

January 8, 2017

I Want to Know Jesus

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

Philippians 3:10-11

"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

II Timothy 1:7

Happy New Year! I know it's already the eighth day of the new year, but today I want to share a lesson on new beginnings. Let's start with a question. Do you live life intentionally or do you live life accidentally? Let me show you what I mean by this question.

One common New Year's Resolution is try to lose weight and get into shape. Most, if not all of us, make this resolution and most of us break it in the first two weeks of the year. How we talk about this common outcome tells a lot about how we live; intentionally or accidentally.

I would probably start with an excuse as I try to explain why my resolve failed yet again. I might claim, "Well, you know it got really cold and so exercise was impossible and one always eats more when it's cold for added energy." That is the kind of excuse someone living accidentally would use. If I were living intentionally, I would have to acknowledge that the reason I ate too much and exercised too little was simply because that is what I chose to do.

Those who want to live intentionally understand this simple truth; it's always about making choices and then being accountable for those choices we have made. In truth we all live intentionally, but we really want to believe our lives are one big accident over which we have little or no control.

So, while we might make New Year's resolutions about losing weight or getting into shape or giving up bad habits, keeping those resolutions is ultimately about the choices we make. And, it is that God-given power to make choices about our own behaviors that really defines intentional living, and I am convinced that few of us really understand just how much power we have.

Too many of us have, I think, abdicated that power and chosen instead to live accidentally. If you have ever been in a car accident you can understand what I am trying to say. If you are driving on slick roads you, as the driver, get to decide how fast or slow to drive. If, at some point, you lose control over your car and begin to slide off the road it becomes all about reactions. At that point your life is accidental and you try desperately to regain control, to reassert intention over the outcome and it is probably too late.

So, when the state trooper arrives what do you say. Probably all of us would claim that it wasn't our fault. We would try to blame and/or justify our behavior. Man has been doing this since the very beginning. After he chose to break God's command, the man blamed his choice on *"The woman you put here with me..."* Man desperately wants God to believe that he could not help himself, that he really had no choice in the matter, but he did have a choice. He could have said "no". The truth is we always have choices and when our lives spin out of control that accidental situation is the product of choices that we have already made.

So, regardless of what resolutions you may have made about life changes in this New Year, in the end it is really about accepting the power which we already have by honestly owning the choices that we have made and are making, and intentionally changing those choices.

The Prodigal son we talked about last week finally did just that. The passage in Luke 15:17-18 reads, *"When he came to his senses, he said. "...I have sinned..."* As soon as he acknowledged

that his own choices left him destitute and accepted his responsibility for those choices his life was changed. When he began to live intentionally everything changed.



Changing our personal behaviors will take more than a New Year's Resolution. As Paul wrote, ***"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."*** (II Timothy 1:7) We have been given a spirit of power to be self-disciplined, to live intentionally.