

Foreword

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Quitting is easy.

From emphatically ejecting to subtly disengaging, quitting takes many forms and has many faces. Look around. People quit all the time, and it goes beyond superficial quitting on diets or gym memberships. Leaders are quitting on sacred promises and commitments like marriage, family, and ministry. From Judas' betrayal to this year's headlines, history is filled with the stories of men who walked closely with Jesus for a time but did not finish well.

Somewhere along the way, it seems they quit relying on His promises and power. They stopped following. The results are tragic, easy to criticize, and even mock. Other times, quitting hits too close to home. Our relationships fail. Our families fracture. Our heroes fall. In moments of doubt and pain, we're left questioning whether we, too, are destined to quit.

As a young man, surrounded by this sobering reality, I asked myself if it was even possible to follow Jesus to the end. The answer is a resounding 'Yes!'

Exhortation and encouragement are part of the solution. Words matter. In response to our desperate need for the Truth of Jesus Christ distilled in words, Pastor John tees up Kingdom treasure, tying together Jonathan Edwards' *Resolutions* with practical application for lives of personal holiness. As thankful as I am for this book, I am even more grateful for John's example. The world needs men who follow Jesus faithfully. By God's grace, Pastor John Gillespie is such a man. He does not quit, though he has had many opportunities to do so.

In 1994, pastoring in the United Kingdom, John could have quit when his church denomination ousted him for holding the line on an authoritative view of Scripture. The British press picked up the story. It went national. John got his 15 minutes of fame and could have walked off the playing field with his head held high. Instead, he stayed local, went across town, started over, and kept teaching the Word.

Later, John taught God's Word to pastors in some of the most underserved and under-resourced countries on earth. Year after year, he endured tens of thousands of miles of travel, spartan accommodations, foreign food, time away from family, and varying attendance with no fanfare. One hot, Haitian afternoon, I sat in an unconditioned, cinder block room as John led dozens of pastors, most of whom never had the opportunity to go to seminary, through the challenging book of *Romans*.

In that setting, with his brothers in Christ, John was fully alive! He loved it but was again faced with a significant challenge when his heart failed a few years ago. God brought healing, extending his life, while at the same time removing John's capacity to go to the ends of the earth. Once more, he could have hung it up, retired, and finally gotten serious about his golf game. Instead, he embraced a call to return to the pulpit, teach the Word, and shepherd Westbrooke, a faithful church in Overland Park, Kansas.

For 41 years, John has faithfully loved his wife, Tessa, and his ever-growing family of seven children, their spouses and 22 grandchildren. Watching his family walk with the Lord brings him great joy. He has written eight books, preached more than 6,000 sermons, baptizing and discipling many along the way. I know because I am one of them.

Obviously, I love and respect John greatly. One of the most encouraging things about him is that, in so many respects, he is a normal guy. In addition to having a sweet golf swing, he likes to bike, lift weights, talk and play guitars, and have a good laugh.

Most importantly, John is fully convinced that he has no hope of following Jesus faithfully without the supernatural, abundant grace of God. His awareness of this personal need comes across clearly in his exploration of these *Resolutions*. The overriding desire of John's

heart is a deeper relationship with Jesus, for himself and for others. The process of writing imprints truth in the author's heart and mind as much (or more) as reading does in ours, and that's part of why he writes.

In 1975, Paul Simon wrote a hit song about just how easy it is to quit on relationships. "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover" was right in one respect. There are at least that many ways to quit. But it was quite wrong in another. Quitting is not the way to 'get yourself free'. True freedom is found in following Jesus: in leaning in – not walking away.

In a world where it often feels like *we can't* – where excuses are the norm – the truth is, *we can!* In the power of the Holy Spirit, we can resolve to follow Jesus, like Jonathan Edwards did and like John Gillespie does. I am so grateful for him showing us how – in word and deed.

Lean in!

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

Welcome

Dear Friends,

I have known failure. I have at times been a quitter. Jesus has been so, *so* gracious to me.

He has not defined me by my failure but by His faithfulness.

And He has given me grace to want to rise above the spirit of my age ... a spirit that gives up quickly. He has put many men and women into my life who have inspired me to get back up and keep running the race. One is a young man who lived three hundred years ago. For years now, I have been wrestling with him. I have tried to escape, but this youngster keeps taking me down to the mat and I think he has all but pinned me. So ...

Come back with me to the year 1722. Brace yourself. We are going to meet an eighteen-year-old man. (Notice I do not say boy. These days we would rarely refer to an eighteen-year-old as a man, but not in those days.) He was a new follower of Jesus. He had exchanged death for life, darkness for light, lies for truth. God had begun a work of transforming grace in his young life.

Born in 1703, Jonathan Edwards was to become perhaps the greatest thinker and theologian in American history. His life was not only useful in his own day; his influence has grown over the centuries. But his development was no accident. This young man applied himself to Christ. Jonathan Edwards lived an extraordinary life because he was a normal Christian (never confuse average or common for normal).

In his nineteenth year, Edwards began to set down seventy *Resolutions* to which, by the grace of God, he held himself

accountable for the rest of his life. The first thirty-four *Resolutions* were conceived and written in just two sittings. The rest came into being over the following year and a half. The fact that he wrote these over the course of eighteen months indicates that they were not just reflecting a fleeting mood, but arose from a deeply convinced disposition. Thus, by 1723, Edwards had committed himself to these seventy *Resolutions*: to read them prayerfully once a week, for the sake of his soul, for the sake of his usefulness, for the sake of his walk with Jesus. This he did for the next 35 years (that is, over eighteen-hundred times!) until his death in 1758.

So, what I want to attempt is to open up each *Resolution* to us, so that we can explore it in the light of Scripture, and have our lives impacted by it, by Jonathan, and ultimately by God.

But beware! A warning should be attached:

**These *Resolutions* will be hazardous to our love of ease, comfort,
and self.**

We are about to explore the heart of a man who did well. The jury is in on him, but still out on us. The ancient warning from Israel's King to the overconfident Ben-Hadad is timely for us as we embark:

One who puts on his armour should not boast like one who takes it off.
(1 Kings 20:11)

So, we will approach with reverence, humility, readiness, and confidence in the Lord as we, together, see the resolve of one uncommon but not abnormal brother in Christ. These will not be for the casual, the shallow, the indifferent. They are for those who, knowing they have been apprehended by grace, set out to run well the race marked out before them.

I offer these simple expositions upon Edwards' *Resolutions* in the hope that something of the robust Jesus-following of his life may be birthed in us. May they serve to provoke us to valiant, dangerous, radical, world-defying – in short, normal – Christianity.

As to my method: Jonathan's *Resolutions* came from his heart in no special order. They did not arrive in neat categories. Themes are

repeated. Nothing is systematized. I thought about trying to collate them to eliminate the repeats but I finally thought it best to take them all as they come ... from Jonathan's heart to ours. If he thought it necessary to repeat a theme, then perhaps we need to see something again in a slightly different light, take another dose of the medicine, or enjoy another slice of the pie. So, I make no apologies for any repeats. Take them not as redundant but as needed. Will you join me on this journey? If you are ready and willing you might want to begin by praying the simple and profound prayer of Augustine:

'O God, command what you will, and give what you command'.

Excited!

John Gillespie

A few warnings before you proceed:

1) Beware of the modern cry of 'legalism' to anything that approaches diligence. The two are not the same. They are not even remotely related. Diligence is a worthy response to the empowering grace of God. Legalism is labour in ignorance of the grace of God. These *Resolutions* are not the efforts of a religious man trying to find favour with a distant God. They are the proper responses of a man who has received God's favour.

2) Beware of the emergent attitude which dares to suggest that we have arrived at some new understanding of discipleship while chuckling at the past. Humility is called for here. A teachable attitude which values history and honours those who have gone before will accomplish far more than a closed mind which disdains anything more than five years old.

3) Beware of confusing grace with licence. Grace empowers to change. Licence excuses the refusal to change. The prevailing attitude today is that 'grace' means 'sin really does not matter', and that the Gospel is God saying, 'Aw shucks, don't worry about it'. Nothing could be further from the truth. Old-timers understood that sin is

truly wicked, God is truly holy, Hell is truly deserved, that the Gospel is truly amazing, and that one's salvation, while never earned, is always proven by the pursuit of holiness empowered by grace.

4) Beware of trying to live these out 'solo'. The Christian life is meant to be lived and experienced within Christian community. If 'it takes a village to raise a child', it takes a church to raise a Jesus-follower. You will fail on your own. You need the discipline, direction, and love of a faithful family of believers around you.

5) Never forget that, in the end, you will be as holy and as happy as you want to be. God is not short on the supply of grace. His promises are sure and His willingness to work in you to your good and His Glory is not in question. Laziness will be rewarded with little joy and little transformation. Diligence will be rewarded with much joy and much transformation.

Finally, this book has not been written by an authority on Edwards, but just a Jesus Follower who has found Jonathan Edwards to be helpful in his journey. I have tried to be faithful to his theology throughout, but if you find a departure here or there, forgive me. I think the sentiments of John Newton well sum up my heart toward this work:

If the LORD, whom I serve, has been pleased to favour me with that mediocrity of talent, which may qualify me for usefulness to the weak and poor of his flock, without quite disgusting persons of superior discernment, I have reason to be satisfied.

(John Newton, Preface to *Olney Hymns*, 1779)

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Grateful thanks to the wonderful congregation at Westbrooke Church, Overland Park, Kansas who first received these devotionals as my weekly Pastoral Letters, especially to those of you who week by week encouraged me to keep writing them. Thanks to Mark Whiting for his early editing of those letters. Thanks to Dee Molton for her numerous rounds of deep editing of the completed manuscript. Special thanks to my dear wife Tessa for her years of constant encouragement, and for being my partner in following Jesus in an age of quitters. I am so eternally grateful for our – to use Jonathan's words for his life with Sarah – 'uncommon union'.

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.

Jonathan Edwards