

New Year Resolutions

Luke 2 : 22 - 40

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At this time of year, fitness centres and gyms around the world are very busy hiring extra gym equipment: bikes, rowing machines. They do this to cope with the flood of new members. By January 7th, they move it all out as most people have given up on their New Year's resolutions. Here's the most common new year resolutions that people make:

Get fit

Lose weight

Reduce drinking

Stop smoking

Get out of debt

I don't want to knock new year resolutions, I've made one or two myself. But the bad news is that all of us make resolutions that we fail to keep. However there is good news. This time of the year does provide us with an *opportunity* to make a fresh start. And when it comes to fresh beginnings, there's a verse in the Gospel reading, which lays down 3 foundations from Jesus' own life, on which we might build some new year resolutions.

Luke 2 verse 40: And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was on him. So, 3 foundations for 3 new year resolutions.

1. Jesus grew and became strong – he grew well physically – new year resolution one? Let's seek to look after ourselves physically.

As we know Jesus worked as a carpenter which, quite naturally, demands

physical strength. Jesus grew well physically through his work – added to this they walked a lot....

For you and me today, this would simply mean planning into the day and week, regular times for physical exercise. One of the most important things we learnt through the Pandemic and lock downs, is that getting regular exercise and fresh air is essential for good mental and physical health. And it doesn't have to be intense! Walking, gentle stretching, swimming, weights,Like Jesus, let's seek to keep well physically by taking regular daily exercise in 2024

Google Hasfit! Prayer walks.

Jesus grew and became strong – he grew well physically

2. V 40: Jesus was filled with wisdom – Jesus grew educationally and mentally.

New year resolution two? Let's grow in wisdom – exercising our minds.

Jesus' own mind expanded as he learned his lessons at home and at school, nurtured and taught especially by his mother. Shout out to all mothers – so important the work you do and have done teaching children. As a child Jesus would have memorized large parts of the Torah, the law of God and like many young people at that time, he would've memorized the Psalms. For us today it may simply mean memorizing a verse or two each week and reflecting on them. The Navigators!! The discipline of scripture memorization enabled Jesus to grow in wisdom.

Scripture enabled him to withstand all sorts of challenges, attacks and temptations. It helped him in his teaching ministry. And scripture helped him especially as he faced suffering and going to the cross. And it's the same for us. The discipline of memorizing scripture will help you through the challenging times in 2024. Scripture helps us to grow in Godly wisdom. Regular quiet time! Jesus grew and became strong – he grew well physically. He was filled with wisdom – Jesus grew in wisdom, educationally and mentally.

3. Jesus grew spiritually: V40: 'and the grace of God was on him.'

New year resolution three? Let's seek to grow spiritually in 2024.

One of the key ways Jesus grew spiritually in his relationship with God was through prayer.

Luke writes about Jesus' prayer life several times in his Gospel.

We see Jesus often withdrawing to solitary, secret places to pray and spend time with God. His prayer life was so attractive to his disciples that they asked him to teach them how to pray. Jesus responded by giving them, what we call The Lord's Prayer. "When you pray...."

Jesus prayed because it gave him a close, intimate relationship with his Father. And from this intimate connection with God, flowed grace, love, compassion, kindness, joy. And it's the same for us. Spiritual growth, intimacy with the Father and knowing his grace comes through prayer. Prayer helps us be free of burdens – 'cast all your anxiety on him....' 'when you pray go into your room and pray and your Father in heaven will reward you.' See Philippians 4 v 6 – 7. Why not resolve to make more time for prayer this year? A daily quiet time? A prayer journal? A prayer partner? Praying with your spouse or a friend? Prayer walking?

In the Church of England the London Diocese has numerous growing churches all because of prayer! What is the secret of Church growth? Prayer. The St Stephen's prayer for growth is excellent!

So there we have 3 foundations on which to make 3 good new year resolutions. By applying these, I pray that in 2024 we will all 'grow and become strong; that we will be filled with wisdom and that the grace of God would be upon us'. In a moment communion – think about how Jesus went to the cross for you and me, giving his life for us so that we might experience and know God's wisdom, strength and grace. As you receive the bread and the wine why not pause for a moment and make a commitment as we begin 2024, to grow and become strong; to be filled with wisdom and pray for the grace of God to be with you'.

