

## **Resolution Frustration**

Good morning and happy new year! I wanted to start out with a favorite childrens' story that we read when Lucas and Julia were little. It's from the Frog and Toad series by Arnold Lobel and pretty appropriate when we think about New Years and resolutions.

Toad baked some cookies. "These cookies smell very good," said Toad. He ate one. "And they taste even better," he said. Toad ran to Frog's house. "Frog, Frog," cried Toad, "taste these cookies that I have made." Frog ate one of the cookies, "These are the best cookies I have ever eaten!" said Frog. Frog and Toad ate many cookies, one after another. "You know, Toad," said Frog, with his mouth full, "I think we should stop eating. We will soon be sick." "You are right," said Toad. "Let us eat one last cookie, and then we will stop." Frog and Toad ate one last cookie. There were many cookies left in the bowl. Frog," said Toad, "let us eat one very last cookie, and then we will stop." Frog and Toad ate one very last cookie. "We must stop eating!" cried Toad as he ate another. "Yes," said Frog, reaching for a cookie, "we need willpower." "What is willpower?" asked Toad. "Willpower is trying hard not to do something you really want to do," said Frog. "You mean like trying hard not to eat all these cookies?" asked Toad. "Right," said Frog. Frog put the cookies in a box. "There," he said. "Now we will not eat any more cookies." "But we can open the box," said Toad. "That is true," said Frog. Frog tied some string around the box. "There," he said. "Now we will not eat any more cookies." "But we can cut the string and open the box." said Toad. That is true," said Frog. Frog got a ladder. He put the box up on a high shelf. "There," said Frog. "Now we will not eat any more cookies." "But we can climb the ladder and take the box down from

the shelf and cut the string and open the box,” said Toad. “That is true,” said Frog. Frog climbed the ladder and took the box down from the shelf. He cut the string and opened the box. Frog took the box outside. He shouted in a loud voice. “Hey, birds, here are cookies!” Birds came from everywhere. They picked up all the cookies in their beaks and flew away. “Now we have no more cookies to eat,” said Toad sadly. “Not even one.” “Yes,” said Frog, “but we have lots and lots of willpower.” “You may keep it all, Frog,” said Toad. “I am going home now to bake a cake.”

Now, my point this morning is not - if you put your trust in Jesus you can eat better or be healthier. But I do want to talk about frustration we have likely all experienced in our Christian life. Many times we approach our discipleship much like we approach new year’s resolutions. This year I’m going to fill in the blank. Read God’s word more, spend more time in prayer, give more faithfully, spend more time listening for God, respond to those nudges from Holy Spirit, cut that sin out of my life, ...

Whenever we make new year’s resolutions, we recognize where we are vs some desired state, see a gap, and make a goal to get there. This is true whether you’re a disciple of Christ or not.

And most of the time, we approach it like Frog and Toad - willpower. And then perhaps part way through we get so frustrated, we say forget it, I’m going to go bake a cake. There are amazing stories of people with sheer willpower who have made amazing changes in their life. But I think in discipleship, in our relationship with God - willpower alone will NEVER work. And that brings us to our scripture passage today.

**2nd Corinthians 5:16-18a** So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ

V17 is so powerful - It's true, if you are in Christ, you are a new creation! The old is gone, the new is here. But this verse can also be a source of frustration, because we hear a text like this and look at our lives and see this disconnect. My life doesn't look like a new creation, I don't feel like a new creation - I'm battling some of the same old things, i'm stuck in a rut. Maybe you do feel like a new creation and there isn't this disconnect - praise the Lord! Remember this time and remember it's because of the power and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But if you are like most of us, you are or will face periods where our life doesn't seem to line up with a passage like this. So what do we do with this disconnect?

I think it's important to reflect on what this passage means and what it does not. If you are a follower of Christ it does mean that you are free of the finality of death and separation from God - the curse of sin - so in that sense our position before God is made new - we are a new creation without the blemish of sin because of the work of Jesus Christ. God reconciled us through Jesus v18. It also means we have a new standard in life - we don't see people from a worldly point of view as vs 16 says. Because when you realize that the 80ish years you spend in this life are a small fraction of an

eternity with Jesus Christ it should change what we value, hold dear, set our minds on. And when we don't hold the same priorities as the world around us that is focused on making this 80 years the most comfortable, the most adventurous, the most secure, the most whatever, then there is a great deal of freedom because our focus is on the eternal not on the temporary. We're not consumed pursuing the same things as others, things that won't last or have eternal value. Before he came to know Christ, Paul's view of the Messiah was a figure who would liberate Israel not from sin but from Rome. Their expectation was on the here and now and so when Jesus came pointing at their hearts and an upside down kingdom and not Rome, they were disappointed. The perspective of the believer focused on the eternal will put the temporary cares of this life in their proper place.

A super important preposition - from vs 17 is "in" "in Christ." When we are in Christ, we identify with His perfect life, His death, and His resurrection. We are credited with the perfect life that Jesus lived even though we can't live it, the penalty for our sin is paid in Jesus's death, and we don't have to fear the power of death because of His resurrection from the dead.

What this passage doesn't mean - you don't replace your current operating system with a new one - reboot to a completely different platform. We walk around with what the New Testament calls an old nature and this new nature and find ourselves so often pulled between the two because they are at odds.

In **Romans 7:19-8:2 Pauls says** For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

So even Paul was caught in this tension and frustration. But thanks be to God - this tension is not the end of the story. Thanks be to God for passages like **Revelation 21 3-5** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” God is making everything new - this immediate frustration and tension will not last.

So does that mean we go and bake a cake like Toad as we sit back and wait for heaven? We just live totally in His grace and do whatever we want knowing the end is secure? Maybe we could, but then I think that means we didn't really grasp what He has done and His great love for us.

We can relax and know that there is no amount of good we can do to earn God's favor, His Love, or His presence. But there is another side of the gospel that is more than just the destination. When we grasp the gospel, that there is nothing that I can do and that He loved the world so much that he gave his one and only son then that empowers us to live differently.

**1st John 4:19** We love because he first loved us. We respond in love because he first loved us. What does it mean to love God?

**John 14: 15-16** "If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—

Jesus tells us that the motivation to live the life we should (to obey his commands), should come from our love for Him. But He also equips us with the Holy Spirit, that's the advocate in v16, in order to do that. He knows our willpower will not accomplish this. But neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit will force their way with us. Instead, it does take a little bit of Frog and Toad's willpower or what we might call discipline. **Romans 12:1-2** Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer

your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

In view of God’s mercy, in view of His love - we should offer this sacrifice. It takes some discipline on our part to meet God at this altar - to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. To say - not what I want, but what you want. Being transformed by the renewing of your mind. These are ongoing activities - a living sacrifice is probably going to wander off so you’ve got to keep bringing it back. And that takes some discipline and some days it’s harder than others. But those days when we keep God’s mercy and love for us in view, it will be more of a natural desire of our hearts than the discipline it takes for a forced run at 6 am. And when we practice it together as the church, we are encouraged and strengthened by one another to live as we should. But for that important element to be effective, it requires a few things. Some of which are outlined in **Hebrews 10:22-25** let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. It means you’re here, you’re dedicated to this body of believers. It means we are willing to go beyond the surface level

conversations with each other - how else do we know what to encourage one another in other than things that are not temporary. That we're a little more vulnerable to share what we're working towards in our walk with Jesus, what we're struggling with, and it means we have to be willing to ask how each other are doing with these things. And this has to be bathed in grace and mercy and free from gossip and judgemental attitudes about one another. I have seen some of these elements from some here at Cornerstone, but we, much like the broader church, likely need to get more real about this. And it's hard, and it's awkward, but much more effective with one another than going it solo.

If you are in Christ you are a new creation. This world and what it values, your past, your personal willpower - don't define you or your eternity. But the reality is we live in this tension - it's normal and in a sense it's good to feel it because the tension points to the saving power of Christ at work in us pulling against the old nature. We're new creations, but not complete. We look forward to the day when God makes all things new and we and creation are how we should be. Until then we realize the reality of this tension and live in the sufficiency of Christ's life, death and resurrection, we are motivated to live the way we should out of the love and mercy he bestowed upon us, and we are empowered to live the way we should by the Holy Spirit and strengthened by each other within the church.