

MONDAY, JANUARY 4, 2010

What is the purpose for making resolutions?

For most of us, we are concerned with doing things better. Remembering past failures causes us to want to do better and be better. So, we begin to think of things we would like to change in our lives and make resolutions to have that happen. There is a problem with most resolutions. They are shallow and they depend upon the willpower of the one making the desired change.

God has something better in mind.

God desires to bring change into our lives through the power of His Holy Spirit residing in us as we yield ourselves to Him. These are the types of resolutions that stand a chance of being kept. Jonathan Edwards made such resolutions. Some consider Edwards to be the greatest American theologian who ever lived. At the age of seventeen, Edwards began a diary of resolutions. It is an amazing list and gives insight into his heart. He was fully engaged and on mission with God.

Think about what it would be like to have some of these as your resolutions:

4. Resolved, never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God; nor be, nor suffer it, if I can avoid it.
7. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.
16. Resolved, never to speak evil of anyone, so that it shall tend to his dishonor, more or less, upon no account except for some real good.
25. Resolved, to examine carefully, and constantly, what that one thing in me is, which causes me in the least to doubt of the love of God; and to direct all my forces against it.
55. Resolved, to endeavor to my utmost to act as I can think I should do, if I had already seen the happiness of heaven, and hell torments.
70. Let there be something of benevolence, in all that I speak.

Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake. Remember to read over these resolutions once a week."

This is but a sampling, the list can be found in its entirety at: <http://www.theresolved.com/downloads/resolutions.pdf>

As I look over the list and I consider the love of God that is evident in each of them, I am humbled by my tendency to be self-focused. God has a purpose for each of our lives. That purpose is to get on mission with Him. We are saved and filled with the Holy Spirit for the purpose of being channels of His power reaching into the world. His Spirit is to flow out of us uncontrollably like a river (John 7:38). God is on a mission to save that which was lost. He uses us to do that. Are you on mission with God? Does your list of resolutions prove that is the case?

Family Discussion Question: What would our resolutions look like if we were fully engaged with God's mission?

TUESDAY, JANUARY 5, 2010

Please read Judges Chapters 6-7. This is the account of Gideon that we looked at in the message last weekend.

You remember that we looked at the excuses that Gideon offered to keep from obeying God. They didn't all look like excuses, did they? That is one of the fundamental truths of excuses. They need to look like something else in order for them to work. We have to deceive ourselves into believing the excuse so that we can use it to its fullest potential.

Do you know someone who gives excuses? Most times, they do not realize they are excuse givers and they do not realize it neutralizes their potential for growth and success.

Gideon was an excuse giver. When you consider that he saw and talked to God, it really is amazing; yet he is just a product of his culture. His people—the Israelites—wanted to serve other gods. They wanted to please themselves and they wanted to blame God when that didn't work out well. Even when they cried out for help (Judges 6:6), it was from an attitude of pain instead of repentance. To them God was a cosmic genie whose job was to give good things in spite of their actions. Even more than that, they had gotten to the point where they did not trust Him at all because He was not acting the way they wanted. That is apparent in Gideon's comment to God in Judges 6:13.

Are you amazed at the patience of God as you read these chapters? I am. It causes me to be amazed at His patience with me. How many times are we tempted to use the same excuses when God waits for us to get on mission with Him?

God has a plan to save the Israelites and that plan requires Gideon to obey (Judges 6:14). It seems to take a long time to convince him of that. God has a plan to save our world too, and that plan requires that you and I obey (Matthew 28:19-20; John 17:18, 20:21). How's that going? Our culture is not all that different from that of Gideon's day. People think of God as a cosmic genie now just as then. They need the truth and they need it to come through us. Is it? Are you finding yourself giving excuses?

The next couple of days we will review the excuses Gideon gave to see if we can relate to any of them. If you can relate—do business with God. Repent and turn from the excuse and step out in faith! Together we will get on mission with God. We will look at just one today:

Excuse #1 God has not really been faithful in the past and He is not really here now (6:13). Do you ever feel like God has abandoned you and left you hanging out to dry? That is what Gideon is accusing God of. *Maybe once in the distant past God cared, but He certainly does not now, so why should I bother getting excited about what He wants me to do?*

Family Discussion Question: Am I an excuse giver?

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2010

Please reread Judges 6:12-33. We will take a look at some more possible excuses. Remember to bring the ones you use to God and ask Him to help you get rid of them.

Excuse #2 See yourself as unworthy of His call (6:15). Gideon did not think that he had what it takes. After all, he was hiding as he was threshing the wheat. He was not trying to be the standout. *Do I see myself as not having what it takes? Does that keep me from sharing what I know about God?*

Excuse #3 Tell yourself that your stuff isn't more important to you than obedience (6:15). In Gideon's reply to God, he states that he doesn't have much to offer and yet later in the chapter we see that his family had a lot and that he actually was able to call 10 servants to help him. *Do I see my resources as not being enough? Do I hold them too tightly?*

Excuse #4 Doubt that God is really with you—test it by making Him wait (6:17). Gideon did not believe this was really God sending him. I wonder who he thought it was. If he thought it was God, why did he make Him wait? We know what God asks of us. *Do I believe that God is really with me? Really? If I really do believe and yet I am not going out, why am I making God wait?*

Excuse #5 Be afraid that God was with you and you missed it (6:22). Now Gideon is really troubled. He now believes that it was God and he realizes he didn't listen. He is afraid for his life. This excuse is one that can creep up on us quite easily and it paralyzes us. It is the thought that I have let God down and so now I could never be used by Him. May I speak clearly and gently to you? You have missed Him at times. You have. Everyone has. Do not let that be an excuse to keep you from going now! *Do I let thoughts of God being disappointed with me keep me from following Him?*

Excuse #6 Be afraid of how others will respond (6:27). It is interesting that Gideon was most afraid of the ones who were like him. He was afraid to obey God in front of his family and the others who claimed to be followers of God. He was afraid of rocking the boat. Everyone was comfortable with the status quo. It is amazing to think of how many times we are afraid to stand up for God around others who know God. It is as if we think that we may be the one who stands out in an odd way. It can be especially hard around your family, can't it? *Am I afraid of the response I think I may get if I obey God?*

Family Discussion Question: Am I starting to get rid of the excuses?

THURSDAY, JANUARY 7, 2010

Today is the last day we will look at some of the excuses that kept Gideon from experiencing the quick hand of God. As we review these excuses, allow yourself to consider the amazing patience God had with Gideon. God so longed for the Israelites to be free from the oppression of the Midianites that He waited for Gideon to "join Him". God longs to free this world from the oppression of evil. Consider how He has been patient as He waits for you. Please read Judges 6:25-7:10.

Excuse #7 Obey some small things quickly only for selfish motives (6:27). At first glance, this looks like a good thing that Gideon is doing. He goes right away and tears down the altar, just as God told him to. But the Bible reveals that his motive for obedience was not love for God. Rather, his motivation was the fear of man. The right thing done for the wrong motives is sin. God looks at the heart. *Are there some acts of obedience in my life that I choose so I can feel like I have fulfilled some requirement? What are those things? Are my motives pure?*

Excuse #8 Wait for more help before you obey (6:35). The Spirit of God comes on Gideon and we begin to get excited that he will actually get going and get on with his mission. But we see that even here, the potential for excuse comes. In his mind, the Spirit isn't quite enough. He needs to surround himself with a visible presence of strength. *Do I wait until I have a lot of help around me, or am I ready to go with the power of the Spirit in me?*

Excuse #9 Don't believe God will fulfill His word (6:36). For all that Gideon has experienced, he is still not certain that God will do what He says He will do. It is really quite amazing! He doubts God's word. *As I look at this, I must ask myself, in what ways do I doubt God's word? In what ways do my actions prove that I really don't believe Him?*

Excuse #10 Don't think that God is your God (6:36, 39). Here Gideon uses the distant name for God (Elohim), not the intimate name (Yahweh). *In what ways do I think of God as some distant figure that is not intimately involved in my life?*

Excuse #11 Even when God proves Himself—don't believe (6:39). How much of this needs to happen? Could I be honest here? It's a really good thing I'm not God. Gideon would have been slapped big time. *What am I waiting for? How many times have I tried God's patience by wanting more information before I obey?*

Excuse #12 When it is clear the time is right, get paralyzed by fear (7:10). Have you ever felt that nudge to ask someone if they know Jesus? To forgive someone? To be kind to someone? What has been your response? *Do I let fear keep me from obedience?*

Family Discussion Question: Are there any excuses left in me?

FRIDAY, JANUARY 8, 2010

Please read Judges 7:10-22.

At the end of excuses comes this amazing experience called worship.

As I have spent time with this account of Gideon, in a new way I am impressed with the things that keep us from the pure worship of God.

Think of all of the excuses we allow to overtake our minds and our hearts. These rob us of the potential of being on mission with God. They keep us paralyzed in a never-ending cycle of self-feeding and self-enhancement called religion. We get sucked in to the whirlpool of trying to learn enough to be of value. That has the potential of dragging us down into ineffectiveness.

We were not designed for religion, we were designed for relationship.

God is good. God is with us. God is for us. God loves us. All of the excuses are lies to keep us from realizing it and they keep us from worshipping Him in spirit and in truth.

When Gideon finally allows God to burst into his heart, he is swept away and runs into joyful obedience in response to the God who is who He says He is. It is contagious. "Get up, Come on, let's go! . . . Watch me! . . . follow my lead!" Is this really the Gideon we have come to know? Something has changed.

It is the something we are all designed for. It is the something that will change us forever.

It is pure worship of God with reckless abandon. It is being able to say this: I am His and I am glad I am.

I am a radical follower of Jesus Christ. He is my Shepherd-my Light-my Life. I would be completely lost without Him and I am totally blown away that He wants me just as I am—and then I realize that just as I am is pretty great, because I have been fashioned by His hand. I am special to the Creator and He is special to me.

I realize there is nothing better in life and nothing more that is needed and I want everyone to experience the same thing so that God will be praised by all He has made. Nothing could keep me from shouting it to the world. He is my loving Lord who I willingly and lovingly serve wholeheartedly.

What excuses keep you from experiencing the above section? Is there something in your heart that says it is not possible? Recognize that as a lie and doubt and an excuse to keep you from the victory you have available in Christ Jesus.

Oh dear friend, may I beseech you to worship the King and let your obedience flow from that worship. It will be contagious!

Get on mission with God!

Family Discussion Question: Am I a worshipper of God?



Pastor Chuck Cervenka

JANUARY 4 - 8, 2010

GETTING RID OF EXCUSES

2010 ON MISSION WITH GOD



A Disciplemaking Tool
**DIGGING
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