

Fil-Am Community Church

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1 January 2012

A NEW YOU IN THE NEW YEAR

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” John 3:30

It's a new year once again! Hope you had a wonderful new year's celebration last night. But I hope you'll stay awake for the rest of this message. Some of you may not have gone to bed till 3 in the morning.

Do you have a New Years' resolution? Some of the New Year's resolutions that people make are the following according to one list I read:

1. Spend more time with family and friends
2. Be fit.
3. Tame the Bulge
4. Quit Smoking
5. Enjoy Life More
6. Quit Drinking
7. Get Out of Debt
8. Learn Something New
9. Help Others
10. Get Organized

Is yours in the list? Or you have something different? Or your resolution is to never have another New Year's resolution again? For those of you who have a hard time keeping your resolution, here are some suggested resolutions that will be easy to keep, according to another list I read:

1. Read less.
2. Gain weight. Put on at least 30 pounds.

3. Stop exercising. Waste of time.
4. Watch more TV. Don't miss good stuff.
5. Procrastinate more.
6. Drink. Drink some more.
7. Start being superstitious.
8. Spend more time at work.
9. Stop bringing lunch from home: Eat out more.
10. Take up a new habit: maybe smoking!
11. Start buying lottery tickets at a luckier store.
12. Learn what "resolution" means.

Then there's this woman who made a resolution every year about her weight:

2007: I will get my weight down below 180 pounds.

2008: I will follow my new diet religiously until I get below 200 pounds.

2009: I will develop a realistic attitude about my weight.

2010: I will work out 3 days a week.

2011: I will work out twice a week

2012: I will try to drive past a gym at least once a week.

Folks, what is your New Year's resolution? Let me suggest one. How about becoming a new you in the New Year? I'm not talking about losing weight, changing your hairstyle, wearing new clothes and all that stuff. I'm talking about having a new perspective in life. Someone with a different point of view than the rest of the world.

You see, much of many people's resolutions focus on the betterment of oneself. How we can appear nice and good to others, whether physically or relationally. But this resolution of becoming a new you is about putting the focus on another person.

And for this, we can copy the example of John the Baptist in the Bible. In John 3:30, he says about Jesus, *"He must increase, but I must decrease"*. Other versions of the Bible say:

"He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less." (NLT)

"He must become greater; I must become less" (NIV)

"He must become greater, and I must become less important" (NCV)

"This is the assigned moment for him to move into the center, while I slip off to the sidelines." (MSG)

All of these are saying, in short, "It's All About Jesus"! It's not about me. This New Year's resolution is about lifting up the name of Jesus, making him visible, making him prominent in our lives. Incidentally, as I mentioned before, our theme for this year is "It's All About Jesus". I want us to do things with the goal of always giving prominence to the name of Jesus.

Many sermons have been written about this verse we're talking about this morning. And most of them talk about being humble. And I agree. John the Baptist must be a very humble person to let Jesus take the center stage even in the midst of a successful and thriving baptism ministry he had. But I want to put a different spin on this verse because of the fact that John the Baptist's life was all about pointing everyone to Christ. It was about making Jesus prominent.

Today, I'd like to share with you how to make Jesus increase or become greater or take center stage while you decrease or become less or slip off to the sidelines. For Jesus to increase and you to decrease, first of all,

1. I MUST ADOPT GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MY LIFE

I have to adopt God's purpose for my life. That starts with a personal commitment. I say, "God, more than anything else I want Your will in my life. More than anything else I want to be what You made me to be. I want to do what You created me to do." It starts with a complete commitment.

The Bible says this in Romans 6 *"...give yourselves completely to God- every part of you... for you want to be tools in the hands of God, to be used for His good purposes."* When you adopt God's purpose for your life, your values and your priorities immediately get switched around. They change radically. Instead of becoming selfish, you become selfless. Instead of focusing on yourself, you focus on God.

You see, God has put us here on earth for a purpose, every one of us. Of course, the overarching purpose is to glorify God. We may call this our general purpose. We have a specific purpose too. And this is what God wants us to accomplish on earth in order to fulfill the general purpose. For example, God's specific purpose for Billy Graham is to conduct evangelistic crusades. God's specific purpose for Chris Tomlin is to write songs. God's specific purpose for Tim Tebow is to play football.

And what is God's specific purpose for John the Baptist? It is to prepare the way for Jesus. When John the Baptist was born, his father Zechariah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said, *"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him."* (Luke 1:76 NIV).

John the Baptist and Jesus are relatives. The Bible doesn't really say they are cousins. It may well be altho' the original Greek word to describe the relationship between their mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, just means "relative". In any case, John the Baptist was born six months before Jesus. And so, even chronologically, John was ahead of Jesus.

How did he prepare the way for Jesus? When the time came, God told him to go in and around Jordan to declare that the Messiah was coming and that people should be baptized as a sign of repentance. Until the time of his death, he never wavered in his calling. He preached and preached because he knew this was what God had called him to do.

One thing that made him fulfill God's purpose in his life is "focus". He trained his eye toward God's will in his life. You see, when we lack focus, we will fail in our task. Many people have started out good but didn't finish well because they lacked focus, they didn't keep their eyes on the target. Someone said, "A mind that is focused is the most powerful force in the universe." In other words, you'll be successful in whatever you do if your mind is focused. In Ecclesiastes 9:10, it also says, *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might."* So, there again, focus, concentration. That's the secret of success.

So, what does God want you to do? Maybe to sing for him? Maybe to teach for him? Maybe to cook for him? If you're still not sure, I encourage you to pray about it and in this new year you may want to get involved in a ministry in the church. The church needs you. The people need you. Ask God what he wants you to do for him.

So, find out what God's purpose for your life is. And keep a focused mind to fulfill that purpose. Which leads us to the next thing you can do to make Jesus increase and you to decrease .

2. I MUST GET RID OF EXCESSES IN MY LIFE

John the Baptist lived a very simple life. The Bible tells us that *"he lived in the wilderness"* (Luke 1:80). Then, in Matthew 3:4 it says, *"John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey."*

John the Baptist's way of life doesn't mean that he was a hermit or anti-social. It just means that he lived an austere and conservative life. He shunned comforts and luxuries. This is no-frills living. The reason? Since the beginning, he knew what his purpose in life was. For sure, his parents must have told him about it. And so, when he came of age, he decided to pursue this single-mindedly. He left, went to the desert in order to be trained by God.

BTW, that is how God trained his prophets. Like Moses, for example. And even, apostle Paul. John knew he was to be the Messiah's forerunner and he didn't want to get distracted.

You may be thinking, I want to be trained by God too. I'm going to the desert of Las Vegas and eat locusts and honey and maybe a little bit of lobster at Caesar's Palace. Seriously, we don't need to go to the desert in order to do God's will. It just takes a conscious effort to get rid of excesses in our lives.

You see, some of us carry extra baggages in life that's why our progress in terms of spiritual growth is slow. An excess baggage is anything that is not necessary. For example, when you travel within the United States, you're allowed to check-in only two baggages weighing 50 lbs each. Any baggage that is more than 50 lbs is considered excess baggage. For the extra pounds, either you pay for it, which is a minimum of \$100, or you take it out. Either way, that hurts. In fact, at present, it hurts to check-in baggages because you have to pay for each check-in unless you're travelling on Southwest.

The point is, we carry extra baggages in our lives that are not necessary. Aside from the fact that they hinder our progress, they also obscure the fact that Jesus is in our lives. When we have excesses, people don't really see Jesus in us. What are these excesses?

a. Material things. Our society is so materialistic that some of us are sucked into this kind of attitude. We want to have the latest of anything and we make up excuses just to have it like "it will make me more comfortable", "it's on sale", "it will save time" "I have a discount coupon" "it looks nice on me" and so on. But the fact is, it is not necessary. Because we still have something that is working and doing its job. So, usually we end up with multiple things of the same thing.

What did Jesus say? *“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.”* (Matthew 6:19-20 NLT)

b. Guilt and Frustrations. Do you often regret something you’ve done in the past? Or do you often wish something had happened in the past? If you regret something, that’s guilt. If you wish something had happened, that’s frustration. If you experience these things, this will hinder your progress. The added weight of guilt and frustration in your mind will prevent you from enjoying life and moving forward. So, don’t dwell on the past.

What did Paul say? *“There is one thing I always do. Forgetting the past and straining toward what is ahead.”* (Phil. 3:13b NCV)

c. Sin. This is the heaviest baggage you can carry. The Holy Spirit can never work in your life if you are harboring sin in your life. How is your lifestyle? How do you relate to others? How is your thought life? Do you easily fall into temptation? Are you quick to criticize others and slow to encourage? Do you say something behind someone’s back? Do you drink too much alcohol? Do you smoke? Are you looking with interest at someone altho’ you’re married? Are you an inveterate liar?

Folks, the bad news is we’re all sinners. Any of us can commit any of the things I mentioned. But the good news is, God loves you and wants to help you. John says in 1 John 1:19 (NIV), *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

Now, as you remove the excesses in your life, more of Jesus comes into your life as the old you gives way to him. In short, you become more like Jesus.

So, if you want to make Jesus prominent in your life, this is what the Bible says, *“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”* (Hebrews 12:1b-2a NIV)

For Jesus to increase, and for me to decrease

3. I MUST TELL OTHERS ABOUT CHRIST

OK, so you adopt God’s purpose for your life. Then, you get rid of the excesses in your life. What else you need to do? Tell others about Christ! Nothing can make Jesus more prominent in your life than witnessing to others about him. Of course, your life is a living testimony that you are his disciple. But no one ever got to know the real Jesus just by looking at you. People will know that you’re a Christian if you have that fish logo on your car but unless you tell them what it means they’ll never know who Jesus really is. People will know that you’re a Christian if they saw you carrying a Bible. But unless you open that Bible and speak to people about what’s in the Bible, they’ll never know Jesus.

The Bible says, *“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”* (Romans 10:14 NIV)

The purpose of telling others about Christ is so that they may be saved. That is what John the Baptist did before Jesus came to the scene. In Matthew 3:2 (NIV), we read that he was preaching *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come*

near.” By saying that, he believed that Jesus will show himself up any moment. Then, a few verses down, he says in v. 11, *“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I.”* And so he actually believed that Jesus was coming soon. And he believed that when Jesus came, he would come with judgment. In verse 12 of Matthew 3 he says, *“His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”*

The same thing with us. We must warn others of the coming judgment. We must tell others about Christ. When was the last time you talked to someone about Christ? But if you need help in this area, we’re going to train you as we’re coming up with an evangelism training in the next couple of months.

Finally, to make Jesus increase and for me to decrease,

4. I MUST SURRENDER MY LIFE TO JESUS COMPLETELY

John the Baptist knew what his role exactly is in God’s scheme of things. You see, God has anointed him, given him much power and authority. This is the reason he can boldly preach the good news. And people were coming to him. People from everywhere were repenting and getting baptized. But all the success and popularity, so to speak, did not make him swell-headed. He was still down-to-earth and humble. He could ask for a collection every time he preached and baptized but he didn’t. He could easily fill his coffers with money to buy him a colorful garment or a horse or build a palace in the city but he didn’t. Which is not what we can say about certain preachers today who take advantage of people, who ask people for money in order to spend for their own selves.

John the Baptist remained humble even in the midst of great success. He didn't let success go to his head. He was totally surrendered to Christ. This humble submission is evident when he says in Luke 3:16 (NCV), *"I baptize you with water, but there is one coming who is greater than I am. I am not good enough to untie his sandals."*

Like washing the feet of someone, untying another person's sandals is a servant's duty. And John was saying that he was lower than a servant. He has totally given up his rights in order for Jesus to become prominent in his life. He was willing to decrease himself in order for Jesus to increase.

To surrender is not easy. Because it means giving up one's rights. It means not having control anymore of your own life. In times of war, yes, to surrender is frightening. But to surrender your life to Jesus is a different story. Because he is not your enemy. He is your best friend. Your BFF.

Jesus loves you more than you could ever know. In fact, he gave his own life for you on the cross so that you may have life. The Bible says that we are sinners who are in need of a Savior. We are all condemned to die and to spend eternity in hell. In Romans 3:23 (NIV), it says, *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* And Romans 6:23 says, *"For the wages of sin is death."* But God loves us so much that he gave his own Son Jesus to die for our sins. Romans 5:8 says, *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

To surrender, all you need to do is to ask forgiveness for your sins and then acknowledge that Jesus is your Lord and Savior. Romans 10:9 says, *"if you confess*

with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." If you do that, God gives you the gift of eternal life. The second half of Romans 6:23 says, *"But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Some of you may be thinking, I'm already a Christian, I already received him, do I still need to surrender my life to him? You may need to. Because you may have received him as your Savior but never really received him as your Lord. Perhaps, in the past, when you became a Christian, you were quite aware that Jesus was your all in all. Meaning, you have placed every aspect of your life in Jesus' hands. But along the way you took back what was in Jesus' hands already. Maybe because of trials. Maybe because you felt you can handle life on your own. Maybe because something or someone influenced you.

You just wanted control of your life again. In which case, more of you is in you now than Jesus. He has decreased and you have increased.

Friend, today is the beginning of the rest of your life. As we enter the new year, will you make a resolution that Jesus will increase and you will decrease? That he will become greater and you will become less?

Will you make Jesus prominent in your life? This is my challenge for you this year. Become a new you by making Jesus prominent in your life.