

Resolution Solution
Just Say No
January 12, 2020

Good morning everyone.¹

Thank you for making the effort to get through the snow and ice and cold to be here in the room or in the café.

And, to those watching online, we also appreciate you not just sleeping in, but making the effort to join us from wherever you are.

We're in week two of our series, *Resolution Solution*, and last Sunday we started out by talking about the fact that this is the season when our culture encourages us to focus on *self-improvement* ... which is why most New Year's resolutions are the answer to the

question:

“What needs to be done *about me*? How do I make a better version of *me*?”

- How do I get slimmer?
- How do I get stronger?
- How do I get out of debt?
- How do I get smarter?
- Etc.

But what we said last week is that, while those are important questions and important goals – and we really should set some of those goals and try to attain them – there’s a bigger, broader, and better question to ask.

In fact, if you have ever had somebody do something for you when you were in need, it’s

because they asked themselves this particular question.

For example, 25 years ago, a group of people stopped asking “what needs to be done about *me*?” and, instead, started asking ...

“What needs to be done about *what’s around me*?”

And in response, they banded together to start this church, because they saw a need for a church that was focused on reaching and serving the people outside of it.

Because they answered that question why you’re sitting in this room or watching online. More importantly, many of you have had your life changed and your eternity changed.

So, as we said last week, if you really want to become a *better person*, part of that is doing something that makes the world around you

a better place.

Of course, figuring out what that “something” is, isn’t all that easy.

- As you look around our community, there are lots of needs.
- As you look around our country, there are lots of needs.
- As you look around the world, there are lots of needs.

... which is why we also spent some time last week talking about *another* question that helps to narrow it down a bit ... a question that is somewhat emotional in nature and maybe even a little disturbing.

And that question is ... “what breaks your heart?”

What breaks your heart?

Here's how you know what breaks your heart.

You hear about 10 different needs, 10 different things going on in the world and you think, "Oh, that's too bad, that's too bad, that's too bad, that's too bad" and then you just change the channel. You move on to the next thing.

But there's that one group, there's that one issue, and when you hear about *that*, something rises up inside of you and you think, "Something needs to be done about *that*."

And you find yourself getting a little bit amped up about it when you talk about it. You go on the internet to get some more information about it. You try to find out "is there anybody out there doing something about this?"

And you do those things because that issue or that problem does something to your heart.

So “what breaks your heart” is a good place to start when trying to figure out what you should do about what’s around you.

Of course, some of us by nature just aren’t very emotional. The things we see around us don’t move us like they do others, so that question doesn’t help all that much.

So, I want to give you another one that might reveal where you could focus as you think about what ought to be done about what’s around you.

How would you finish this sentence?

“At the end of my life, I would like people to line up and thank me for _____.”

Fast forward the calendar to the end of your life and try to imagine all of the people you have come into contact with over the years.

Try to imagine them coming by your house and stopping in to say, "hey, you may not have known me, but I want you to know that I am really thankful that you <fill in the blank>?"

At the end of your life, what would you like people to line up and thank you for? That's the question.

And I'm not talking about your spouse or your kids or your grandkids. You're going to love them well, so they're all going to be lining up and thanking you. That's a given.

Instead, I'm talking about *outside of your family*, what would you like people to line up and thank you for at the end of your life?

That is a profound question. It's pretty revealing about what matters most to you beyond you (if there is anything).

By the way, neither of these questions are particularly "religious." This isn't just for Christians. This is for everybody.

If you're *alive*, you need to be able to answer or at least wrestle with:

- "What breaks my heart?"
- Or "What do I want people to line up and thank me for?"

Now, that said ... the *problem* with these questions – and I think this is why so few people ever ask them and why (even if we do) we decide that "somebody else is going to have to do something about that; somebody else is going to have to figure that out."

The problem with these questions is that if you decide to move, even in just a small way, towards the *answers* – if you decide you're going to do something about what's around you ..

The problem is ... *it will require something of you.*

- It's going to require some time.
- It's going to require some money.
- It's going to require you to miss out on opportunities in some other area of life.
- It's even going to take away some time from your family, from some of the things that you value.

It's going to cost you something. It's going to cost you some *life*.

And the problem with it costing us some life is that ...

We are, by nature, life preservers, and life savers.

I don't want to give away my life. I want to save my life.

And I don't want to risk my life. That's why I've got insurance and a security system and a seat belt and air bags.

I do everything possible to preserve ...

- My life
- And my family's life
- And my time
- And my money.

I'm by nature a life preserver.

And you are by nature a life preserver, a life saver.

And the problem with "what breaks my heart?" and "what do I want people to line up and thank me for?" is that, to actually *do something* about them, I have to begin letting go of some the things that I define as "life."

Things like ...

- My time
- My money
- My reputation
- My opportunities
- My advancement in whatever it is I'm leading or involved with.

And this is the tension.

If you discover the “thing” ... the group of people (whether it’s families or children or people in poverty) ... or something going on economically or even politically in our country ...

... when you find out what it is and you decide to get involved, it’s going to cost you.

And it’s going to feel like you are giving up or giving away some of your life.

What Jesus Says

And as we wrestle with that tension and wonder if it’s worth it, Jesus comes along and says ...

“Whosoever devotes themselves to themselves will have nothing *but* themselves to show for themselves.”

Well, that's not exactly what He said. But, as we'll see, it's a very good summary of His overall teaching concerning how we think about ourselves and about our lives.

Whosoever devotes themselves to themselves ...

Whoever thinks, "I'm going to save my life. I can't afford to give that away, I can't afford to look over there because I need to worry about me, I need to focus on me, I need to take care of me ..."

Whoever devotes themselves to themselves ...

... which is what we all naturally do.

Whoever devotes themselves to themselves will have nothing but themselves to show for

themselves.

And Jesus taught (as we'll see) that if all you have at the end of your life is what you did for yourself, then your life is a total loss. In the attempt to preserve your life, you've actually lost it, with nothing to show for it.

So, let's look at what Jesus actually said.

One day Jesus is going along and Luke tells us that ...

*Large crowds were traveling
with Jesus. Luke
14:25 (NIV)*

And what Luke is saying is that people didn't just show up to listen to Jesus speak.

Instead, when Jesus finished speaking, they didn't go away. They stuck around until He made his next move, which made sense

because, after all, Jesus was healing them and sometimes even feeding them!

I mean, why would they want to go home? It was way more fun to keep following Him around waiting to see what's next.

So ... large crowds were traveling with Jesus ...

*... and turning to them ...
Luke 14:25 (NIV)*

... which makes me imagine Jesus stopping in his tracks because he has had enough of these crowds and He needs to say something very pointed to them.

He needs to say "You're traveling around with me and it's a lot of fun. But you need to get something very clear in your mind."

Turning to them, Jesus said,

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters ..."

Luke 14:26 (NIV)

"If anybody follows me and doesn't hate their family ..."

And let's stop right there and admit that this sounds like Jesus has either hopped on the crazy train or is starting a cult where you need to cut all ties to your family.

So let's clarify that He's not encouraging anyone to *feel* hatred or *act* hateful towards their families or anyone else.

In fact, on other occasions, Jesus made it very clear that His followers are to do the exact opposite. Instead of hating people who everyone thinks *deserve* to be hated – their enemies – they're to love them instead.

What Jesus is doing in this statement is hyperbole – overstating something to an attention-getting extreme in order to make His point even stronger.

And the point He is making has to do with who is ultimately going to be in control; who is going to call the shots in the life of those who are His followers.

Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sister ...

And yes ...

“– even their own life – ”

And, again, Jesus isn't talking crazy. He's not talking about embracing self-destructive emotion. This isn't “My life is so terrible. I just hate it.” And He's not saying “you need to feel

bad about yourself.”

This is about deciding that *you* aren't going to call the shots and that *you're* not ultimately going to be in control. It's deciding that your life is not primarily about *you*.

“A person,” Jesus, says, “who doesn't hate their family and even their own life ...”

Such a person ...

*“... cannot be my disciple.”
Luke 14:26 (NIV)*

And, of course they can't because to be someone's disciple is to declare *them* to be your leader. To become someone's disciple is to say, “I am a *follower* and I follow you.”

So this statement was Jesus' in-your-face reality-check way of saying, “Look, I know you all are following me around – traveling

wherever I travel.”

“But let me be clear: you can’t actually *be* a true follower or a sincere disciple until you decide once and for all who is going to be Lord, who is going to call the shots, who has the ultimate say in your own life. My authority must supersede that of everyone else in your life, including *you*.”

And that was hard for them to hear just like it’s hard for us to hear.

But then Jesus takes it even further and He makes a crowd-thinning statement if there ever was one.

He says,

“And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

Luke 14:27 (NIV)

“You can be my traveling buddy. You can eat the free food. I’m willing to heal you and your mama and your mama’s mama, but don’t kid yourself: you are not my disciple until you decide to come and die to *you*, so you can say ‘yes’ to Me.”

And, at that point, the “what’s in it for me” part of the crowd left Jesus because ... and here’s the thing: *this sounds like such a downer.*

Dying and taking up your cross just doesn’t sound all that enjoyable. In fact, it sounds *bad*, like we’re *supposed* to miss out and be miserable all the time if we follow Jesus. If we don’t feel that way, we must not be doing it right.

But that’s not the point at all. Jesus wasn’t trying to take something good away from those who follow Him.

Instead, this was His way of saying “I have something *better* for you. I’m making you a better offer, but you will never be able to say ‘yes’ to *that* until you learn to say ‘no’ to *you*.” Jesus is actually giving us an invitation to more life, not less.

Let’s look at another example of what Jesus said and it will become clearer.

On another occasion ...

The Gospel of Mark says that ...

*Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples.
Mark 8:34 (NIV)*

In the first story, Jesus was trying to drive them away because there were too many of them. This time, He called the crowd to him along with his disciples.

And He said,

*“Whoever wants to be my
disciple ...” Mark 8:34 (NIV)*

.. not just my traveling buddy, not someone who just shows up wherever I show up.

“Whoever wants to be my follower, whoever wants to be my disciple ...”

*“... must deny themselves,
take up their cross and follow
me.” Mark 8:34 (NIV)*

Same thing He said before, right? Sounds like such a downer, right?

But this time, Jesus goes even further.

This time, He explains *why* He continually makes what sounds like such a radical demand.

This time, He goes right to the heart of that tension between being a life preserver and actually *doing something* about those questions of “what breaks my heart” and “what do I want people to line up and thank me for?”

He says ...

“For whoever wants to save their life ... ” Mark 8:35 (NIV)

That’s me. That’s you. We want to save our lives. We’re life savers. We’re life preservers. And, in a physical sense that’s how it should be.

But when Jesus says, “whoever wants to save their life” He is not talking about that.

Instead, He means “whoever lives every single day with their ultimate priority as

themselves and their self-preservation; whoever wakes up every day and lives as if everything is a means to an end ...

- My family is a means to an end.
- My spouse is a means to an end.
- My kids are means to an end.
- My job is.
- My possessions are.
- Even my religion is.

“Everything is a means to an end and I am the end.

“And I would do just about anything other than something illegal that would send me to jail (because then I undermine my own success), but I would do just about anything to preserve me.”

Jesus says, *“If that is your approach to life, I have some very bad news for you. I have*

some shocking news for you.”

“Whoever wants to save their life ...”

... will lose it.” *Mark 8:35*
(NIV)

The very thing that you spend your life trying to hold on to, you lose out on.

But, Jesus says – and this gets to the invitation part.

He says ...

*“But whoever loses their life
for me and for the gospel
[meaning ‘my agenda’] ...”*

And, again, this is hyperbole. This was not a call for His followers to throw away their lives. Jesus isn’t talking about dying as a martyr.

He’s talking about people who are willing to

say ...

- "Jesus, the answer is 'yes' to whatever you want."
- "Jesus, the answer is *your way*, not *my way*."
- "Jesus, the answer is, 'you are the supreme authority in my life over my parents, over my children, over my family, over my boss, and yes, even over me.'"

Jesus says, "If *that* is your approach to life, then I have some *good* news for you. I have some *shocking* news for you."

"Whoever loses their life in that way ...

"... will save it." Mark 8:35
(NIV)

What an incredible invitation!

Jesus was saying, “if you allow me to lead you *outside of you*, you will find something *bigger and better than you*, something far more fulfilling.”

Friends, denying yourself and dying to yourself isn't about missing out and being miserable. It's about saying “no” to you so you can say “yes” to something bigger than you, because here's the bottom line:

As long as I'm all about *me*, I can't really be all about *anything else*.

And as long as I'm all about me, I can never say yes to the things that are outside of me.

And if you decide to wrestle with the question, “What breaks your heart?” you will ultimately be led away from you.

And if you wrestle with the question, “what would I want people to line up at the end of my life and thank me for?” ultimately, at some point, you will have to lose *you*. You will have to walk away from *you*.

At some point, it will no longer be about self-improvement. It will be about self-denial.

And Jesus is saying, “I’m inviting you into that life because I want to rescue you from *you*, because left to yourself, you will live for yourself.”

And Jesus says, “If you live for yourself, at the end of your life, it will be a total loss. For whosoever devotes themselves to themselves will have nothing *but* themselves to show for themselves.”

A Life of Purpose

And you don't want that to happen to you!

You don't want to get to the end of your 40s, your 50s, or your 60s, and you got this perfect-looking life. Everything's insured, everything's paid for and everything is shiny. And everybody looks at you and envies you, but, in the end, in reality, *it's all about you.*

You don't want that to happen to you because ...

You are not enough for you to live for.

You are not enough for you to live for.

- There is more to you, as we said last week, than a body and a balance sheet.
- There is more to you than self-improvement.

- There's more potential in you than "you've never looked better," and you've never been closer to your ideal weight, and, "oh my gosh, you can fit into the same jeans you wore in college."

Who cares? I mean, that's great, but there's more to you than that, isn't there?

That's what Jesus is saying. That's what He's inviting you to.

This is one reason why I love being a Christian – a follower of Jesus – because it's an invitation to be *more* not less. It's an invitation to significance.

It's an invitation to make sure that, at the end of your life, there is someone who says "Thank you, because if it wasn't for you, this would not have happened."

- “If not for your sacrifice ...
- If not for your self-denial ...
- If not for your money ...
- If not for your time ...
- If not for the fact that you took some of your passion and pointed it in the direction of my need ...

... my life wouldn't be what it is today.”

And in so many words, this was Jesus' invitation to His audience and to ours: to live a life of purpose.

Now, let me put on my grandpa hat and tell you something you may not realize, especially if you're younger than 40.

When you're just starting out what you're

mostly interested in – and I was this way, sometimes still am this way, it's just natural ...

When you're just starting out in life, purpose doesn't matter that much. What you're most interested in when you're young is ...

- Being accepted socially.
- Being thought of as competent by your peers.
- Finding someone to love who loves you back.
- Having the same kind of money and possessions as everyone around you.

And when you're young, you think "If I could have those things, it would be enough."

But here's what I've discovered and here's

what you are going to discover at some point in your life if you haven't already: when you get those things – and it doesn't matter how successful you are or unsuccessful you are, how much you own or don't own ...

No matter where you end up, at some point in your life, at some point in your experience, at some point along the way, you're going to ask yourself the same question everybody eventually asks themselves.

“Does any of this matter?”

“Does any of this count? Is any of this going anywhere? Does it even matter? Does it even matter?”

And, if your life has been all about you, then the answer will be “no, it does not matter.”

And by the way, even if you're well over 40

and into retirement you're going to ask the same question about what you do with all free time and money you now have. Does any of this matter?

And, if your retirement is all about you, then the answer will be "no, it does not matter."

And Jesus, your creator, knew that. He knew that no matter what you do, don't do, try to do, or fail at doing, at some point, you would be looking in the mirror thinking, "Does it matter? Is there a purpose to any of this?"

And Jesus says, "Yes. But it is not found in self-improvement" because you can be the most self-improved person on the planet and be empty, BUT you cannot give yourself away and be empty ...

... which doesn't make any sense. Logically, it *seems like* if I work hard to fill myself up with

me, then I'd be full.

But Jesus says, "This is the problem, this is the confusion, this is why I talk about this all the time."

"If you focus on you, you will be empty. BUT if you empty yourself, you will be full because I created you for purpose. I created you for something more than you. You are not enough for you to give your life to."

In fact, the best thing that you could do for you often has very little to do with you.

And not only is that hard to believe, it's hard to do because it requires us to step out of our comfort zone.

Last Wednesday evening we had our first ever "Potluck and Praise" event and a lot of you were here for it. If you weren't you need to come to it next year because it was

awesome.

And it was fascinating to me to hear so many people talk about what a hard year 2019 had been for them and, yet, how God had shown up to for them, how their small group helped them, the HOPE fund helped them, the preaching helped them, the counseling helped them, serving with others helped them.

But something happened to me in listening to everyone that I wasn't expecting because, for me, too, 2019 was a very hard year. Not personally but it was a very hard year to be the pastor of this church. If 2019 wasn't the hardest, it's got to be in the top three out of 25. I was way out of my comfort zone.

And more than once last year, as I focused on *me* and how hard or unfair or whatever-it-was to *me*, I wondered does any of this matter?

Does what I'm doing matter? Is it even worth it to make the effort?

But on Wednesday night, as each person spoke about what was happening in their life, how God was present in and redeeming their pain, two words kept getting louder and louder in my mind.

"Worth it. Worth it."

Worth the losses. Worth the pain. Worth being misunderstood. Worth being maligned by some.

Worth it to suffer some discomfort to accomplish the purpose for which God called me to do what I do.

And it's the same for you.

Jesus is saying, "Trust me. Trust me. Say no

to you, so you can say yes to something bigger, better and broader than you. Step outside your comfort zone, because there you will find life. Give yourself away so that you can be filled up.”

Conclusion

Which brings us back to that pesky little question, “what should be done not *about me* but about *what’s around me?*”

Now, let’s be realistic. You can’t change the world, but you could possibly change *somebody’s* world, or you could possibly change a little tiny slice of the world.

So, what breaks your heart? What do you hope people would line up to thank you for at the end of your life?

Here’s another question to help you maybe

move in that direction: “Who’s doing something about it?”

You don’t need to run out and start a new non-profit organization. Whatever breaks your heart, it’s more than likely that somebody’s already working on it; that there are already people giving their lives away to it.

Who is that? Who’s already doing something about it?

That’s an easy question to answer.

And then, “how can you help?” Because to make the world a better place, you must say no to you, so you can say yes to something bigger, better and broader than you.

And when you do that – and this is kind of a bonus – when you engage in meeting the needs of others, when you try to solve

someone else's problem, when you get outside of yourself ... you have entered into the activity of God.

Because when God looked at this world and saw what sin had done to it and to all of us, it broke his heart. But He didn't just change the channel.

Instead, His broken heart compelled Him to send his Son, Jesus, into this world to bear the burden of your sin and my sin. And Jesus said, "yes" to going way outside of His comfort zone, way outside of "what's in it for me?"

And, because of that decision and because of that action, countless men and women from all times and all places – this is amazing – are lining up and bowing down to say "thank you, Jesus. Thank you for doing that."

For whosoever devotes themselves to

themselves will have nothing *but* themselves to show for themselves.

But if you devote yourself to more than yourself, you will have more than yourself to show for yourself.

Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for preserving these amazing and challenging words of your Son, Jesus of Nazareth. In so many ways they contradict everything we believe and everything we've been told.

But we know in our hearts it's true: *that we're most full when we're most empty; that we're most fulfilled when we give ourselves away.*

And, yet, there's something in all of us that wants to hang onto our lives.

So help us to trust what Jesus said so that maybe, at some point in our lives, someone would walk up to us and thank us for the difference we made in *their* life because we gave *our* life away.

And give us wisdom to know how to do that and the courage to do it.

Amen.

1. I hope you'll come back next week for part three of Resolution Solution

Endnotes

¹ This message is based on Andy Stanley's message, Something to Show for It, only it's better. ©