



## A New Way to Live

Adapted from “New Me” series by Rod Loy.

On the first of every year, millions of Americans make a New Year’s resolution (or two or three) that they won’t keep. Still, despite the ritual’s repeated failings, we keep trying. This yearly tradition, which dates as far back as Ancient Rome, is a reminder that humans can’t stop believing in new beginnings. Why we keep making resolutions—and why they’re so hard to follow—comes down to the way our brains work. And a better understanding of the inner-workings of your noggin can help you follow through on your goals for 2017.

There is one obvious reason why most resolutions fail: We usually focus on goals or tasks that we haven’t been able to achieve over the past year. “You are making it your New Year’s goal because you keep failing at it,” says Tim Pychyl, a psychologist at Carleton University in Ottawa. The other terrible thing about New Year’s resolutions, he says, is that making them requires no action. The simple thought—the idea that we *intend* to lose weight or exercise more—satisfies our instant gratification: In the moment, just thinking about losing weight makes us feel good, and we don’t actually have to go out and do the tasks necessary to achieve that goal.

“They make the intention now, but they don’t do anything. And people love that. It’s like going to buy furniture and not having to pay anything until 2019. “Of course, I can do that,” says Pychyl, “That’s the selective nature of it.” He adds we would never form a New Year’s resolution around tasks we like to do. We already did those things the year before, so there’s nothing satisfying about pledging to keep them up.

Even as we try to overcome our resistance to our resolutions, something a little more powerful takes over in our brains: The force of habit. In simple terms, habits are connections of neurons that work together that have been beneficial to us over time. The more we execute the habitual behavior, the stronger those neuronal connections in our brains become.

Through the course of human evolution, habits have been a really good thing; they are automatic thoughts or actions that have, for example, saved us from predators. Unfortunately for your 2017 gym plans, anything that vital to our

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survival is extremely hard to shake. The brain's entire limbic system is devoted to this type of automatic thinking, while the prefrontal cortex—the decision-making center of our brain—does its best to determine when it can and should override our baser instincts.<sup>1</sup>

We know what is holding us back. But, somehow, it is too difficult to change. As men, we have all types of excuses. God gives men a way to walk in victory. His plan makes it possible for men to have a total makeover and become new.

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<sup>1</sup> Claire Maldarelli, "Why your brain makes New Year's resolutions impossible to keep," *Popular Science*, December 29, 2016, <http://www.popsci.com/how-to-use-brain-science-to-stick-to-your-new-years-resolutions> (accessed July 21, 2017).



## COURAGE

**C1:** Describe a time in your life when you were determined to quite doing something. What was the result?

**C2:** Why do you think men make resolutions? Why do you think men do not hold long to the resolutions? What are some of the resolutions you have made over the years?

## STRENGTH

**S1:** Describe what a resolve to take your relationship with God to another level in the next sixty days would look like for you?

**S2:** Read and answer the following.

### **Romans 7:16–20 (ESV)**

- What do you glean from these verses regarding decisions and resolutions?
- Have you ever had a time when your decisions did not result in the intended actions? Describe this time in your life? What were the results?
- From these verses, what is it that causes you to do things you do not want to do?

**S3:** Read and answer the following.

### **Romans 7:20–25 (ESV)**

- What do you glean from these verses?
- What is the starting point to a new you?



## ENDURANCE

**E1:** Describe a time in your life when you tried to do something in your own way? What was the result?

**E2:** List what your life on God's terms should look like? Give scripture references.

**E3:** If you could begin your life over again, what would you do differently? Find three younger men to share your journey and how you would do your life differently. What was their response?