
Chapter 2

Why the Word of the Year Works

In Chapter 1, I argue that words matter, but what I didn't tell you is why they matter from a theological perspective, and also why so many people struggle to find true transformation in the Word of the Year project (or any other resolution-based project).

The Theology Behind the Word of the Year

The Bible opens with these famous lines:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. -Genesis 1:1-3

One way to interpret this scene is that God transforms chaos into order by speaking specific words. God begins with 'light,' but goes on to speak, 'sky,' 'land,' 'seas,' and on and on. The Gospel of John builds on this concept in its opening verses:

The Word (Christ) was in the beginning. The Word was with God. The Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. He made all things. Nothing was made without Him making it. -John 1:1-3

Jesus, who is the Word, creates with words. In fact, Jesus created you with words, and with words, Jesus gave you the power to create:

**So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. -Genesis 1:27**

You are a word spoken by God who has been given the power (by being made in His image) to create with words. To be clear, I do not believe in manifestation (speak it, and it will be), but I do think there is power in meditating on God's Word. This is how Paul puts it:

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." -Philippians 4:8 NIV

As you focus on one word for the entire year, God will honor your thinking or meditating on one true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy word. You'll begin to see your word from multiple angles and perspectives. You'll have original thoughts and ideas about it, but it will grow throughout the year.

Meditation will lead to understanding and create life within you. In other words, God will take the parts of your life that are in chaos and, through your word, He will bring order to those chaotic areas. So, if this project is so powerful, why is it such a struggle for so many people?

Why You Struggle to Grow from Your Resolutions

New Year's resolutions suck.

If you need the stats to support your feeling that we don't do a great job keeping our commitments from the beginning of the year, I have plenty for you. In one set of surveys, of the 41-52% of Americans who made New Year's resolutions, only 14% kept them. Those studies were conducted in 2007 and 2016. More recent studies have found similar results.

In 2024, 30-50% of Americans made a resolution, but only 25% followed through on it beyond January (Did you know there is an actual day of the year known as 'Quitters Day'?). A whopping 10% made it the whole year. That means less than 1% of the 300 million Americans make and keep a New Year's Resolution.

That would include me.

I remember my first encounter with the idea of making life changes at the New Year, when I was a third-grade student. My teacher introduced the concept to my class, and we were all encouraged to participate. That's all I remember because I definitely didn't follow through, which is most of America (and probably the world).

When asked why they didn't keep their resolution, one of three answers came up repeatedly. Most people don't follow through on their New Year's Resolution for one of these three reasons:

- A lack of motivation
- The busyness of life
- A shift in goals and priorities

In a moment of transparency, the Word of the Year project stats are most likely very similar to the ones listed above. While the Word of the Year is much more than a resolution, following through

on it still requires some of the same skills. Again, in honesty, there have been very fruitful and forgettable years, as I've participated in over 15 Word of the Year sessions.

Looking back on those years that weren't quite as good as I hoped, I recognize the very things that sink a New Year's Resolution. I wasn't motivated, or I let life get too busy, or my priorities shifted from those at the start of the year. These roadblocks could very well pop up in your life, too. You'll lose your mojo, get busy with life's day-in and day-out chores, and your goals will shift throughout the year. So, how will you make the Word of the Year successful? How will you be in the 1% who see the year through? I'm glad you asked!

Over the last 5-6 years, I've been able to dial into the Word of the Year and found a key to success year after year. And wouldn't you believe it, it boils down to one word. To be successful in your Word of the Year project, you need the essence of one word to see it through.

INTENTIONALITY

When I look back at my first year participating in the Word of the Year project, living with intentionality was one of the lessons I learned about FREEDOM. Another word to describe both intentionality and freedom is agency. Agency means that you have the power to make choices or take control of what you have agency over. **A Word of the Year is taking agency of your life this year.**

Agency means living with intentionality.

If you want to grow this year, you must be intentional. This is true of a New Year's Resolution, the Word of the Year, or any self-help tool. We change when we take deliberate steps to grow. In the following sessions, I will give you tips and tools to succeed with your Word of the Year, but you'll only see growth if you intentionally implement those steps.

In the story of Moses parting the Red Sea, the people of Israel have the Red Sea before them while the Egyptian army bears down on their backs. The people begin to curse Moses for bringing them to the desert to die, so Moses falls to his knees asking God for help. This is how God responds:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to keep going. Lift up your special stick and put out your hand over the sea, and divide it. Then the people of Israel will go through the sea on dry land. -Exodus 14:15-16

Let me give you the two-word summarization: "Get moving!" We can sit, stand, wait, and wonder what is next, but sometimes we just have to act. **Action takes living intentionally.** So, if you are ready to take control of your life and make intentional decisions, let's move forward with finalizing your Word of the Year and what it means for you.

Session 2 Homework | Finalize Your Word

Your homework for this session is to pull out the list of words you brainstormed from the last session and narrow them down to one word. Depending on how long your list is, take a few days to narrow it down to one word.

First, I don't want you to overthink or overspiritualize this process. I firmly believe you can grow from most of the words you already have on your list. **You will grow not because of the magic of the word you choose but because you intentionally put in the work to grow from your word.**

Second, read through your list of words and quickly cross off any words you know aren't right. It's okay to work from feeling. This is an art, not a science. As you go through this list, circle any word that jumps off the page at you.

Third, go through the list again (and again if needed) to narrow it down until you land on one final word. I usually take 4-5 days to process this list, from brainstorming a list to choosing my final word. It's okay to take your time.

One last thing I want you to do is write down how you hope to grow and change as a result of choosing this word. If you follow through with the Word of the Year project the entire year, this will change, but I want you to have a starting point.

If you would like more help on this step, take a look at this [post and video from my friend Todd Van Fleet](#). I introduced Todd to The Word of the Year in 2016, which also changed his life. His process for finding a word is different from mine, and I appreciate this because it is a creative process, so there is no single way to approach it.

My encouragement for you is to take the plunge and choose a word.

So what's your Word?

About Andy



My name is Andy Bondurant. In over 25 years of professional and volunteer ministry experience in the urban, suburban, international, and domestic worlds, and now as a pastor at a local church in Kansas, I have found that most people make connecting to God too complicated. Most people don't believe they can personally connect to Jesus.

Understanding the God of the Bible is easier than you might think, and I want to show you how.

You can find a new article about once or twice a week, where I'll show you how to connect with and understand God. If you don't want to miss one of these, sign up for updates, and I'll send you a free eBook devotional that will help you draw closer to God in just 30 days.

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