



We're six days into the New Year, which means that of those of us who've made New Year's Resolutions, probably over half of us have already broken them. The Resolution ritual is a curious one: usually for the last couple of weeks of the year, lots of us decide to change our lives in fairly substantial ways. We decide we're going to start eating right, get in shape, read our Bibles more, go to Church more, be better people - nicer, complain less, call our parents more, and so on. Maybe this will be the year we pick that hobby back up or start writing that novel or start our new career.

But woven into the fabric of the resolution ritual is the expectation that it's not really going to happen. Collectively, we make resolutions expecting them to fail. Which makes our resolution ritual an exercise in staving off despair. At the bottom of the ritual is a fear we see more and more blatantly in our world, whether it's in blockbuster films or Keshha's latest single.

We've been told that all these things, all these aspects of our lives will give us meaning and purpose. If we have the right job, build the right sort of family, chase the right dreams, do the right kinds of religious things. If we chase them, we'll be fulfilled, whole.

The problem is we have and we're not. So now the American Dream itself is having a midlife crisis: we're afraid that life doesn't have any deeper meaning. That deep down there's nothing more to life than the day-to-day weariness of keeping up and getting by.

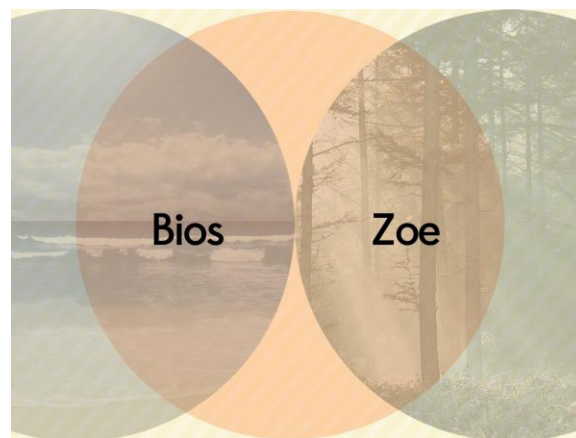
That's why we make resolutions: we think the answer is to tweak what we've been doing. Try to do it just a little better. Our resolutions help us believe that life can be better this year than next year. And when we fail, when our resolve to do better, to be better, gives out and we settle back into the same old habits, we laugh. We turn it into a joke. Because laughing is better than weeping at the futility of our rituals and the meaninglessness we're trying to ignore.

We prepared for Christmas by proclaiming that Jesus' coming into this world was the End of the World as We Knew it. We proclaim that Jesus' coming into this world is the beginning of God putting the world back right. That through Jesus, our lives do have meaning.

So during the first part of this new year, we're going to explore what God's new life looks like. If Jesus' coming was the End of something, then it was the Beginning, too. So what does Jesus' New World Order look like?

Jesus told us that he came so we could have life. In John 10, he said of those who follow him, "My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life." John 10:10 (NLT)

Jesus promises a "rich and satisfying" life. The Greek word means 'excessive' or 'abundant', which sounds awfully enticing to those of us trapped in the Resolution Ritual. We'd love a life that's excessive, that's overflowing with purpose and meaning. The word "life" Jesus uses here makes his promise even better. If you want to talk about life in Greek, you can talk about *bios* or *zoe*. *Bios* is where we get our word "biology", and it refers to the mechanical aspect of life. Ancients used it to talk about lifespan or the stuff of staying alive - the day to day cares of life like food and drink and shelter.



But Jesus says, My purpose is to give them excessive *zoe*. *Zoe* isn't the material of life, it's the more basic, foundational essence of life. That thing that leaves our bodied when we take our last breath. So Jesus isn't saying, I've come to make you rich and fat and happy. He's saying, The whole reason I came is to get you back on track, to reconnect you with the source of *Zoe*, to show you how to live the life you were always created to live.

What does that *zoe* life look like? To help us figure that out, we're going to explore the first two chapters of Genesis. As we saw at the end of Revelation, Jesus' New World is a return to God's original intention for us. Jesus' new life isn't reinventing the wheel. He's reconnecting us with what God originally did, before our sin broke everything. So by exploring the creation stories in Genesis 1-2, the first things God did, we can learn who we are, who God is and what sort of life is available to us in the wake of Jesus' coming.

And the first thing we see in Genesis 1 is that for our lives to be truly meaningful, we must be ordered rightly.

In the past decade or so, Genesis 1 has turned into another one of those books everyone's scared to touch. Everyone gets caught up in fighting about creationism vs. evolution and whether it was 6 literal days or a metaphorical amount of time. So tragically, most Christians have fled from this rich text.

But here's the thing about Genesis 1: it's not a science textbook. Genesis isn't trying to talk about *bios* life questions: where we came from, if it was creation or evolution. Genesis is talking about *zoe* life, about the deep questions we have about meaning and purpose. Who are we? Who is God? Why are we here? Those aren't science questions. You can't put those in a beaker and test them.

We treat Genesis like a science book because that's what we know. But we didn't write Genesis. Genesis 1 is an ancient near eastern creation story, and that tells us that Genesis 1 is a temple text. That sounds strange to us today because we don't use temples. But in the ancient world, gods lived in temples. Temples were how gods and people interacted. In ancient near eastern creation stories, the gods created the world to be giant temples. And once the world/temple was finished the gods rested in the world/temples.

Clear as mud, right? Let's look at Genesis 1, and a helpful example that will illustrate what I'm talking about. You've probably heard some version of this before:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. -- Genesis 1:1-2 (NLT)

We hear this and it makes us think of creation as sort of a magic show (not in a blasphemous way). We imagine God in the darkness and emptiness preparing to work and then calling stuff into being, making it appear out of nothing.

But that's not how an ancient reader would've understood this text. Again, ancient readers weren't concerned with where the stuff came from - they knew God made it. They wanted to know *why* it's here. They wanted the *purpose* of creation, not the *process*. A more accurate translation of those verses looks like this:

When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters... -- Genesis 1:1-2 (NLT)

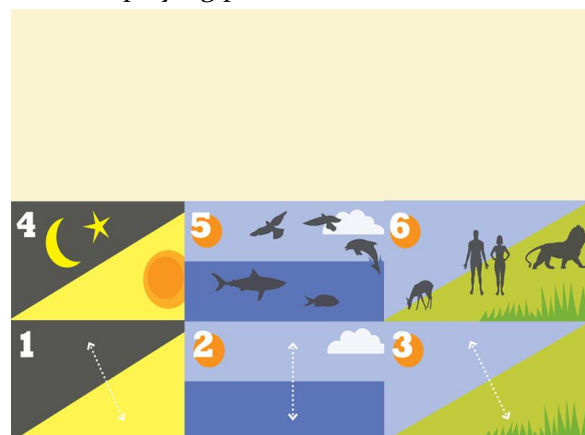
The two words "formless and empty" are a phrase that basically means "a chaotic mess". The image is God standing over a huge mess. An example we're all familiar with, especially right after Christmas:

This is a piece of train track from a Thomas the Train toy Abby's kids got for Christmas. It warned on the box that there was "Some Assembly Required". We all know what that means: this toy isn't ready yet. You're going to have to put some work into it before it's ready. Ready for what? We all know the answer to that: It's obviously for a child to play with. It's a toy.

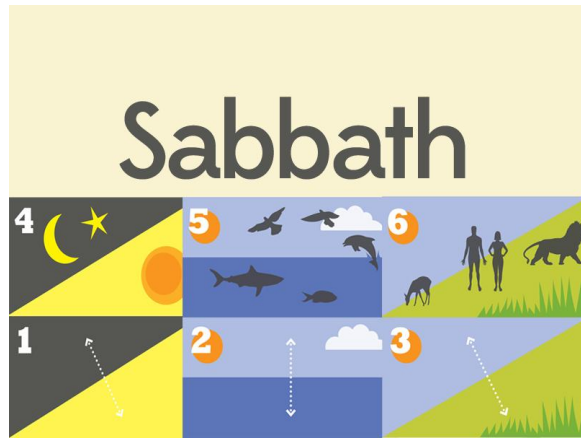
But you also know that, as it is, here in my hand, it can't fulfill that purpose. Because this piece of track is part of a larger whole. It needs to be ordered, to be put in its proper place, before it can be fully utilized.

Abby is standing over this mess, bringing order out of chaos. When she began, with a pile of parts, we could say that of course the Thomas track already existed. We could see it all sitting there. But it's just as true that Abby is right now creating the toy. Once she's finished, it will exist in a more perfect and whole way than it did before. All sorts of fun train-playing possibilities will be available to us then that aren't yet. Because her act of creating, her act of ordering the mess, isn't finished yet.

This is the picture of creation Genesis 1 gives us. God hovers over the mess and begins to order it. During each of the first three days, God draws a boundary - light and dark, sea and air, land and sea. Then during the next three days, God fills the spaces created in the first three days. God gives the various parts of creation a role, a function - sun and moon, fish and birds, animals.



As each day progresses, the world looks more and more finished. We can tell it's all building toward something, just like as Abby gets this train track closer and closer to finished, it's more and more clear what it's supposed to be. So what's the purpose of creation? What is God building? Well, at the end of Day Six, Genesis tells us:



So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. -- Genesis 2:1-2 (NLT)

The whole creation story builds to Day 7, the Sabbath. Genesis tells us that the whole point of creating, the purpose of all this stuff is God's rest. And even though that's weird for us, to an ancient person, that would be blatantly obvious. Creation stories are about gods building temples, and once the temple of creation is finished, the god takes up residence in the temple. Temples are where gods

rest.

But even saying creation is finished so God can rest sounds weird to us. Does that mean temples are like lazy-boys? Is Genesis saying that God created this world, put it all carefully in order so God could... take a nap?

Obviously not. When we think of rest, we think of inactivity. But that's not what the word meant in the ancient world. In his excellent book *The Lost World of Genesis One*, John Walton describes it like this:

"In the ancient world rest is what results when a crisis has been resolved or when stability has been achieved, when things have "settled down." Consequently normal routines can be established and enjoyed. For deity this means that the normal operations of the cosmos can be undertaken.

"[Rest] is more a matter of **engagement without obstacles** rather than disengagement without responsibilities." -- John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*

Rest is "engagement without obstacles". Consider our Thomas track: how silly would it be if Abby did all this work to get it put together, and then put it in a closet? She would certainly rest from her labors of putting it together, but you don't buy a Thomas Train Track to put it together and lock it in a closet. You put the track together to play with it.

There's work that has to be done before it can fulfill its function. Order must be imposed on the chaotic state it starts in. And once that order has been imposed, once that work has been finished, you can rest from that work and get down to the business of enjoying it.

This is the ancient concept of work and rest. God ordered the world, imposed a Way, a logic, on the chaos. And now that the work of ordering is finished, God can get on with what God actually wants to do, which is ruling the world with us.

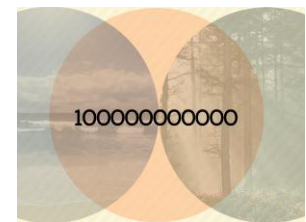
So... what does any of this have to do with finding meaning in our lives?

When we ask that question, we tend to get caught up in *bios* stuff. We have all these different things in our lives - our work, food, homes, family, hobbies, dreams, aspirations, mistakes. And we wonder, does any of it matter? How do I tweak these to make my life better? What resolutions can I make to make things better? What's the right combination of *bios* that unlocks *zoe* life?

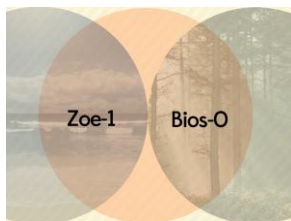


Pastor and author Shane Hipps illustrates the relationship between *zoe* and *bios* as the relationship between 1s and 0s. The value, the meaning of 1s and 0s is determined wholly by their sequence. If you have a 1 and you put a 0 in front of it, its value doesn't change. In fact, you can put two 0s, or three or a hundred and it doesn't matter. That 1 is still just a 1.

But put the 1 first. Now both the 1 and the 0 are worth more than they were before. In fact, now, every 0 you add increases the value of the whole thing. The order matters. The order adds value, adds meaning.



1 is the *zoe* life, the life God intends for us, the life Jesus offers us. The 0 is our *bios*, all that stuff that makes up our individual lives. As long as we get them in the right order, then all that stuff adds meaning, value to our lives. And if we get them out of order, then nothing will have meaning.



And we're not talking about reading your bible and praying every day and going to church and giving. Those are all good things. But those are all *bios* things. Just like your kids, your spouse, your parents, your job, your dreams.

All those religious things are good things, but they can become just another resolution, another thing you have to try to cram into your life.

And the reality is, like with this train track here, if your life is out of order, if it's not ordered rightly, then just throwing more pieces into it isn't going to fix anything. It's probably going to make it worse.

Genesis 1 tells us that the path to meaning, the path to the *zoe* life God offers isn't being more religious. It's not taking non-spiritual stuff out and adding more spiritual stuff in. It's recognizing that *everything is spiritual*. That your work at your secular job is spiritual. God cares about what you do there and how you do it. There's a Way God calls you to follow in your job.



The way you relate to your family is spiritual. God cares about how you relate to the important people in your life. There's a Way God calls you to be married, to parent, to be parented, to be a friend.

The dreams you have, the talents you have are spiritual. God created you and gave you a part to play in the Church, in the body of Christ. There's a Way God calls you to chase after your dreams, to engage your passions, to use what you've been given.

And we could go on and on, exploring every aspect of our lives. Because it doesn't matter what area of our lives we're talking about. Every part of our lives is like a piece of this track. It doesn't have any meaning unless its in its proper place, the place God created it for, in the right order.

Every part of our lives is like a zero. Our jobs, our families, our health, our dreams, none of these have value in and of themselves. They're like these pieces of train track. If you ignore the larger picture, you miss the point. If it's not in the right place, it's meaningless. Empty. It can't fulfill us. We can make whatever resolutions we want, try to tweak it, improve it all we want, but you can't add enough to make it valuable.

The *bios* of our lives only have value when we seek God first. When we understand that there is an Order, a Way that makes everything else make sense. A Way that gives everything else its value. And until we get our lives in the right order, we'll always come up short.

And every choice we make points us either toward God's way or towards chaos. Every choice we make is a step towards purpose or into meaninglessness. Meaning and purpose don't just happen. Our lives are given to us with Some Assembly Required. God invites us to build our lives according to the Way Jesus shows us.

So if we're looking for a resolution this year, let's resolve to see that everything is spiritual. That God is everywhere, that every aspect of our lives is part of God's larger whole. Let's resolve to seek out God's way in all things, to put God first. Let's focus on what it means that we live in God's world and we need to live on God's terms. Let's find the life that is truly life, that excessive, overflowing *zoe* God created and Jesus offers.

Because Jesus came, because Jesus died and rose again, a whole new world is opened to us. Now God - and us as God's image (but more on that in later weeks) can enjoy creation. We can live the lives God called us to, live the way God created us.

Examine

1. In 2012, was my life ordered or chaotic? (more like the before or the after?)
2. At the beginning of this year, what is the state of my life? (more like the before or the after?)
3. What parts of my life are in a good order?
4. What parts of my life are out of order?
5. What can I do this week to work towards a healthy order?

Benediction

Turn the trainset on... it's time to enjoy life with God!