

## NEW YEAR'S COMMITMENTS FOR CHURCH GROWTH PASTORS AND STAFF

By Chuck Lawless

One of my favorite Bible texts is 2 Corinthians 5:17—“therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (NASB). God is the God who grants us new birth (John 3:16), forgives us of yesterday’s sin (Heb. 10:17), and renews his compassions each day (Lam. 3:23). He is the God of new beginnings—and each new year reminds us of that truth.

*Now*, at the beginning of this new year, is a proper time to renew our commitments to God. As a new year begins, pastors and staff members who want their churches to grow might consider making these New Year’s commitments:

**1. I will pray every day with my spouse and family.** You’ve heard these words before if you read my last column here at Church Central. Growing churches are praying churches, and praying churches are led by praying pastors and staff. Pastors and staff who *really* pray begin by praying with those that matter the most—their family. Commit yourself to model family prayer in your home this year.

**2. I will read through the Bible this year.** What seems so basic a Christian discipline is often one of the most difficult goals to achieve in a single year. Yet, pastors and staff who want to make a difference *long* to hear from God each day, and they hold themselves accountable to reading the Word. The result is that they enter the pulpit or small group each Sunday with a genuine word from the Lord; they preach and teach with conviction and certitude—two traits that our research indicates attract the unchurched.<sup>1</sup> Start this new year right by following

a workable annual Bible reading plan, perhaps one found under “Bible Study Tools” at [www.crosswalk.com](http://www.crosswalk.com).

**3. I will memorize one scripture verse each week.** The great preacher Charles Spurgeon spoke this challenge about knowing God’s Word: “I commend to you, then, the hiding of God’s Word in your heart, the pondering of it in your minds. . . . Be rooted and grounded and established in its teaching and saturated in its spirit. . . . Take the Word as your chosen weapon of war.”<sup>2</sup> Genuine church growth involves a spiritual battle, and you can rest assured that the enemy will strike churches that really want to grow. Only the best armed pastors and staff are ready for that battle. Memorize the Word, and have that weapon ready when the enemy seeks to discourage and defeat you.

**4. I will honestly evaluate my church’s growth throughout the year.** When the church isn’t growing, how easy it is to blame the non-growth on lazy church members or a difficult harvest field. Perhaps more insidiously, how quickly we become comfortable when our churches *do* grow, but that growth is only from “swapping sheep” with other congregations. Even in my own evangelical denomination, thousands of churches reached no lost persons last year—while some of those, I’m certain, still grew numerically. This year, be willing to lead your church to ask the hard question, “Is God using our church to reach non-believers?” If he is not, pray that the Word of the Lord would spread rapidly through the ministry of your church (2 Thess. 3:1).

**5. I will speak about God to someone each day.** Most of us will be better witnesses for God if we simply speak about him *more often to anyone*—including other believers. For example, respond with a word about God’s goodness to you when someone asks, “How are you?” Call a friend and rejoice together when God answers prayer. Steer conversations with your barber or your banker to God’s blessings in your life. At the end of the day, tell your spouse about the

evidence of God's presence throughout your workday. Simply talk of his righteousness all day long (Psa. 71:24), and witnessing to non-believers will come much more naturally.

**6. I will seek opportunities to share my faith weekly.** One word—*intentionality*—characterizes the thousands of growing churches that we have studied through the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth. These churches intentionally train believers to witness, invite non-believers to church, graciously welcome them when they come, and share the saving gospel with them. More specifically, pastors of these churches intentionally plan personal evangelism into their schedules.<sup>3</sup> If you want your church to grow in the new year, lead intentionally to share the gospel at least once a week. Pray and watch for God-given opportunities, and don't miss the open doors (Col. 4:2-4).

**7. I will personally disciple at least four believers this year.** God most often blesses churches with new growth when they are prepared to disciple the new believers. For most churches, though, this task of discipleship is overwhelming—unless we remember that biblical discipleship follows the mentoring pattern of Jesus and Paul. Effective discipling begins with pastors and staff members who intentionally mentor other believers. The task is time-consuming and at times energy-draining, but *not* discipling is not an option. Commit in this new year to mentor at least four believers, perhaps working with two for six months at a time.

### **Anything New for This New Year?**

Am I suggesting anything new in these New Year's commitments for church growth pastors and staff in this new year? I doubt it—but that's precisely the point. Healthy church growth is not first about new techniques and strategies. Rather, it is about leaders who genuinely walk with God, deeply love his Word, faithfully and passionately share the gospel, and invest

themselves in new believers. In many ways, church growth in this new year is about doing the old things well. May God help you to commit to be such a leader in the new year.

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<sup>1</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 125-137.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Spiritual Warfare in a Believer's Life*, ed. Robert Hall (Lynnwood, WA: Emerald Books, 1993), 76.

<sup>3</sup> Rainer, *Surprising Insights*, 184-85.