

New Years has become about three things...

1. New Year's resolutions
2. College Football
3. Tradition of eating collards and black-eyed peas for good fortune

There could be more things, like fireworks or running outside banging on pots and pans with wooden spoons (our family growing up), but for the sake of today, I am going to focus on these three.

Even if we don't participate or believe in all of these, there are good odds that we participate or believe in at least one in some way.

1. New Year's resolutions include eating right, working out, staying on top of a calendar, spending more quality time with family or friends, prioritizing values, getting involved in the church more often, or going back to school. And over the last few years there has been a rise in mental or emotional resolutions like positivity, hope, and joy.
2. College football is a New Year's phenomenon. For the entire week from Christmas through New Year's Day there are so many games it seems even one of us could sponsor a game if we had a field to play and sent out invites.
3. How many of us eat collards and black-eyed peas on New Year's? How many of us like eating collards and black-eyed peas? Even if we don't like it, we can find ourselves indulging, can't we? Food is a big component of holidays and tradition. Food carries with it meaning and foundation.

I mention each of these because they each require one thing in common, at least in the fulfillment of them: commitment. Think about it with me.

1. To follow through on a New Year's resolution diet or work out routine, spending more quality time, prioritizing values, and getting more involved in church requires commitment to those tasks. It is one thing to start a resolution and a whole other thing to see it through.
2. College Football is not just a matter of showing up to play in a bowl game named after a popular sandwich condiment or steak restaurant chain. In looking closer at the teams playing and even the individual players, I am drawn to what is known as commitment day in college sports. Commitment day is the day top recruits around the country hold press conferences to reveal their choice of a school and program

they are going to. Basketball and other sports have commitment days as well. When a player makes a choice to go to a certain school, they are making a choice to that school's ways, the teams' ways, and the coaches' ways. When they make that choice to commit, they are buying in to history and tradition and value and opportunity. All of those things contribute to the play we then see on the field for a bowl game.

3. Eating collards and black-eyed peas also requires commitment to plan, purchase, prepare, and participate in eating the foods.

To be clear, let's explore what is meant by the word "commitment".

We have likely heard of the question that asks, "In a bacon-and-egg breakfast, what's the difference between the Chicken and the Pig?" The answer, "The Chicken is involved, but the Pig is committed!" There are a couple different versions floating around, but the point is clear: Commitment requires all, not just a contribution.

To go a little deeper, Dr. Will Joel Friedman with Mental Help dot Net shares 3 elements of commitment. He says, "It is proposed that without all three components of a commitment, there is no commitment. There may be a good intention and/or action, but neither or both constitute a commitment or qualify anyone as a committed person. It is asserted that the three components of a commitment are:

- A. A public statement of intention, that is, speaking with or writing to pertinent other people of specifically what you are "signed up" for and fully intend to do in action; and
- B. Explicitly indicate a specific time and date to begin taking the intended action and also a specific time and date to complete the intended actions, and to periodically communicate progress and, if necessary, to shift times and dates given logistics and vagaries of life (i.e., being timely); and
- C. Do the intended, signed up for actions as promised to completion.

Dr. Friedman then states, "A committed person is simply one who regularly keeps their commitments, what he or she has signed up to do or not do."

When I think of commitment, I think of steadfastness and endurance. The image that comes to mind is driving a stake in the ground. We drive stakes in the ground to hold firm and protect from being blown to and fro. When the choice is made to drive a stake, a commitment is being made. The tent will go here. The corner of the home will be here. Two pieces of wood go together and will stay together with a stake. Two people who join together in marriage use promises as stakes to hold them together.

Neil Strauss said, *"Without commitment, you cannot have depth in anything, whether it's a relationship, a business or a hobby."*

And Ken Blanchard said, *“There’s a difference between interest and commitment. When you are interested in doing something, you do it only when it’s convenient. When you are committed to something, you accept no excuses- only results.”*

With the new year upon us and hearts ready to make a commitment, I want to encourage us to make our primary commitment to Christ. We have been talking about making room this Advent and Christmas, more specifically making room for Christ and Christ’s way throughout our lives. How are we doing?

There is never a bad time to start or make a commitment to Christ and Christ’s way, and because today is the only day we can do anything with at this time, the second day of this new calendar year presents us with the most opportune time to commit to Christ and Christ’s way in a new way.

How do we do that? What does that look like? Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, leaves no stone unturned as he charges them to what it looks like to live faithfully committed to Christ. Paul’s words are an excellent place for us to start.

First, Paul says, **“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved...**

We are chosen by God, wanted, adopted, set apart, loved unconditionally. God is committed to us and through the power of faith we are committed to God in return. This commitment is our covenant relationship with God, built on the promises of God and our promise in return to seek, trust, and lean on God.

Next, Paul says, **“Clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...**

These five virtues are the wardrobe of faithful and committed living. To whom can we share compassion? To whom do we show kindness? Where must we embody humility? How can we own meekness as a strength? To whom and with what can we be patient?

Next, Paul says, **“bear with one another and forgive...**

As hard as it can be, we are to be patient and forgive one another, even ourselves I think, in the Spirit of God’s patience and forgiveness with us.

Next, Paul says, **“love...**

Love is highest of all virtues and the most powerful, bringing everything together in perfect harmony.

Next, Paul says, **“let the peace of Christ rule and have dominion in our hearts...**

For peace to rule means for the peace of Christ to be the referee that settles disputes, not our own self-interests. And let's be boldly honest, Christ's way of peace is often different than our way of peace.

Next, Paul says, **“be thankful...**

An attitude of gratitude for God and all God is and all God does for us is in order.

Next, Paul says, **“let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... teach and admonish one another in all wisdom...**

We are to follow Christ's teachings when we teach doctrine and teach morality, for true wisdom is found only in Christ and Christ's way.

Next, Paul says, **“sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God with grateful hearts...**

Because we are thankful to God, how can we keep from singing? Even if we don't think we can sing, we are to make a joyful noise to God.

In closing, I'll share the commitments one woman writes:

I am committed to my husband. I chose him and devoted myself to him. I am committed to our marriage and our friendship. I am committed to my children. God entrusted their care to me as a mother. It is my duty to care, nurture and teach to the best of my ability. I am committed to my health. I work out and eat healthily so I can enjoy the life I was blessed with.

But more than any other.... I am committed to God. To my faith in the Creator. I do that by prayer, worship, and obedience. I am committed to knowing God more today than I did yesterday. I do that by reading God's word, listening, and being aware of God in my life. I am committed to reaching out more today than I did yesterday. I do that by serving and helping. I am committed to change. I don't want to remain who I am. I want to keep growing. Don't look for me 10 years from now and expect the same gal. Dear God, I hope I've grown in love, in joy and am even more committed to the Father.

*I believe that when I do, God's promise in Psalm 37:5-6 awakes, **“Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you. He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun.”***

The best and only News Year's commitment we need to focus on is being committed to Christ and Christ's way. Whatever we do in word or deed, let us do and say everything in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Let all God's people say... Amen.