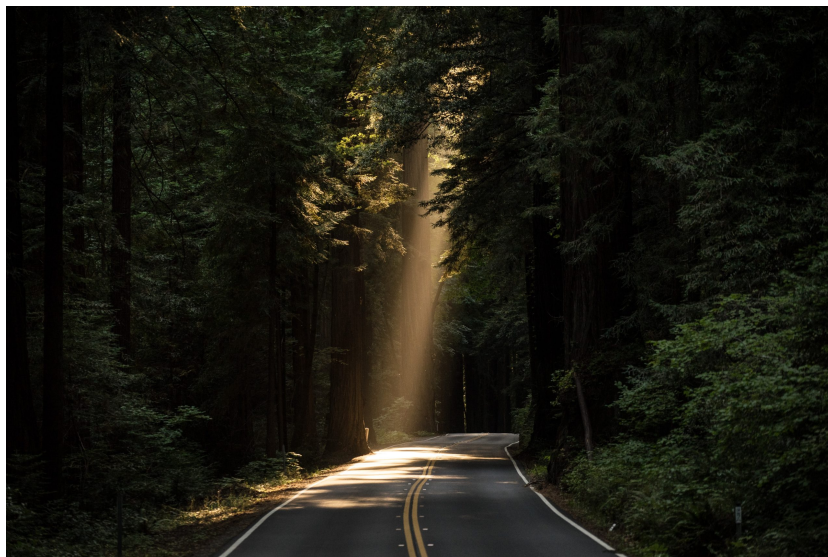


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# Hope, Prayer, and Understanding in 2021

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I'm not the biggest fan of making New Year's resolutions.

I'm not knocking the desire to better myself in ways that benefit my health, finances, empathy toward others, spiritual beliefs, whatever it may be. I just don't think that waiting

until the end of one year and the beginning of another is the best time to make that decision.

Progressing toward a better version of myself is something that I need to work on throughout the year; otherwise, it's like deciding to finally start sprinting on the last 10 meters of a 100-meter dash — and meanwhile, everyone else has already finished the race ages ago.

But this year, I decided that maybe making a New Year's resolution wasn't such a bad idea, considering what this year brought to not just my life but the entire world.

So in 2021, for the first time in a while, I set a resolution for myself: I'm going to make a point to be more hopeful, prayerful, and understanding than I've been in years past.

## **Hopeful**

I don't have to revisit the many, many ways in which 2020 was devastating. We're still living through it, and many things are still uncertain in 2021.

But I am hopeful that this year will be the year that the church grows and progresses in ways that we haven't seen in hundreds of years. The virus has already forced churches to pivot to a new online reality that most were not prepared for, and just because we have a chance to return to in-person worship once again, that doesn't mean that everything learned this year can be tossed aside and forgotten.

Online worship is here to stay; in fact, I believe it's the inevitable future for churches to be sustainable and relevant once again in our communities.

Of course, I'm also hopeful for an end to the pandemic and that lives will be saved from the virus that has taken more than 350,000 Americans from us in 2020. The two vaccines from Moderna and Pfizer give me a glimmer of hope that an end to the darkness is within reach.

## **Prayerful**

I've talked about how my prayer life has weakened over the years and how I long to strengthen that part of my faith again.

In 2021, I want to make an effort to pray more about the things that worry me and cause me anxiety.

I also want to pray more about the things that bring me joy and comfort, and remind myself that despite the pain of 2020, 2021 brings a chance for new and better things to arise.

## **Understanding**

And finally, my last resolution is to try to understand those who think differently from me.

I recently had a conversation with some very good friends about how difficult it is to understand people who have different beliefs than I do. Whether that's political, religious, or moral beliefs, I have a tough time understanding their justifications for believing a certain way that goes against my own views.

It's even more difficult these days to have a conversation with a person who thinks and believes in a polar opposite way than we do because we've become such argumentative and partisan people.

But through this conversation with friends, I began to understand that people make decisions either based on love or fear, and the "crazy" beliefs that some people have might not be so crazy after all. They most likely are making their decisions because they think they are doing what's best for them, their family, or their friends, and, in fact, it's the same way I make decisions.

By hoping for more understanding, I'm not saying that I will change how I believe or how they believe. But having more understanding means that maybe we can start to have pleasant and engaging conversations with each other once again, and leave behind the partisan bickering, yelling, and name-calling that have dominated our culture in recent years.

There's no doubt that 2020 was an awful year. It's undoubtedly the worst year I can remember living through. But 2021 brings new hope for a broken world. I hope that you've set resolutions for 2021 as well, and by holding onto that hope of new beginnings, we can surely get through this new year together.

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