

“New Resolutions and Patience with Yourself”

a talk by Rev. Dr. David Breeden

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ONE

Eighty-percent in five months. That’s the attrition rate for gym memberships beginning on January 1. Eighty-percent in five months. Also, half of the people who sign up for gym memberships never actually go. And less than half of the people who *do* go work out as often as twice a week.

I get my gym membership paid for by my health insurance. (I’m a lucky guy!) I have to go twelve times a month in order for my insurance to pay. Twelve times. For those of you counting, that’s not even half of the month. That’s not even half of February.

No. This isn’t a critique of gym memberships. Those with affluence and insurance and the energy to work out should. Doctor’s orders. I’m merely reflecting on how determined we human beings tend to be to live up to our resolutions.

It’s the time of the year people talk about making resolutions. Lots of talk. Very little resolve. I, for one, resolve to lose the extra twenty pounds I’m carrying around. I want to be fit and trim. Twenty pounds. That’s all. The weight of a chair. The weight of a car tire without the rim. It’s not much. I can do it!

Nope. I won’t do it. For me, that extra twenty pounds is insurmountable. I’ve hovered around twenty pounds too heavy for most of my adult life. When I was 35 I could drop that twenty pounds with a solid diet and some jogging.

Now . . . not so much. Nowadays, it’s takes that . . . you know . . . that resolution thing.

“Resolution” is one of those words that doesn’t mean what we think it means. The way we use “resolve,” it appears to be about a stiff upper lip and a steel backbone, right? Wrong. *Resolution* came into the English language from the Latin word *resolutio*, meaning “to reduce to simpler forms.”

We find a *solution* when we soften a hard problem by breaking it down to smaller parts—that “how to eat an elephant” thing.

So, if I want to lose weight, I need to get some resolve—I need to break the problem down into parts. The acronym SMART is a great tool: break the problem into parts that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

“Measurable.” You know—lose two pounds a week.

“Achievable.” Yeah! Two pounds a week! I can do that without starving!

“Relevant”—uh, as in I might be able to live longer? And, I’ll feel better *right now*.

“Time bound”—two pounds a week. For five weeks. SMART.

And you know what? That’s how I know I’m not going to live up to my resolution: I’m not willing to live up to those baby steps. I’m just not going to go for that two pounds a week. Or one pound. I’m not going to resolve.

The inventor and visionary Buckminster Fuller once said,

You never change things by fighting against the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the old model obsolete.

Perhaps the main reason that New Year’s resolutions don’t work for most of us is that they come by an artificial means, the calendar, rather than a natural rhythm, such as being fed up and done with whatever behavior needs to stop. January isn’t going to give me the backbone to lose weight, and if I declare losing weight a resolution, I’m going to fail.

TWO

Now, before you decide I’m a gutless wonder with no resolve at all, I have to defend myself: I do have a resolution I’m going to be SMART about: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

That something is the amount of time I spend on video games.

My love affair with video games goes back a long way. I was an adult before video games became common. And then you had to go to an arcade or bar and chuck quarters into them. That was a hassle.

Then . . . video games came to PCs!

Some people have Tennis Elbow. I have Mouse Elbow from playing video games for too many hours!

But, a desktop, you know, you can leave that at home. It’s a hassle to take it with you. But now . . . tablets, smartphones. There are even games on Apple watches. Now, you can *wear* your games!

So, hi, I'm David, and I have a problem! There aren't enough hours in the day to check how all my various armies and cities and islands and continents and planets are doing!

OK, I'm exaggerating a little bit. But wasting time can become like work!

It's time for me to resolve to cut back on the time I spend on video games by being SMART—taking action that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

I *am* going to do that. It's a resolution!

THREE

One way that I'm going to be SMART about cutting back my time playing video games is by using a really cool app—because being online and losing track of time is one of the things that can be resolved.

(If you have a screen problem, maybe it can help you.)

I've downloaded an app called wecroak.com. We. Croak. Dot. Com. Here's the description of the app:

Find happiness by contemplating your mortality with the WeCroak app. Each day, we'll send you five invitations at randomized times to stop and think about death. It's based on a Bhutanese folk saying that to be a happy person one must contemplate death five times daily.

The WeCroak invitations come at random times and at any moment just like death. When they come, you can open the app for a quote about death from a poet, philosopher, or notable thinker.

Memento mori. Yes, "there's an app for that." *Memento mori* is a classic practice. *Memento mori*: remember death. People once slept in coffins and decorated with human skulls and carried bones around. That's inconvenient!

Nowadays you can get *memento mori* coins and bracelets and necklaces . . . and tattoos! But I'm taking *memento mori* to the very root of my problem: wecroak.com sends me a reminder right there on my computer screen where I waste so much of my fleeting lifetime.

wecroak.com is there to remind me that life is short, and there are many things I want to do . . .

CONCLUSION

Change the model. See the problem from another angle. Break it down into manageable pieces. Sounds like the advice the Stoics of long ago gave. It sounds like the advice of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy today. *Resolve* those big challenges into smaller bits . . . and have a plan.

It can work, if you work it. And you'll work it when you're ready to work it, not when the calendar says "January first."

So. Go ahead if you really want to: make a resolution that breaks the challenge down into doable bits.

Perhaps you'll see me at the gym. I'm the gray-haired overweight guy using my treadmill time to read a book.

Some Suggestions for Resolution:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/18/smarter-living/how-to-stick-with-new-years-resolutions.html>

WeCroak.com

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