midst of them.” This does not mean that He only shows up when we worship, but He manifests His presence in a special way when we lift up His name in praise and worship. The Spirit-filled Christian is a worshiping Christian. Every time we come to worship, we are bathed in God’s love and presence. We receive forgiveness of sins, have our faith fortified through Word and Sacrament and enjoy the fellowship of other believers. King David asked God for only one thing, and it was to dwell in the house of the Lord. A very God-pleasing request! But our lives are filled with distractions that can keep us from worship, aren’t they? Everything from kid’s sports events, football games, to having too busy of a week, or maybe just thinking that I just don’t feel like worshiping today. Today’s resolution is to commit to be in worship on a weekly basis, coming with a humble heart, giving praise and thanks to our God and to experience the joy of being part of an active community of faith, both giving and receiving as we worship together.

Thursday — Serve Others

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

In our me-first society, being a servant is not a popular concept. Many books have been written on leadership, but very few on servanthood, which leads me to believe that most people want to be Generals rather than Privates. But to be like Jesus is to be a servant. In fact, that’s what He called Himself. Jesus gives us an amazing example of being a servant by taking the lowliest of all tasks of washing the dirt and dung off the disciple’s feet. Peter (who I believe wanted Jesus and perhaps all the disciples to be Generals) was appalled by Jesus’s actions, refusing to have Jesus wash his feet. But Jesus told him, “Unless I wash you, you have no part of Me.” Jesus goes on by telling His disciples that now that He has washed His disciples’ feet, they were to wash each other’s feet. And so it is with us. By serving others we serve God. There are so many ways to serve others, often in the simplest, yet most profound ways. Today’s resolution is to dedicate yourself to find ways to wash other’s feet (so to speak), perhaps setting a goal of at least once a month or even once a week. Look at the many, many outreach ministries at Immanuel for possibilities, or maybe it is as simple as helping a next-door neighbor in need. Just be ready for the joy that comes as you pour out yourself and Jesus’ love into the lives of others!

Friday — Take it to the Lord in Prayer

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16)

God commands and invites all believers in Jesus to pray, yet so many find this difficult to do. Many times, I have asked if someone in some of the groups that I interact with if they would like to pray over this or that, and was greeted by everyone looking sheepishly and lost at each other until the one (it’s usually the same one, too) says, “Oooo, I’ll do it!” The disciples were lost when it came to prayer, too, having to ask Jesus to teach them to pray. Prayer is simply speaking directly to God in words and thought.