

Choosing the Good Part

Following Jesus into 2012

Luke 10:38-42; Matthew 6:25-33

Most Common Resolutions

As one year winds up and another comes, it is a common time for people to take stock of their current state, and declare changes that they want to put in play in the next year. A new season, a clean slate, another chance to “get it right”. Many times these resolutions are driven by dissatisfaction in various areas of life. The top 10 New Year’s resolutions reflect this:



Some people refuse to make resolutions because they don't believe they can keep them, or feel the practice is worthless. In any case, year after year, people come to this point and have to come to a decision regarding how they will enter the new year.

Common Needs and Desires

This list of resolutions shows that there are many desires and needs that are common to most people. Not only this, we end up chasing the same types of things, sometimes out of desire, others out of necessity. The interesting thing is that while we end up chasing the same common desires and needs as everyone else, there is something that we, as Christians know: *there is more to this thing called Christianity than we are experiencing (to see the 4 barriers to experiencing Maximum Faith, click the following link to read information from the Barna Group: <http://t.co/dCWbsYkQ>).* Even with this, we take the same stance when it comes to our spiritual lives and growth as we do with other needs and desires. Jesus saw the same thing happening in His day, and wanted to address this with those who were listening to Him.

Setting the Standard

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect – Matthew 5:48

Jesus began his discourse in the Sermon on the Mount talking about the differences between “normal living” and living in the Kingdom of God. The people of God had their idea of what was important both in their own lives and to God, and were doing their best to fulfill both. Jesus, however gave a different view of what living in the Kingdom was, and showed that, not only could earthly righteousness not compare to God’s standard, it could not achieve it. There is a common belief that God gave His commandments to show us that we could not keep them, but this is not God’s character or M.O. This was not a means to condemn people, but to invite them to live a different way

You have heard that it was said “eye for eye and tooth for tooth”. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also... that you may be sons of your Father in heaven... - Matthew 5:38-45 (abridged)

Jesus was giving people an opportunity to experience a deeper righteousness. A more real experience of the life of the kingdom, and a life that touched people in ways they would not expect. It was an invitation to see the kingdom of God for all that it was and could be, and to allow the kingdom and the righteousness that comes from God to influence how they approached every situation, and to be manifest rather than just being spoken or thought of. That invitation is an eternal one, an invitation that Jesus constantly gives to us.

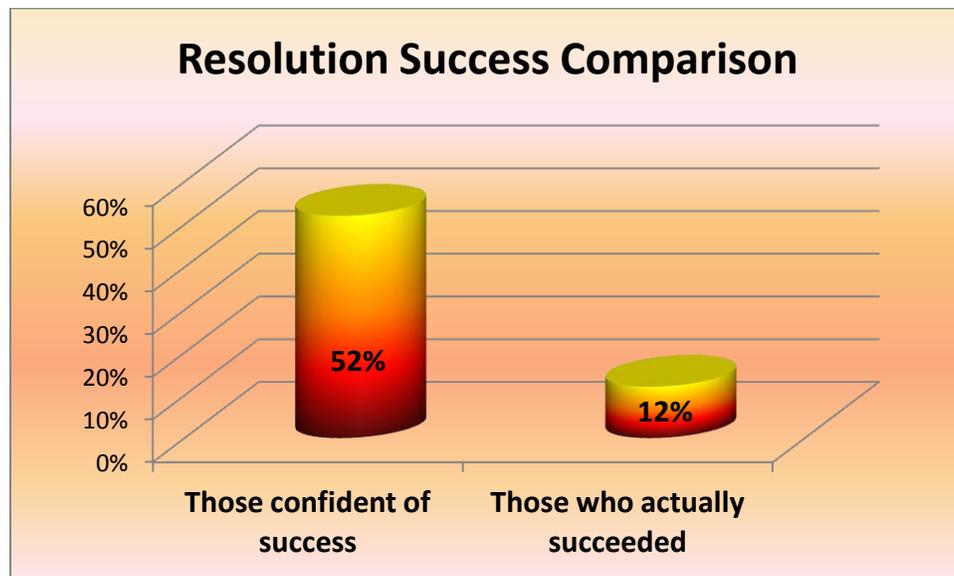
*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have **life** and have it to the full – John 10:10*

The key to Jesus’ statement lies in **His** definition of life, not ours. Life to the full is not just more of the same things we have been chasing after. Nor is it more of the same religious practice that we have been doing, but it is accepting the gift that Jesus gives, not just at the point of salvation, but as a constant flow of His life into ours. It is by definition **more than necessary; something further; superior; more eminent.**

The kingdom, righteousness and life Jesus speaks of are simply *more remarkable* than what we are used to experiencing, but are what we are supposed to not only experience, but to seek after.

Why Resolutions Fail

For most people, the reason that the resolutions fail has little to do with the validity of the resolution itself. People start off very strong, but something happens in short order: **they realize they can live without the fulfillment of the resolution.**



After hours, days or weeks of activity with few results, the logical decision is to cut your losses, and go back to life as you know it. Resolutions are made based on our thought that they are *good ideas*, much like those who decide to go to church on Christmas. No one would fault the person for such a decision, but eventually they find that there are as many reasons to not continue with the decision as there are to continue.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" – Matthew 18:21

Peter asked the right question, and showed that he was listening to what Jesus was teaching: if after 3 tries the person doesn't want to listen, regard him in the same manner as you would a heathen or tax collector. For Peter to ask if 7 times was enough meant that he understood that our lives are to be better than the norm, and 7 times was significantly better than 3. However, Peter's question also revealed that he mistook the combination of grace and discipline (a.k.a. living by the law) for true forgiveness

When you're
tempted to lose
patience with
someone, think
how patient God
has been with
you all the time.

Yet, even at 7 times, built into Peter's thought process was the idea that at some point, *forgiving his brother was not as important as holding to the hurt*. In Peter's mind, he could push his potential and resolve to a certain point, maybe even further than most, but no further. No one would fault Peter for refusing forgiveness when the sin hit double digits. Therefore, Peter's resolution (to demonstrate a real life of forgiveness) was wrought with the potential for failure. Many of our resolutions are the same way.

Seeking is not Casual

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
– Matthew 6:33

The word "seek" in Greek (ζητέω) carries with it the idea that what is being sought has to be found. While this sounds simple, it is actually very key. People who seek in this way do not give up until they have the object of their desire. It is mad Captain Ahab going after Moby Dick. FBI agent Hanratty chasing Frank Abagnale for years, when most would have said no more. Seeking is active, deliberate, goal oriented, and holds the object in the highest value. This is also another reason that most resolutions fail: **they are just not valuable enough.**

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought the field – Matthew 13:44

As we approach 2012, considering our quest for the kingdom of God, and everything else in our life, we must do so with the same fervency as the man who purchased the field just to get the treasure

Seeking More from Life

Jesus showed what most people seek after: food, drink, clothing.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more [important] than food, and the body more [important] than clothes? – Matthew 6:25

The word “important” was added for emphasis, but the original phrase is “***is not life more than food and the body more than clothes?***” Jesus was not advocating a life of asceticism, but was again offering the people an opportunity to see themselves and their lives differently. This was not a discussion about eternal life, about extreme spirituality, but rather about their current state of being: their souls, their physical beings, their current surroundings. By focusing solely on the fulfillment of those things, they were missing out on what was more important, more fulfilling, more rewarding.

As Jesus and His disciples were on their way, He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. She had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said – Luke 10:38-39

We can get the impression that Mary was the flighty, irresponsible one who wanted to do the easy things. However, we can see, especially from Jesus' response that Mary was nothing of the sort. She saw something desirable and valuable in Jesus' teaching, and was not going to rest or be distracted until she received all that was there for her. While Martha was looking for the “clothing of recognition”, Mary was looking for what the Kingdom of God would do and be in her life. Martha's recognition would be forgotten until the next time she served, but what Mary received, per Jesus, “would not be taken away from her”. ***As we go into 2012, are we engaged in that which will change our lives, and the lives of those around us for the good?***

Uncomfortable Balance

Many times our resolutions pit one part of our lives against another, and because of this we have to sacrifice something that has had value in order to achieve the goal ahead of us. This is another reason resolutions fail: ***fear of loss***.

Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth – Matthew 19:21-22

Jesus answered this for those listening, as well as for the rich young ruler. Jesus was not advocating not having our needs or desires met as a path to a greater spirituality, but rather having a hunger for the things of God that so eclipses the other things in our lives, and for seeing God as our resource even for the basic needs and desires.

So do not worry, saying, what shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them –
Matthew 6:31 – 32

The balance would put God's things first and have everything else fulfilled in its time and place. It was uncomfortable because it was totally new. In all, it was a new way of life (notice how he compares the pursuit of not dreams, but everyday basics to what our pursuit of God should be).