

Lessons from failed New Year's resolutions

New Year is the day we traditionally make our New Year's resolutions.

That is the day when we vow never to do this or that again. It is the day when we hone our resolutions to a fine point, trying to make them realistic, easy enough to accomplish – at least for a while.

I think the resolution made by most people this year was to lose weight.

This is a direct response to the weight gained by some during lockdown.

Some pledge to quit drinking alcohol or stop smoking.

Others to quit doing drugs.

These are some of the innumerable resolutions made by innumerable people. All made in good faith with every good intention.

This reminds me of a Mexican proverb which says, "A good resolution is like an old horse, which is often saddled but rarely ridden."

Most of the well-intended resolutions are broken by the end of January.

So why am I harping upon failed New Year's resolutions?

Closer scrutiny of such resolutions reveals a lack of commitment and follow-through upon noble intentions.

The Bible speaks to such a situation in Zechariah 4:6, "...This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit', says the Lord Almighty".

This verse from Scripture speaks originally to a context not dissimilar to ours in 2021. It is set during a time that the leadership of Israel was enduring a period of great discouragement.

The giant obstacles they were facing seemed insurmountable in their yearning to reconstruct the Temple.

It is then that God's word comes to them as leaders via the prophet Zechariah. In the end the Temple was completed with joyous singing (The Book of Ezra 6:15).

Now what does this say to all the efforts by made by government, the church and civic organisations as we face the next surge of Covid-19 infections and deaths?

The human resolve undoubtedly yearns for a cure amidst the pandemic.

The consequences of human endeavour alone take us back to the mantra of the Enlightenment period that elevated humanity as the measure of all things – not an objective standard but affirming the subjective.

The litany of failure regarding such a worldview is self-evident in the politicking around the current pandemic.

It ranges from denial, wilful disregard of protocols and to embracing conspiracy theories.

A further anticipated debate will be about who will receive the vaccination – health care workers, educators, prisoners, the elderly or is it people over 60 with comorbidities?

Perhaps we can resolve to be accountable to our fellow citizens in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic by observing the mantra of washing hands, practicing social distancing, and wearing a mask.

This is the essence of that wonderful virtue of ubuntu that South Africa has gifted the world.

Now more than ever we need to resolve to be accountable.

Accountability is a matter of Integrity.

Integrity is when the person who we are in the dark matches who we are in the light.
Integrity is being the same person in public as we are in private.
Growth in accountability is analogous to being accountable to God, and those set in authority over us.
In that way we become accountable to each other. We need that more than ever in the history of our common life together.
So, back to New Year's resolutions.
We've all made them, and we've all broken them.
Maybe we need to stop and rethink the whole idea.
Instead of resolving to lose weight, or make more money, or exercise more, maybe we should resolve to live the kind of life that God would have us live.
God cares about how we live.
And God does care how we treat each other. And God has given us the instructions we need to live a life which is worthy of him.
So, let's resolve to live that life this year, and next year, and every year from now on.
Let's resolve to follow the teachings of God's word and try to be more Christ-like.
Because when people look at us, Christ is mirrored in our faces, and in our souls.
The question remains: "What image do we want people to see when they look at us?
More than ever before do we need to pray the Prayer for Africa: "God Bless Africa, guard her children, transform her leaders and give her peace".

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