



# The 4th Focus

## “Resolve to BE...”

We are called to a life-long journey of change toward holiness or transformation into the likeness of Christ. And so it's natural and good for us to make resolutions toward change in a New Year. Most of us will resolve to do some things differently—often revolving around eating less and exercising more. As well, we may resolve to watch less TV and read more Bible. A few days ago, a number of you responded to a link I shared on Facebook that led to an excellent article entitled, “How Not to Read Your Bible in 2013” ([thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org)). The article made five suggestions for what not to do as you freshly commit to reading the Bible again for this year.

There are indeed many things we should do and not do as the New Year provides opportunities for a fresh start. But I want to suggest that we go beyond resolving to do differently by resolving to BE different. And so for example, Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest theologian dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, developed 70 resolutions that he passionately and incessantly reviewed and pursued. And you will find that many of the resolutions refer to doing. But the doing always had its purpose in his being and thinking.

And so, for example, resolution #28 was, *Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.* His real purpose is not so much focused on knocking off some chapters but to grow in knowledge. Romans 12:1-2 states that we are transformed by the renewing of our mind—or our thinking/knowledge.

You've heard me refer to Jack Miller's piercing question: *What's the last thing you have done or stopped doing out of love for Christ?* This question is vital because that's the only doing that matters. And so again, we are not called to be B.F. Skinner disciples who focus on behavior modification. We are called to be Jesus' disciples who focus on transformation of the heart.

This heart and mind transformation led Edwards to write: *Resolved, to examine carefully, and constantly, what that one thing in me is, which causes me in the least to doubt of the love of God; and to direct all my forces against it.* We love him and others because he first loved us and so Edwards resolved to ferret out anything in his heart and mind that would prevent him from reveling in God's love for him. All of my God-honoring doing begins with God's love and doing for me. Or, how about this one: *Resolved, never henceforward, till I die, to act as if I were any way my own, but entirely and altogether God's...* Your daily doing or not doing will be deeply impacted by the steady memory that you belong entirely to God.

Edwards' resolution #32 is again about BEING: *Resolved, to be strictly and firmly faithful to my trust, that that in Prov. 20:6, “A faithful man who can find?” may not be partly fulfilled in me.* I want to be found faithful. Every day, I want to be guided by, how can I be found faithful—before God—in my marriage, workplace, church and community?

We SHOULD focus on our doing but let it begin with a focus on our being—our heart—the source for our good and evil doing. Edwards was deeply committed to digging out the roots of the weeds in his heart and life. Consider #24: *Resolved, whenever I do any conspicuously evil action, to trace it back, till I come to the original cause; and then both carefully endeavor to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the original of it.* It's about my heart and soul yielded to God—allowing his Spirit to convict, guide and change me.

Let us all resolve, as Edwards recorded in #65: *Resolved, very much to exercise myself in this all my life long, viz. with the greatest openness I am capable of, to declare my ways to God, and lay open my soul to him: all my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, fears, hopes, desires, and everything, and every circumstance...* May he find us faithful in our being and doing—for his glory. - Pastor Tim

# GEMS Update

# Happy Birthday



On December 17th the GEMS and their special friends, counselors and helpers met in the church basement for our Christmas party. We enjoyed some sweet treats and fun and for our craft made a baby Jesus on the hay. There were presents exchanged and friendships made.

Sharon Van Timmeren read Luke's account of the first Christmas and the girls dressed up and presented the pageant. We celebrate because Jesus loved us first. Thanks to all who came and supported the girls for this special event!

- Nancy Aukeman

## Jan

- 2 - Jim Berthiaume
- 3 - Laura Horinga
- 3 - Delores Christians
- 6 - Lynn Berthiaume
- 6 - Jennifer Parks
- 9 - Connie Wierenga
- 10 - Ed Van Timmeren
- 11 - Jim Rinkenberger
- 13 - Dave Gleason
- 13 - Nicholas Walton
- 16 - Marge Berrevoets
- 17 - Amalie Woods
- 22 - Doris Kelly
- 24 - Gary Proos
- 26 - Justin Bierens
- 27 - Steve Wammack

## Feb

- 2 - Nancy Springfield
- 2 - Caden Gleason
- 5 - Megan McDowell
- 8 - Bud Waterloo
- 11 - Ken Coeling
- 15 - Percy Woods, Jr.
- 17 - Merribeth Fannon
- 21 - Don Couthie
- 22 - Marcia Schuur
- 25 - Kathy Burggraaf
- 25 - Brayden Hawkins
- 25 - Ron Schuur
- 26 - Ryan Faasse
- 27 - Ruth Meendering
- 28 - Maria Dorn

# Kids Hope USA



On December 5 we held our 14th annual Christmas Party for our Kids Hope USA students and their families. While it was a bit of a smaller crowd, we had a wonderful time! We began the evening with a delicious ham dinner served by Amy Coeling and

Lisa Fles who do an amazing job feeding a crowd! We then told the Christmas story through the use of Nativity Cookie Cutters. As Pastor Tim told the story, each family was able to create their own nativity scene by using the cookie cutters to cut out playdoh shapes of Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, sheep, etc. This was a wonderful tool to get everyone involved in the story, and each Kids Hope family was able to bring the set of cookie cutters home along with their playdoh so they could continue telling the story. We ended our evening with cookie decorating, the giving of the gift packages (which is always a highlight of the evening) and a raffle where everyone was able to go home with a prize! Check out the picture across from the mail station!

Many of us commented that we thought this was our best party yet! Thank you to everyone who helped to make this a great night of fellowship with our Kids Hope families!

- Mary Kay Townley



## Family Night



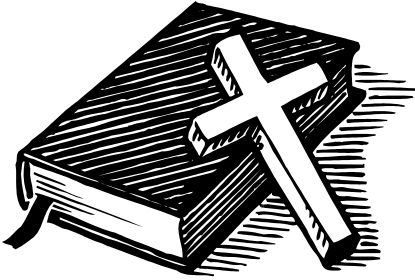
All women are invited to sign up for breakfast at Russ' Restaurant on Plainfield!

Mark your calendar for January 19 at 9:00. Invite a friend and enjoy great fellowship over a steamy mug of hot chocolate or a stack of blueberry pancakes!

# Reformed Church Heritage - Colonial Worship

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Worship during the colonial period had many similarities but also differences to the church today. One change was language. Before the Revolutionary War, most Reformed services, as well as everyday life, were conducted in the Dutch language.



A single service was usually customary during the winter. During warmer seasons, two services sometimes took place in the morning and afternoon, often with food and fellowship time between services for those who had travelled longer distances. Those living nearby could be called to worship by church bells, drum beating or horn blowing. For the wealthy, a hired messenger called the *domper* often announced the service with a knock on the door.

The order of worship generally conformed to the mother church in the Netherlands as formulated at the Great Synod of Dordrecht (1618-19). Better known for the Canons of Dordt which outline the five points of Calvinism found in the acronym T-U-L-I-P, the synod held a final, additional 25 sessions called the *Post-Acta* which dealt with worship.

In the worship service, the *voorlezer* or “forereader” was a person with many responsibilities. As his title implied, he customarily began the service by reading Scripture, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles Creed. Before the use of organs, he led the people in singing metrical arrangements of the Psalms listed on “Psalm boards” located on each side of the pulpit. As the singing began, the minister appeared, ascending the elevated pulpit. After giving a salutation, he presented a general sermon outline called the *exordium remotum*. The sermon often lasted an hour or more, timed with an hourglass. Once an hour had passed, the *voorlezer* would sometimes tap the pulpit with a cane. To prevent congregational drowsiness, the sermon was often interrupted with a diversion introduced which might have been a prayer or announcements. It was neither unusual nor improper for worshippers to stand to ward off sleep. The *voorlezer* was responsible for awakening sleepers.

The congregational prayer could last a half hour or longer. Sometimes, written prayer requests were passed up to the minister on a cane or wooden claw. Afterward, if not already done, the offering was collected. Money was gathered in cloth bags, sometimes with small bells attached to somehow awaken sleepers and signal the approach of the deacons. The Lord’s Supper was celebrated four times a year. Preparatory sermons called *voorbereydingen* were usually delivered on the Thursday or Friday before Communion Sunday.

Church seating arrangements reflected distinctions for both gender and class. Women and children sat in the center of the sanctuary, while the men sat along the walls facing them. Slaves who attended sat in the back. A special bench called the *juffrouw bank* was often reserved for the minister’s family. Pews were frequently rented, costing more up front and less as one went further back.

Largely absent from churches before the Revolutionary War was interior heat. In the winter, women battled freezing interior temperatures by using *stooffes* or foot stoves, which were metal-lined perforated wooden boxes filled with live coals that were placed under a woman’s skirt and sometimes passed around. The men preferred to bundle up.

A frequent target of preachers was worldliness. Activities such as theater attendance, shooting matches and dancing were condemned. Nevertheless, exceptions were excused. A New England physician visiting New York City in 1697 wrote that *the Dutch seem not very strict in Keepeing the Sabbath, you should see some shelling peas at theyr doors, children playing at theyr usuall games in the streetes & ye taverns filled*. Alcohol was frequently consumed at baptisms, weddings, house visitation and the ordination of elders and deacons. Funerals were extravagant by today’s standards. Although one of the poorer members of the Albany Church, Claes Janse ended his days, it was said, with *a good dry coffin, a good dry grave, and a far from dry funeral*.

By Eric O’Brock

Next - Native American Missions

## High School

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newcityneighbors

Has the following ever happened to you? You walk into a room, sit down and begin watching a TV show. You get caught up in the story, but since you came into the room late, you have no idea what's going on, so you begin asking a million questions to better understand the plot.

You need to know the beginning of the story to know why you should care for these characters.

From September through December, Jake Parks, Erin Broene and I worked on helping the high school students understand the beginning of our story. Most of us know we're sinners, we know Jesus died and rose for us, but we don't really understand how we arrived at that place. We began this year by taking the high school students through the book of Genesis. We explored why God created the earth, why he allowed the fall, and why he bothered with people at all. Then we began to unpack God's covenant promises found in the life of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

We had some pretty great conversations about who we are, and God's plan for redemption. I'm always amazed how much I learn every time I study the Genesis account. The study of Genesis transitioned nicely into the Christmas season as we saw God's plan of redemption fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

In light of the first half of the school year, we are going to help the high school students understand what it means to live in community with other believers, and how to hang on to their faith in a post-high school world. Couple those discussions with some exciting activities - the spring is shaping up to be great!

- Eric Schalk

## Middle School

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J Walkers is a middle school youth group that focuses on the blessings given to us by our Heavenly Father. With that in mind, we join together every other week to play games, hangout and most importantly, learn about God and his Word.

My friend Josh, Kristi (student from Kuyper College) and I have been talking about blessing and the promises of God. There has been a focus on how to look for the promises of God throughout the Bible. We have also been talking about how to take the time to see God's small blessings in your life. The Bible speaks of many blessings and promises that God has in store for us.

One example can be found in Micah 7:7: *"But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me."* This verse has three promises of God in it. The promise of future/purpose, trust/waiting and the promise that he will hear us.

J Walkers has a lot of fun worshiping and studying God's Word; but we also know how to party and have fun. We have enjoyed two "overnighters" at the church where we played video games, watched movies, played "capture the flag" and of course, Nerf gun wars! The kids' favorite part is the well balanced diet of caffeine and sugar that we give them with the junk food so that they can stay up all night long and have fun. We look forward to Pando on January 19!

- Jon Brinks

## Missions 2013

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