

THE RESOLUTION SOLUTION

3 KEYS TO A



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SUPERNATURAL YEAR

Introduction

I love January! My birth month. My wife's birth month. My eldest sons birth month. College football playoffs. Reruns of Jimmy Stewart in, "It's A Wonderful life." What's not to love? But what I love most about January is that it marks a season of new beginnings.

There is at least one thing that most people have in common. They want to change. They want to do better. They want to be better. It seems to be written in our DNA. It's stamped deep in our spirits. The resolutions we write, the plans we make, the aspirations we cherish, all point to our fundamental frustration with the status quo. We want to change.

The good news is that God is the eternal source of fresh starts and new beginnings. He won't leave you the way he found you. He says in Revelation 21:5, "*Behold, I make all things new!*"

Jeremiah said in Lamentations 3:22 -23, "*...the compassions of the Lord never fail...they are new every morning, great is the faithfulness of God.*"

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.*"

- In Psalm 40:3, God told David, *"I'll put a new song in your mouth."*
- In Isaiah 43:3, he says, *"I'll do a new thing in your life."*
- In Ezekiel 11:19, he says, *"I'll put a new spirit in your heart."*
- In Revelation 3:12, He says, *"I'll call you by a new name."*
- In Hebrews 10:20, He says, *"You will walk in a new and living way."*
- In Isaiah 65:17, He says, *"We are headed to a new heaven and new earth."*

But there is another thing that most of us can agree on. And that is that change is a lot easier to talk about than it is to experience. Change is hard. We mean well but we generally underestimate how difficult lasting change is. I hate to say it, but a significant number of our New Year's resolutions have been on automatic pilot for years! New year, old resolutions. What's the problem?

The Challenge of Change

Each New Year I notice a similar theme at my local health club. The first couple of weeks the place will be packed! I'll have to stand in line for a treadmill and it will be almost impossible to find an open elliptical machine. But I know that if I can just hold out until the middle of February, then I'll have all the space I need. Because the "resolution" crowd will be gone.

Change is no easy matter. We are creatures of habit and we underestimate how many physical, emotional, generational, and spiritual demons we fight when we decide to move in a new direction. And this resistance to change is no respecter of persons, circumstances, or resources. When you're stuck, you're stuck, no matter who you are or what you have.

Last year we witnessed several professional athletes lose multi-million-dollar contracts because they couldn't quit a hundred-dollar weed habit. Last week, John Skipper the CEO of ESPN stepped down citing an ongoing losing battle with substance addiction. These folks had it all, but they didn't have the power to change.

I remember when one of my favorite actors, Robert Downey Jr. was struggling to change. For years he refused to face his out of control lifestyle and addictions until he was finally sentenced to 3 years in prison. In prison, he was a number. The mansion he once shared with attractive models was replaced by a tiny cell that he shared with 4 other inmates. He made millions of dollars a movie in Hollywood, but he made 8 cents an hour in jail.

Because of good behavior inside the prison and important friends outside the prison, Downey was released early. He professed that his lesson was learned, and his life was changed. But in just 3 months he was found in a Palm Springs, California hotel with drugs and alcohol. He had fallen again. Change is hard.

But change is not just hard for athletes and movie stars. Listen to this brother.

"I do not understand what I do! For what I want to do, I don't do that. I do what I hate to do.. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out!" Romans 7:16, 18.

That's no drugged- out movie star. That's no sexed-out starlet. That's no washed-out athlete. Those are the words of the Apostle Paul, the most prolific writer in the New Testament-struggling! Paul like millions before and after him discovered how futile it can be to fight the battle of change. But let me hurry and add that Paul found the answer. In fact, he had the answer even as he wrote those words of frustration. He wrote:

"Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Romans 7:25

"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." I Corinthians 15:57

This victory that Paul celebrates is primarily Christ's victory over sin and Satan, but it's also a celebration of the victory that we can have over failed resolutions and frustrating habits. Paul recognized what many do not. The challenge of change, in many instances, is a symptom of a much larger struggle. Let me explain.

Fighting the Right Battle

You've heard the old story. A frustrated church member cries out to God every week during prayer meeting, "Lord, please take away the cobwebs of sin!" She leaves church and falls into the same habits. Next week at prayer meeting the same cry, "Lord, please take away the cobwebs of sin!" She said it so often until one Wednesday evening when she cried out, "Lord, take away the cobwebs of sin!", a sister mumbled under her breath, "Lord, forget the cobwebs...Kill the Spider!!"

This wise member realized what the struggling member did not. The problem was larger than a lingering habit. She was fighting the wrong battle. At the very least she had the order confused. Her habits were an outside symptom of an inside battle. Paul recognized it. This is what he said.

"For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 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!" Romans

7: 18-20

Sin living in me! Paul discovered the real change challenge. It's the sin problem. Now let me be clear. I am not saying that every change problem is a sin problem. I'm not saying that every

emotional problem or behavioral problem is a sin problem by another name. That is overly simplistic, harmful, and flat out incorrect.

- Some people struggle because they have been victimized, some at an incredibly early age. They are suffering because of someone else's sin.
- Some people struggle because they are sick. They are in need of emotional and medical help. More and more experts are convinced that many of the Robert Downeys of the world have a bi-polar disorder with all of its devastating implications.

But if we are going to be more successful with our resolution solutions, we are going to have to take sin more seriously. Romans 6:23 is accurate, **"The wages of sin is death."**

- Death to the emotions.
- Death to the profession.
- Death to the community.
- Death to the marriage.
- Death the family.
- Death to the body.
- Death to your dreams!

We have to take sin more seriously if we want resolution solutions. Although we serve a merciful, patient, longsuffering God, his great

love doesn't often shield us from the painful consequences of our sins. Many Christians have been duped into believing that forgiveness erases the consequences of our sins. But that just isn't true.

Galatians 6:7, 8 explains it this way, *"Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."*

There are countless thousands who sow bad seeds and pray for a crop failure. That rarely happens, but I'll tell you what does happen. The consequences of sin grow but the blessings of God grow much faster and broader and stronger!!

"But where sin increased, grace increased even more." Romans 5:20

"And I will restore to you the years that the locusts have eaten..."

Joel 2:25

The law of the harvest is real. We reap what we sow. But instead of being depressed about the devilish fruit you are harvesting today, get happy about the harvest of God's blessing that you will be harvesting today, tomorrow, and forever! Here's a promise.

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children of fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life." Matthew 19:29

Now, I'm not going to pretend to completely understand that text. And most folk that claim they do are really taking the passage

out of context. But I'm sure of this. God's harvest always makes the Devil's harvest look small. So, the challenge is to start sowing today. But make sure you're sowing the right seed in the right place.

Natural or Super-Natural Change

The problem with many of our resolution solutions, our attempts to change, is that they start in the wrong place. Real change works from inside out and not from outside in. The challenge with our attempts to change our lives by changing our diet or changing our appearance or cleaning our houses or reordering our schedules is that those ideas are good, but not good enough for lasting change. That's natural change. Needed, but still natural. We should do all of that, but our first order of business, our primary focus, should be the heart. That's supernatural change. And that is our foundation.

Years ago, I saw a photo of sink hole in Orlando, Florida. It was large and destructive. It was so big that cars were trapped inside the sinkhole and structures were in danger of being sucked in. A gentleman from the Public Works department was asked to explain how something so big could have developed almost overnight. "Did a truck punch a hole in the asphalt and start the sink hole?" Did a large tree fall on the street and start the spread of the sink hole?" Those were some of the questions the spokesman was asked.

His answer was enlightening. He said the problem was not with a truck or tree. A water main had broken under the street long ago,

they discovered. Slowly but surely it had eroded the foundation of the street: At a certain point the foundation was so degraded that, the spokesman said,

"Something as light as the foot of a fox could have broken through the top layer of the street. And because the foundation was destroyed, nothing could stop the sinkhole from spreading."

Our foundation is critical. Outward change is important and extremely motivating. But if the foundation isn't sure, even the smallest challenges in our lives or to our schedules can start sinkholes that can swallow us up.

So, let's explore 3 keys to Super natural living that will provide our resolution solutions.



KEY NUMBER ONE: Consistent Personal Devotion

This is where real change begins. Before we can experience change in our homes and in our churches, we must first experience change in our own lives. This change begins with our personal time with God in prayer and study. Ellen White put it this way in the book *Sons and Daughters* page 313:

“Our first duty toward God and our fellow beings is that of self-development.”

Paul says in I Timothy 4:7,8 that we must exercise ourselves to godliness or real change. Core has been a buzz word in personal fitness circles for the last several years. Your **core** is a complex series of muscles, extending far beyond **your** abs, including everything besides **your** arms and legs. It is incorporated in almost every movement of the human body. When the core muscles are strong the rest of the body follows.

A consistent personal devotional life is the core of your spiritual body. Everything else tends to take it's signal from that core. The most challenging word or those three words, consistent personal devotion, is the word consistent. Our lives seem to be a blur of endless activity. From the time we get up in the morning until the time we fall asleep at night, we are on the move. And when we aren't moving we're

awash in media. We don't seem to have enough time to do it all. And for some it seems impossible to consistently carve out time in our busy day.

But we have to make time to develop our spiritual core, our personal devotional lives. When is the best time for time for personal devotion? For most people it's probably in the morning when they are fresh, and the distractions are few. But for others the evening hours are less hectic and more conducive to connecting with God. The best time for your personal devotion is the best time for you.

How much time should you spend in personal devotion? Again, that depends on you and your schedule. The age-old argument is whether you should focus on quantity or quality. But early on I don't think you should obsess over quantity or quality, but consistency. Get going and keep going, that's the goal.

Prayer

As the saying goes, prayer changes things! That's more than a cliché, that is a fact of life.

- *Prayer changes circumstances.* James 5:15 says, "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are...but he prayed, and the rain stopped...He prayed again, and it rained again."
- *Prayer changes people.* 2 Chronicles 7:14 says, "If my people who are called by my name would humble themselves and

pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

- *Prayer changes you!* One of the most powerful chapters on prayer is found in the book *Steps to Christ*, where Ellen White remind us that, "Our heavenly Father waits to bestow upon us the fullness of His blessing. It is our privilege to drink largely at the fountain of boundless love. What a wonder it is that we pray so little!" Incidentally, that little book is a great book to for personal devotion time.

It might be helpful in our time of personal devotion to follow the popular ACTS acrostic as a pattern or framework for our prayer time.

A - Adoration. Perhaps the most appropriate way to begin a prayer is with adoration. The Psalms are filled with these prayers. They demonstrate the need to thank God for who He is before we ask Him for what He has. The act of adoration forces us to reflect on the attributes of God. This is at once humbling, awe-inspiring and motivating.

C - Confession. After expressing our adoration to God, we must come to Him with hearts of confession. Confession should be a part of our practice of prayer because sin is a part of our practice of life. The beauty of devotional prayer is that God invites us to come in spite of and because of our sins. The late R.C. Sproul said that confession is like

a declaration of bankruptcy. It declares to God that the only hope that we have is in Him. This life is beyond our ability to handle.

T - Thanksgiving. Philippians 4:6 says "*Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*"

To give thanks is to demonstrate that we appreciate what we have already received from God. In Romans 1:21, Paul calls attention to two primary sins of the pagans. He notes that they did not honor God and they did not thank God. God takes ingratitude very seriously. We are told not to forget the benefits of God, Ps. 103:2.

It certainly demonstrates immaturity when Christians, like children, come to God with nothing but a wish list in their hands. Thanksgiving is as much for us as it is for God. It heightens our appreciation for what God has done and is doing for us.

S - Supplication. After we have adored, confessed and thanked, it is time for us to ask. Ask for what? Ask for whatever we need! We are told that it is the Father's pleasure to answer the requests of His children. In James 1:5 we are reminded, for example, that if we need wisdom, God gives it in abundance. The same is said of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The same is said of peace. The same is said of the power of forgiveness, of repentance, of joy. If we want it, we must request it. We are told to ask so that our "joy may be full." God is concerned about our happiness.

Personal Bible Study

Someone once said that a dusty Bible will lead to a dirty life. The Bible should be our primary text for personal devotion. Matthew 22:29 says that we err or make huge mistakes in life, because we don't know the Bible. But it's important to remember that our goal in personal devotion is not to know about God, but to know him personally, intimately.

So again, the goal is not covering the Bible, but carefully uncovering what the Bible reveals about God. How much scripture should we read each day? That will differ from person to person, but a return to the physical exercise example is helpful. It's wise to begin with a modest goal and expand as we grow. For instance, if you begin the year with a resolution to get your body in shape, you don't start the year with a goal to run 10 miles a day. It won't last. Your mind is willing and ambitious, but your body is weak.

Apply the same wisdom to the bible study goals you set for your devotional life. You don't get special credit for the degree of difficulty! Take a careful look at your schedule and do what's doable. Instead of 10 chapters a day, what about 1 chapter a day consistently. Instead of reading the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and risking getting stuck in Leviticus, why not start with the Gospels and take a walk with Jesus.

It's important to set reasonable, doable goals. Why? Because the Devil is an accuser and discourager. He will try to push you toward an unreasonable goal and the moment you come short by a hair, he will accuse you of never being serious or committed in the first place. Don't fall for it. God wants to spend time with you and he can make miracles flow from precious, prioritized minutes, if that's the best you can give.

Other Study Materials

This is the golden age of personal devotion resources. Take a drive to any Christian book store, or take a look a look online, and you will find a seemingly endless pool of possibilities. There are daily devotionals for every age and interest. There are bible study tools that will make your bible come alive. There are audio and video presentations that will walk you through any and every book of the bible and any bible study theme that interests you. The only limit to your personal bible study material is your imagination.



Key Number Two: Cell Membership

By cell membership I mean community. I'm not speaking of a structured small group or cell group, necessarily. Those are excellent sources of community, but you can find Christian community in various ways. The key here is to understand that there is a certain level of Christian growth that only comes in community.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says it this way,

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall the one will lift up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falls, for he doesn't have another to pick him up!"

"Again, if two lie together, then they shall have heat, but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him, and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken."

That's a good word. The reason many Christians fall so often is they are trying to stand alone. And that is not God's design for growth. God created us with needs that only fellowship, and community can satisfy. We need help to survive. God made us that way. Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, was struggling with his impending death and the thought of separation from his Father. He called to his

disciples and asked, "Couldn't you have stayed and prayed with me?"

Now that was a holy God seeking human help. The question is, if Jesus himself felt the need for community, guess who else needs it? We do. And we live in an age that desperately needs community. Look at the conditions:

Loneliness - According to recent polls, 73% of Americans report feeling lonely often. As more and more individuals find safety and security in their gated communities and electronically-secured homes, there seem to be fewer and fewer opportunities for genuine "community." We are created in such a way that without community we never really reach our full potential.

Marriage and Family Problems - 50% of all first marriages and 70% of all second marriages end in divorce. Even among intact marriages, the problems often run deep. People need the relationships that they miss in these broken systems provided in the body of Christ. This is best done in the community of cell groups or small groups.

Spectatorism - The couch potato has almost become a national symbol in the US. This same spirit of spectatorism affects the church. Members must be encouraged to come off the sidelines and become actively involved in their ministries. Cell groups help to break the "spell of the spectator."

Isolationism – The explosion of online shopping is just another example of how cocooned and isolated we are becoming. The shopping that would have traditionally forced us from our homes to interact with shoppers and sales staff is now done at home. Same with banking and sporting events and even church going. The online opportunities are a blessing and a curse. Cell membership, community, forces us to remember that we need others to help us develop emotionally and spiritually.

Individualism - This is a "me first generation." Look at the television and print advertisements. When that attitude creeps into the church, and it has, it brings with it fights over turf, fights over church standards and requirements, fights over finances, and the list goes on. Cell membership reminds us that we are parts of a larger body of believers.

The A Factor

One of the greatest benefits that community offers the believer is accountability. Accountability is a scary word to some but without it we won't grow to our potential. Accountability is simply giving a count. It is the act of being responsible. Frankly without accountability we can't accurately determine our real condition.

Twice a year I go to my primary physician for a complete physical. He gives me all of my numbers; cholesterol, blood pressure, Psa, weight,

etc. He gives me a count. A couple years ago he explained to me that my cholesterol numbers were too high and that I needed to change some things about my lifestyle. If I didn't I could face serious consequences in the future. I felt fine but my numbers, my count, told a different story.

My doctor had potentially saved my life by giving me accurate numbers, by giving me a "count." That's what accountability does for you. It gives you an accurate idea of your condition. Genuine community connects you to people who love you enough to hold you accountable. They aren't afraid to give you a correct "count."

Encouragement

The last benefit of community that I'll mention is encouragement. Encouragement is the motivation, the strength, the "courage" we receive from fellowship and community. The Devil tries to isolate us from each other and make us feel as if no one cares or understands our struggles. But simply hearing someone say that you can make it is often enough to keep you moving forward.



Key Number Three: Celebration

By celebration I simply mean worship. Follow the important progression. We're looking at keys to the resolution solution. Key number one is consistent personal devotion. That's your one-on-one time with God. Key number two is cell membership. It expands the support to include a small group of believers who provide fellowship, accountability, and encouragement. Now the support expands even further as we worship God with a body of believers.

Celebration or worship offers a different kind of strength and growth. Worship is the believers most important activity. Isaiah 43:21 declares that we were created to worship. Worship at its simplest is declaring the worth-ship of God. It is giving God the honor that he deserves. Worship is a two-way street. God initiates by first loving us and we respond by worshipping Him, by loving Him back.

As we gather for worship, we benefit from the spiritual gifts of other believers. Ephesians 4:14 explains that our exposure to the spiritual gifts of others in the body of Christ causes us to mature, to grow up. No one person has all of the gifts of the spirit. My gifts help you and your gifts help me.

In John 4, Jesus uses his encounter with the woman at the well to lay out some important lessons about worship. He teaches that:

Worship is not bound by location. Powerful worship can take place in Jerusalem or Samaria. In a large church or small group. In a lofty cathedral or a simple storefront.

Worship is intelligent. Worship is at its best when we are conscious of the qualities, the attributes of the God we worship

Worship must be balanced. God wants us to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Left brain and right brain. With our minds and emotions

God seeks worshippers. In these last days God says that He is seeking worshippers. Not just because He deserves it, but because we need it.

Pastor Tim Keller of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan teaches that corporate worship is God's way of giving us a weekly realignment. Like cars that travel over rough roads and lose their alignment, we struggle through the potholes of life and lose our personal and spiritual alignment. Once a week God reminds us of who we are and who He is as we worship. As we sing and teach and preach the attributes and acts of God, it keeps us conscious of how great and powerful He is and how small but blessed we are. It keeps us from making idols of lesser "Gods." Gods like money and power and position and relationships

The Importance of Sacrifice

2 Samuel 24:24 teaches a powerful lesson for effective worship. King David is preparing to worship and he approaches his subject Araunah about purchasing what he needs for the service. He needs animals for the burnt offering, he needs threshing floor sledges and ox yokes for the wood. He offers to buy all of this from Araunah for a reasonable price.

Araunah says to the King that it would be his honor to freely give to the King anything he needs for the worship service. David's response is priceless. He says, *"I will not offer burnt offerings to God which doth cost me nothing."* In other words, I won't participate in a worship service without a personal investment. It would rob my worship of meaning.

David's lesson to us is that worship demands sacrifice. You can't get anything out of worship if you don't put anything into worship. This is a powerful lesson to those of us who want to experience the type of worship that will solve our resolution problems, our problems of change.

Some Closing Tips for Resolution Solution

The 3 Resolution Solution keys: Consistent Personal Devotion, Cell Membership, and Celebration will help you have a Super- Natural year. But let me close with a few more quick tips.

1. **Remember Who You Are!** We are striving to grow in grace each day, but remember that in Christ you are already declared a winner. To be clear, I'm not waiting for these blessings, as a child of God, He has given them to me to experience-right now! In Christ:
 - a. **I am complete** – Colossians 2:10
 - b. **I am forgiven** – 1 John 2:12
 - c. **I am anointed** – 1 John 2:27
 - d. **I am loved** – 1 John 4:14
 - e. **I am redeemed** – Revelation 5:9
 - f. **I am chosen** – Colossians 3:12
 - g. **I am justified** – Romans 5:1
 - h. **I am a joint heir with Christ** – Romans 8:17
 - i. **I have received eternal life** – 1 John 5:11-13
2. **Watch Your Company.** 1 Corinthians 15:33 puts it plainly, “Bad company corrupts good character.” Not only that, Paul remind us that on this journey to wholeness, we shouldn't take along any provisions for the flesh. Romans 13:14. That means don't drag along people and patterns and problems that will weigh you down, hold you back.
3. **Go See a Doctor.** We probably underestimate how many of our emotional and spiritual problems actually have a physical root. And not physical problems alone. We are living in a broken world that damages us deeply. At times God answers our prayers

through trained physicians. At other times he uses trained counselors and mental health professionals.

4. **Be Patient.** The Bible often uses the metaphor of fruit and plants to illustrate how we grow. The implication is that growth is gradual but it's inevitable if you stay connected. Paul says we grow from glory to glory as we focus on and reflect Christ. 2 Corinthians 3:18
5. **Have faith!** Proverbs 29:18 reminds us that we need vision, the eyes of faith, to see God taking us to another level. Pray for that kind of faith. One of my favorite quotations is found in the book *Desire of Ages* pg. 657.

“The Lord is disappointed when His people place a low estimate on themselves...He is well pleased when they make the very highest demands upon Him that they may glorify His name. They may expect large things if they have faith in His promises.”

Have A SUPER- Natural Year!