

“THE FLY WHISTLER”
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- If the Christmas lights in the video represented each time we decided to share an opinion and then respond... I think it would be a pretty good picture of how our world is operating right now... with Great Resolve!

In today’s environment, a lot of people have begun to share, with that resolve, what they themselves believe publicly, maybe more than ever!

- And for the most part I love it!
- We need to have opinions... can’t always sit only in the middle.

(Vs) James 2:1 MSG – “My dear friends, don’t let public opinion influence how you live out our glorious, Christ-originated faith.”

God Himself says...

(Vs) Revelation 3:15-16 ESV – “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”

We are called to have a resolved faith!

- But we’ve all seen how sometimes, when someone shares a Resolved/Authentic opinion, how quickly it becomes a path to personal wounding or attack.
- It all generally starts the same way... **“I’ve done my research!”** Then as one person’s “research” collides with another person’s “research,” a tearing occurs and the relationship starts to break apart...

“Although resolve is very important, it should rarely result in a continuous string of broken relationships.”

- This, my friends, is not how it’s supposed to work...
- It’s a lesson I had to learn the hard way...

If there is one attribute more than any other that the difficulties of church planting have developed within me, it would have to be my ability to maintain my Resolve...

- I blame Scripture! - I just find great power in Bible verses. My most recent...

(Vs) Isaiah 7:18,19 ESV - "In that day the Lord will whistle for the fly that is at the end of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes, and on all the pastures."

- Our God's a Fly Whistler? How awesome is that???
- On a positive note... As I developed this area over the years, other people's opinions, critiques, fears, or judgement started to have less and less impact on me, especially when it came to my passion and purpose up here.
- This meant that I could stand up every week and publicly share what I was processing or struggling with... (Transparent and Authentic)
- I would share my thoughts and opinions, and listeners would go and process; Some agreeing, some disagreeing; Some correcting me, and some needing correcting.
- Some would choose to respond or engage with me further; Some would choose to leave and seek somewhere else, and so on.
- This is all good, I know this is how it's meant to work...

But a few years back a problem arose... Although this Resolve gave me a sense of great purpose, somewhere along the way, I started to become a bit cold to the feelings of other people.

- At a conference a few years back I heard a pastor refer to people leaving your church like people leaving a Starbucks to go to a different Starbucks. He said, "As long as they aren't leaving God, I don't care."
- This wasn't true, and it happened because I didn't pause to see how my resolve was affecting me, our church, and even my friends and family...

So, about 5 years ago, with the help of the Holy Spirit, strong and trusted mentors and, of course, therapy, "I Resolved to fix my Resolve."

- Today I want to talk with you a bit about how I now work to maintain appropriate and balanced resolve!
- But first I want to show you in scripture why this is such an important part of your spiritual life to have in balance.

This Christmas, we celebrate the Birth of Christ

(700 Years) (Vs) Isaiah 9:6 ESV - "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Consider what Jesus coming as human child really meant for Him...

(Vs) Phil. 2:7-9 ESV – "...but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name..."

- Jesus sets down a large portion of who He was in order to enter into our stories... *"being found in human form!"*
- Jesus leaves Heaven, glory, power, and worship!
- Jesus then finds us by becoming as us.
- There's another word for this... "Empathy"

"The New Testament believes that God is an empathetic God; that God's empathy extends beyond just the capacity to understand human experience, but to actively enter into human experience."

Jesus eventually teaches His disciples (Us) how to do this very thing with others...

(Vs) John 13:34,35 ESV – "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

- **Remember:** The Disciples are a collection of people who don't match: Fisherman, a Doctor, a Tax Collector... These are people with very different backgrounds, different political, cultural, and even theological beliefs.
- Jesus is saying... "Just like I set down what made me different from you in love..."
- "... you too will not be known by your sameness, but by setting down your differences in unity!"

"The testimony is that Jesus is taking people of different minds and giving them a greater mission than their differences. That Mission is Him!"

- He's calling us to actively enter into another's human experience.
- He's teaching that empathy forever marks us as transformed human beings because...

"Empathy is the finding of another person's story within our own."

I got stuck at this place for quite a while within my own journey.

- My God's a Fly Whistler, what are you gonna do?

- I finally started to get unstuck when I realized that...

“Entering into another person’s story with empathy in no way contradicts my ability to be resolved.”

- This sent me down a new path of understanding around my own resolve... It changed me!
- **Here’s what I’ve learned:** How I enter into someone else’s human experience, and so Empathize with them, while maintaining Appropriate Resolve!
 - “The problem is seldom the problem...”
 - “Don’t count the criticism / opinions, weigh them.”
 - “As Christians, we can choose to both Oppose and Embrace.”
 - “Empathy is not Endorsement.”
 - “Do the best you can under the circumstances and then take a nap.”

Never forget what’s at stake...

- We all know...

“The unchurched will come to church not through front doors, but through relationships.”

- But it’s also been said that: “Three years after becoming a Christian, other Christians will be the only people most Christians hang out with.”

When all this is over... What will the relationships behind you look like?

- Will they be paths others can follow in Love, Kindness, and Service?
- Or will they be paths littered with broken hearts and loneliness?
- Remember, every Christmas we are worshiping a God, who through the Christ Child chose to empathetically enter into our own human experience. So how can we celebrate this season authentically, if we ourselves aren’t willing to empathetically enter into the experiences of others?