



## A BETTER NEW YEAR RESOLUTION

Most people make new-year resolutions in an attempt to overcome weakness or solve a personal problem. I believe there is another and possibly better resolution to make. Focus on your strengths.

Let me pose a question. What is it that you do that makes you so good at what you do? Unfortunately, most people cannot answer that question. Management guru Peter Drucker states:

“Most Americans do not know what their strengths are. When you ask them, they look at you with a blank stare, or they respond in terms of knowledge, which is the wrong answer.”

The Gallup Organization interviewed 2,000,000 people to learn about human strengths. They surveyed the world’s best teachers, doctors, lawyers, professional sports stars, hotel housekeepers, accountants, soldiers, nurses, chief executives, engineers, stock brokers and yes, even pastors, to find out “what they do that makes them so very good at what they do.”

What Gallup and other researchers have found constitutes a whole new understanding of how to be the best you can be. The simple answer is: *identify, build, and utilize your strengths!*

The following are emerging as foundational truths about personal performance, fulfillment and strengths. Review them, pray about them and see what they might offer you in terms of new goals and resolutions for the year. After all, can 2,000,000 people be totally wrong?

- 1. Determine what is and is not a strength.** Strength is “consistent near perfect performance in an activity.”<sup>1</sup> It is a natural ability you have that when combined with knowledge and skills yields something that you do consistently well. Gallup has identified thirty-four (34) strengths that range from achiever and activator to strategic and WOO (winning others over). In Gallup’s view some strengths describe types of individuals while others refer to qualities and categories. Other authors and assessments expand Gallup’s strengths while adding descriptions that help identify natural talents, inclinations, and gifts.

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<sup>1</sup> Now, *Discover Your Strengths*, Buckingham & Clifton, The Gallup Organization, 2001.

2. **Focus on identifying your specific strengths.** The second key to personal fulfillment and success is to identify your characteristic strengths in a manner that means something to you and gives you the ability to maximize them. I often ask leaders to list ten (10) strengths they possess and then list weaknesses. Most struggle with listing so many strengths but seem to easily make a list of weaknesses. Church culture doesn't characteristically acknowledge the need to develop one's strengths. Instead, it usually reinforces confessing one's sin and weakness.
3. **Capitalize on your identified strengths, Whatever they may be, and manage your weaknesses, Whatever they may be.** Most of us put time and energy into trying to overcome our weaknesses so we can perform better. The Gallup research found that consistent high performers invested more time into strength development and utilization and only minimal time on weaknesses. They only did whatever minimal 'damage control' was necessary to keep the weaknesses from undermining performance.

For example: The world's # 1 ranked golfer, Tiger Woods. Tiger spends most of his time on refining and perfecting his two most dominant strengths – putting and his swing. A mediocre bunker player, he does just enough work on his weakness to keep it from undermining his strengths.

4. **If you are in a position or job you love, it is highly likely you are operating out of your strengths.** When your strengths connect with the requirements of your job and life, creativity, synergy, accomplishment and joy are the usual result. Rob, a local pastor struggled with finding fulfillment in the pastorate. He frequently felt frustrated with the demands of the job, especially the organizational challenges and people problems. His Board encouraged coaching. Through identifying his primary aim in ministry and assessing his strengths, Rob found that his major fulfillment and strengths lied in studying, conceptualizing, and preaching the truth. Not in the day-to-day running of the ministry. His associate Chris loved operational responsibilities. An adjustment of roles ensued and now both are remarkably more fulfilled in what God has called them to do. Remember, operating out of your strengths means operating from your true self. Aligning your strengths and your passions can make all the difference.
5. **If you are not in a position or job you love, you are probably not operating out of your strengths – Don't expect great performance, expect character development.** Oftentimes God plants us in a ministry position that resembles the parable of the fig tree in the vineyard (Luke 13:6). Like the fig tree among a bunch of grape vines, we feel we don't fit the job like others around us seem to. Even the results of our efforts don't seem to produce great results that others appreciate. What does this misfit mean? I believe such situations are seasons of character development. Because the fit isn't perfect God uses the resulting difficulty and adversity to build our maturity (James 1:2-4) by producing the

character fruit of the Holy Spirit in us (Gal. 5:22-24). These seasons of life are also part of God's school of leadership development.

- 6. Above all, be a yielded vessel wherever you are and whatever you do. Even in your weakness God can be glorified** (2 Cor. 12:9). God can use your weakness for His gain. When in college I took the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). My counselor shared that the morning score was great but my afternoon score was so low it would disqualify me from any law school in America. The low score was on writing ability. I just couldn't write. Imagine my surprise when many years later Thomas Nelson Publishers asked me to write a book. Writing that book – *One Way Relationships* – was pure agony. But God's grace was sufficient for my weakness and the book became a best seller with over 100,000 copies sold in four languages. PTL!