

GOD'S CALL

Hebrews 12:1-11

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." ⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Monday, December 27

As we are getting ready for the new year, we will be looking this week at our calling from God. Now, this is a huge discussion, and we will only be able to scratch the surface. But this is a good place to be as we will be going into 2022. We hear much about careers and occupations today, but little about a sense of calling, the fact that God created us with a purpose in mind, and we can find that purpose and live it. The gospel tells us that our lives and stories are not meaningless. God wired our world and our lives with meaning. That meaning provides the underlying structure and direction for what happens in our lives. It is like your skeleton. You cannot see it directly, but it supports your body for your entire life. Here is one verse from Ephesians 2:

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. -Ephesians 2:10

That word for handiwork is where we get our English word poem. This text means that He carefully crafted you with purpose, like a piece of art, to serve him in the world. We are going to learn what this means this week and how to live into God's purpose for us. But where we start may not be where you expect. We start not with God's calling for what you would do. No, there is a calling that comes before that. It is God calling you to himself. You see, we cannot know who we are apart from the God who made us. I like to think about it like this. You are called by Him, to Him, and then for Him. Yes, we want to rush off and consider our gifts and abilities, or our passions and interests. Instead, we need to begin with God calling us to himself. This is the danger of the age we are living in. We think life is about us. I have to break the news. It is about God. Yes, God doesn't want you to do anything for him. He doesn't need you to do anything for him. He wants you to live life in the fullness he provides WITH him. That is his plan for each of us. This is his plan for you. So, we begin with God. We want a meaningful job, and that is good. We want to feel like what we do matters, and that is good as well. But calling is meaningless unless there is Someone who calls. If we don't begin with God, we will gravitate to what needs doing or what we enjoy doing, but we will miss the core purpose of our lives. We will miss God. You are here in this life to know God and to glorify God and to enjoy God. I love the story of Teresa of Lisieux. In meditation God spoke to her two words, and these two words changed the trajectory of her life forever. What were those two words? God said to her "enjoy Me." Maybe you have heard that your calling lies at the place where your deepest passion meets the world's greatest need. This is good, but incomplete. Your calling will come from directing your deepest passion toward God. Enjoying him.

Here's our text for today:

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

As we look at this chapter in Hebrews this week, the first thing I want us to see is that Jesus fulfilled his calling; he entered our world, and he went to the cross for "the joy set before him." We might wonder what that joy was. Yes, it was his joy in his heavenly Father. His mission began with joy as the Spirit of God descended upon him at this baptism, and Jesus heard the words of his Father: *You are my beloved Son. With you I am well pleased.* He pursued his mission, his calling, out of this joy every day. This is also where we begin.

We don't pursue our calling because we have something to prove, or because we have to hustle to gain the Father's love. Jesus hadn't begun his mission when he received this word from the Father. We also don't earn God's love by what we do. Instead, this is the place where we can enjoy God and glorify the God who loves us. Your calling is something you get to do with God. But it begins with your calling to God himself. For Jesus, the joy he had in the Father enabled him to endure the cross and reject the shame that came with such horrible death. It is our joy in God that sustains us through the difficult aspects of our callings. Yes, every calling brings with it frustrations and weariness. Adam worked the Garden before sin came into the world. After the fall, he did the same work, but it became toil for him. We haven't escaped the world where the same hard work is at hand. But in Christ, we have union with the God that gives us joy in the midst. Remember, your calling begins with God's calling to him personally. Otherwise, work is just work, and often we are at a loss to see what meaning it has.

Today is laundry day at our house. Yes, another day, another load. It can feel empty, but it needs to be done. I complete the same chores every Monday. Clean the pool filter. Run the generator. Clear the yards of branches and palm fronds. You get the idea. The good news is that, with God in the picture, I get to do everything with him. Our faith shows us that everyone, everywhere, and everything becomes a way we can know and enjoy God. Even in the laundry. Have you ever noticed what happens when you are completing a project with someone? Working together bonds you together. You share the load and enter into life together. This is what comes when we respond to God's call. Yes, we receive God's grace. This is what God wants with each of us. It is the grace of Jesus that makes possible the partnership God seeks to have with us in his creation. We enjoy this as we work side by side. You can see why we need to begin with coming to God, resting in God, and finding our purpose in him. Yes, calling is the result of faith, trusting that God made you with a purpose and has something for you to do in his world. It is the outworking of God's grace because here you discover that your faith is more than an idea flitting around in your head. It is your very life, your life with God, all that you do, and the way you worship God.

Let's pray:

Holy God, renew in us this week the sense of your presence in every aspect of our lives. Give us joy in knowing that through Jesus we can come to you, and that in him we become coworkers in your creation. Help us to see that our labor is a place where we can know your presence and enjoy your goodness. We pray in the name of Jesus, amen.

Tuesday, December 28

Growing up, my parents had us swimming almost as soon as we could crawl. By age six, my parents got my two brothers and me into competitive swim club. We practiced every afternoon after school, all the way through high school. I think I was more a water creature than a land animal at the time. I loved it, but the competitions were tough and often humbling. These were the times when all our practice and skills were on the line. They could be seen in the outcome

of our swim meets. As a part of the team, we swimmers had all sorts of conversations about competition. We wanted to win, and we wanted to learn the secret recipe for being our best. How much rest should we get? Should we take a break from our hard practices a few days before competition? How many carbs should we eat the day before, and so on. Well, scripture tells us the kind of life that most supports our calling.

Here is our text for today:

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...

The scene of the passage is not a swimming pool, but the arena of life. We are all in a race. No, it is not against each other. It is for the sake of the kingdom. It means living out of our calling. It means enjoying God and glorifying him with our lives. People are watching us, and they can see how we are doing and what we are living for. We have the cheering section of both earth and heaven. We have friends and family members who want to see us succeed.

So, what's the problem? We can be in the race, but doing things that will hinder us. We can be our own worst enemies in life. I love the story about how one day Gandhi was asked, by a reporter, who he considered his greatest enemy to be. He reached out his hand with his finger pointed and then turned that finger on himself. Yes, we can be our greatest enemies in living out our calling. We can harbor life practices that keep us from enjoying God and from being our best. I think the sins this text mentions are not the petty sins of our lives. I think weights we carry and the sin that clings to us is more about not trusting God. Not looking to him. This is why we are given the assurance that Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith. We are not being asked to make our lives work on our own and to present ourselves perfect before God. We cannot do that anyway. We are being asked to rest in Jesus, the one that has done it all. Some translations read author and perfecter as beginner and finisher. Yes, Jesus is the one that finishes the race, all the way through the cross. You see, these verses do not call us to try harder, to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. This text reminds us that our hope is in Jesus. We think we can weed out our sins to get good, really good. Let me tell you, you can't. Our righteousness is in Christ. This passage about our calling turns to Jesus. How he finished the race. We are told about Jesus as an example. We are shown that he is our savior. He did it all. We simply come to rest in him. This is something I learned about swimming. It is part of the basic instruction. Swimming is always a combination of work and rest. Of effort and glide. Watch a swimming event, and you will see that this is so. Yes, there is great effort, but there is also strategic rest, the glide that allows the swimmer to make the most of each stroke. This is the way our calling works. The more we come to rest in Christ, the more we can live deeply into the calling God has given us. This is also the gospel. It is in trusting Jesus, the alpha and omega, the beginner and the finisher, the pioneer and the perfecter, that we can get things right. Sin, the thing holding us down and holding us back, is whatever keeps us from seeing this and from resting in Jesus. There is a race set before each of us. We may not see it. It is about winning the prize of Christ himself. Yes, it is true that we already have been given fullness in Christ. But it is enjoying the fullness of Christ to the limit, given the way he has made us and in the ways he made us to serve and live. Today, some of my favorite times are in the water. I relish moments swimming a coral reef, spearing a fish, or catching lobster for dinner. All of this is a gift of God. I feel God's pleasure when I am swimming. This is what God wants with us in the daily moments of our lives, so that we might enjoy him both now and forever.

Let's pray:

Lord God, you made each of us with purpose. Help us to see that our chief purpose is to enjoy you and live in your grace. We easily get distracted by sin and pulled down by the heaviness of life. Thank you that the yoke of Jesus is easy, and his burden is light. Amen.

Wednesday, December 29

We are continuing this week our study of the call. We have seen so far that our first call is to God himself, to enjoy and glorify God. God isn't an idea or a force. God is personal. God wants us to know him. Of course, on our own, this is impossible. We can only know God as God reveals himself to us. This is true of any person. You cannot know them unless they let you in, unless they reveal themselves to you. As hard as you might try, there is a limit to what you can know about someone, unless they open the door and invite you in. Sandy and I sometimes watch movies in the evening after dinner. We recently saw two movies, romantic comedies. In each story, there were immense barriers between the man and the woman. It didn't look like connection and real relationship would happen. Then one of them decided to let the other in, to be vulnerable and open up about their pain, and share their personal story. It was then that the other's guard was dropped and deeper sharing could take place. Perhaps, you have seen this in your relationships. Someone has to take the first step in opening up. This is what God did by entering our world in human flesh. God showed up. God also opened up. Jesus told his disciples that he shared with them all that the Father had shown him. Jesus wasn't holding back.

...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. -Hebrews 12:2-3

There is always a cost to loving. Jesus faced opposition from the very people he came to love. Even the disciples ran off when Jesus was lifted onto the cross. They scattered. Peter even denied that he knew Jesus. But this was the love of God in person and in action. I believe every calling in our broken world, beginning with your calling to God, has a cost. If you try to bring change, some people will feel threatened and oppose you. If you step out, others may envy you or even reject you. Sometimes to pursue your calling will mean misunderstanding. I think of my own efforts to help my son find his calling. I thought I understood him and could help him, but often I got in the way. My motives were good, but I wasn't helpful. I remember my dad and how he loved me, but once I discovered my calling, he tried to dissuade me from pursuing it. He even brought in the big guns to set me in another direction. One day he brought me in to visit with our pastor. My dad hoped the pastor would agree with him and exhort me not to pursue ministry. But as it turned out, my pastor encouraged me to seek the calling of God, and then once discovered, to follow it.

That is what the study this week is all about. It is a process, guided by the Spirit of God, to direct us in life to the place God has for us. Now, different peoples have had different ideas about this. Some people have the acorn view of calling. That means what is already wired in the heart of each person at birth is the beginning, the acorn that will grow into the mighty tree of adulthood with all its accomplishments. For example, the renowned violinist and maestro, Yehudi Menuhin, was only three when his parents started taking him to see orchestras perform music. Before he turned four, he asked for a violin of his own to play. You see, the desire and interest was there from the beginning, in acorn form. The Greeks taught that each person had what they called a daimon. This is the word they used to describe an attending spirit that helped to guide you along the path that you were meant to go on. We learned yesterday that we have the direction of the God who made us, direction given by his Spirit. God often guides us along the path of our giftedness. Our lives in this sense are a form of stewardship, putting to use in God's world the abilities God gave to us. For us, often the first question we receive when meeting someone new is: what do you do? We may answer, "I am a truck driver." Or, "I am a teacher." Or, "I am a surgeon." We have connected what we do with who we are so deeply that this is how we come to define ourselves. This is what we believe our identity to be. But our place with God comes before that. Instead, I am a child of God who practices law. I am a child of God who teaches children. And, so on. You get the idea. This always reminds us that we are not what we do. That is not our identity. We have already commented on the joy that was set before Jesus. It was joy in his Father. In other words, Jesus fulfilled his earthy calling,

even going to the cross, but remaining faithful to and always standing in his primary calling with His Father. That is what we do, and how we are meant to pursue our calling as well. Of course, that begs the question: do we see our primary calling to God himself? Do we understand that we are first children of God? That is our identity, who we are. It is from this place we are in a position to get our vocational perspective right and not make idols of our work. To do all for the joy set before us. Even though it may be difficult and involve sacrifice. And, yes, we keep our eyes on Jesus, the author, the finisher of our faith.

Let's pray:

Lord God, we think we must do something for you. Remind us that you made us for yourself, and that our hearts are restless until we find rest in you. Thank you for Jesus, the one that not only shows us the way, but makes a way for us through his death and resurrection. We pray in his name. Amen.

Thursday, December 30

It's a story I love to tell. John Coltrane, the one affectionately called "Trane", nearly died of a drug overdose in the 1950s. Survival brought him face to face with the God who loved him. Trane came to faith, and he left breadcrumbs throughout his life pointing people to the love and goodness of God. Some of his greatest music resulted from this time. He is one of the most gifted jazz musicians of all time. My favorite of his is entitled, "A Love Supreme." It really is a song of gratitude to God and an offering of his life to him. After playing this piece in an extraordinary moment, Trane stepped off the stage, put down his sax and said: Nunc Dimittis. That is the Latin phrase translated from the words of Simeon after he took Jesus in his arms. It means: now dismiss me... Simeon knew that God's promise to send the messiah had been fulfilled.

Here's that passage from the book of Luke:

Luke 2:25-32

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

Now, as we are learning about our calling, here is what happened to Simeon. He walked closely enough with God that the Lord let him in on what would be happening when the messiah came. He didn't know the day or the hour, but the Lord revealed to him that he would see the messiah, the one that would redeem Israel. No doubt he must have gone up to the temple every day to see if that were the day God would fulfill his promise. His mission from God, his calling was this simple. He was to wait. To watch and pray and wait. We are told about the day when the day came. God revealed to him that this baby being brought to the temple by his parents, this Jesus, was God's chosen one. When Simeon saw Jesus, he said, "I'm done. That's what I've been waiting for. I can go home now, Lord. Dismiss me." Now, imagine being so dialed into God's timing and God's purpose that he could see Jesus. What a joy it must have been. But God's purpose and timing and calling is not only displayed in Simeon's life. We see God's planning in the life of Jesus. The question of this week is, how do we see God's purpose in our lives? I think we read the stories of men like David, who was Israel's king, or Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, or Abraham, and we think that maybe God does work in a few people's lives, but not in everyone's. Not in my life. It is true that God works differently in the life every person. God has a unique relationship with each person. It is also true that each person has a calling from God. God has a purpose for each of us in his world. There is the great king, one such as David. But there was also the couple that was his parents, the ones

that helped raise David and prepare him for his calling. Every link in the chain is different, but every link in the chain of God's purposes in the world is important.

I love the way this is stated as spiritual gifts are explained to us from 1 Corinthians 12:

14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts,^[e] yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable... -1 Corinthians 12:14-22

Now, we may be tempted to think that we have little or no importance in God's plan. It is true that our part may seem insignificant. But the truth is, each part is indispensable. This is the way God works to accomplish his purposes. The key is to find our part and also to see what we are doing as part of the whole, part of what God has planned in his sovereignty for the revealing of his glory and for the saving of many people.

Now, I want go back to Simeon. Think of how small a part he had in the plan of God. Then step back and see how pivotal his role actually was. Mary heard from Gabriel, the angel of the Lord, before Jesus was conceived in her by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was told about Jesus in a dream. Yet, here was confirmation for this young couple, recruited by God, to raise and prepare Jesus. What a gift this encounter was to them. A small prophetic word from someone they did not even know must have been needed confirmation for them. Here is what happened next:

33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." -Luke 2:33-35

Yes, Mary and Joseph were stunned to receive this word from Simeon. God was working and would work through Jesus. The message in it all is that you matter to God. Even the smallest piece in a puzzle is required to make a full picture. Yes, your part in God's plan, living out of your calling, is how God has planned to bring his picture together.

Let's pray:

Lord God, we are tempted to think that what we do really doesn't matter. Some days we wonder whether there is a plan for our world or not. Thank you for continually pointing us to Jesus and reminding us that you are at work in our world, and in each of us. In your name we pray. Amen.

Friday, December 31

My dad loved to play golf. He was an engineer, but I think in his heart of hearts he wanted to be a professional golfer. As soon as I could hold a club in my hands, he began teaching me the game. First, there were the basics. How to hold the club. How to stand in front of the ball, to address the ball. Driving distances and club selection. And of course, the etiquette of the game. There was a lot to learn. I spent a lifetime learning golf with my father. I came to love the game because he loved the game. As gifted as he was, he was always teaching me, watching my swing and my game to tell me what he saw and how I could improve.

Here's our text for today:

Hebrews 12:4-7

⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." ⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

When learning this section of scripture and especially the teaching about the Lord's discipline, we almost always get started on the wrong foot. We read the word discipline as meaning punishment or perhaps correction. But the idea of discipline first means training. God's purpose is not to punish us. No, Jesus took our punishment upon himself when he died for us. God plans to train us, or you might say, retrain us. Our hearts and lives have already been formed before we come to faith in Christ.

Now in Christ, God's takes his Fathering seriously. He is determined to train us and teach us our new way of life as his sons and daughters. But this is not easy. Our scripture says that sometimes God reproves us, and he may even chastise us. This is all done in love so that we might live the fullness of our life in Christ. We spoke about our first calling not being to a career, but to the Lord himself. As our Father, God trains us in righteousness, in faithfulness and in steadfast love. The writer of Hebrews tells us that this is what loving fathers do. If God didn't love us, he wouldn't train us. He wouldn't correct us. Our problem is that we fail to see difficult moments in our lives as the ways that God is shaping and developing us. We miss the Lord's discipline and training. Part of the reason for this is that we do not live our lives godward. We do not think that God is involved in the ordinary details of our lives. We don't realize that God is using everything for our good and his glory. We also don't have room in our theology for hard times or difficult things. We think if God loved us he would spare us from trouble. But he loves us so much that he is using everything in our experience to teach us his ways.

Going back to my dad on the golf course. So much of my time with him there was used for teaching. Golf is a difficult game that can take years to learn and even longer to master. There is so much to learn. But there were times when I just could not learn from him because my attitude was not positive. I couldn't take his loving direction for what it was: a real desire to see my game improve. At times, it was pride. At other times, I felt I could do it myself on my own. I think we do this with God. We think we can live our new life on our own. We'll figure it out. But then struggles come. We easily get frustrated, and we might even blame God. He loves us, and we cannot imagine that he might use our struggles and weaknesses to teach us and lead us.

Recently, in my men's Bible study, we worked together through 2 Corinthians. We learned that it was as Paul was brought to the end of himself that he learned to trust God, the one that raises the dead. It was there he learned that the grace of God is sufficient. He would never have discovered the extent of God's grace without first being found in utter weakness. This is a place where none of us want to be, but it is here that the gospel becomes most real and where we discover just how much God's loves and sustains us each day. The day of trouble becomes the classroom of grace. It is a beautiful thing. It makes you wonder if we can learn the sufficiency of the resources we have in Christ in any other way. The point in Hebrews is that your Father loves you enough to train you, so do not despise the training of the Lord. I have heard it said that the best players, those that get to the top of their game, whatever their game might be, love to be coached. They want to be taught and desire to always be learning. That is how we must come to be with God if we are to learn to live in the fullness of God's grace. We don't do this to gain God's grace. We already have his grace because of all that Jesus has done for us. But we must learn to enjoy our place with him.

Let's pray:

As the new year is upon us, O Lord, remind us of the depth of your love, and that you are working through every detail in our lives for your glory and our good. There are times when the difficulties we face tempt us to doubt you, Lord. Show us the cross of Jesus once again we pray, that we might rest evermore in Jesus. Amen.

Saturday, January 1

Happy New Year! My wife Sandy is a New Year's resolution person. Well before the new year begins, she makes an extensive list of efforts she wants to grow in the coming year. She's a listmaker, so it works well for her. I'm not sure she makes it through the year, but there are often months of progress. Now, there are reasons to think about growth as we are going into a new year, and there are also a few warnings. I think of Paul's words to the Christians in Philippi as he encourages them forward in their faith in Christ. He says:

...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. -Philippians 2:12-13

First, we hear Paul urging us to apply the grace of God in our lives. That is what it means to work out your salvation. You have been given everything you need in Christ. Now, we can apply it. We don't do this to gain favor with God, but to enjoy all that God has provided. This is not a legalistic thing at all, but an opportunity for us. That is the thing about resolutions. If you make them a new law, something you must do, then likely they will not help you. If you fail, that will hurt. It will mean that you just couldn't do it. You could resolve but not follow through. But even if you succeed, this could be dangerous for you. You could come to trust more in your own power and rest in pride rather than in Christ. The idea is not to see resolutions as a work you must do, but as an opportunity you can enjoy. This could be the time when you learn more of how God works in you. I remember reading the resolutions of Jonathan Edwards. He was one of the greatest early American pastors and theologians. As a young man, he made 65 life resolutions. Again these were aspirations, desires to lay hold of the fullness of his life in Christ. Here are a few that are striking to me. The first states what you might call his life mission:

Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriad's of ages hence. Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many and how great soever.

Here is another, number six:

Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.

We get the idea that he desires the fullness of life as found in the fullness of Christ. I think that is a good desire for all of us. It reflects the first call of Paul to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. That fear and trembling part means that our lives are lived before the face of God. We realize that it is a serious thing to be given life to begin with. That doesn't mean we can't enjoy life or have fun. It means that we know the privilege of being given this human life by the Lord. Then there is the second part: *but it is God that works in you to will and to act according to his good purposes*. We remember in all our growth that God makes it possible. We may learn new practices that enrich our lives, and I hope we do. But our growth is possible only as empowered by the God who is at work in us.

Here is Edwards once again. Resolution number 30:

Resolved, to strive to my utmost every week to be brought higher in religion, and to a higher exercise of grace, than I was the week before.

As I read him, you can hear him straining to draw every drop of God's grace into his life, and also trusting God for it. Or, as Paul states it:

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
-Philippians 3:12-14

Now, folks, Paul had walked with Christ for decades, but he knows he has not arrived. There is more to learn, more to enjoy. That is also true for us. Here is that language of pursuit, straining to grasp all that Christ has for us. Now, if you make resolutions, let them be made in understanding the gospel. Here we learn that all we have comes to us by grace, as a gift of God. Let us also enjoy God; this is God's purpose for us in Christ. If you don't make resolutions, we can make Christ our focus and our goal.

Let's pray:

Lord, our planet has just completed another lap around the sun. Make us wise in how we see our lives, and in how we use our time. We want to always be growing in your grace and responding to the upward call we have in Christ. Thank you for giving us life, and also new life in you. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.