

My New Year's resolution: To discover what Jesus wants for me and from me

Like many people, you may be considering a New Year's resolution: something you will commit to doing throughout 2008. Mine will be to discover what Jesus wants *for* me and *from* me — and to dispose myself to actually receive what he has *for* me and give him what he wants *from* me.

This, of course, is not something new. This is the attitude with which I try to live my life of discipleship day after day, year after year, following the example of our father in faith, Abraham, who responded "Ready!" when God called his name. (cf. Gn 22:1) In that passage titled in some Bibles "The Testing of Abraham" we see that the Lord wanted something *from* him, because he also wanted something *for* him — and these two things go hand in hand.

In order to bring about his plan for us — and grant us what he has in store *for* us — to bless us in unimaginable ways, with blessings we have not yet conceived (*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' — but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.* 1 Cor 2:9-10) — God may ask something *from* us: to embrace a particular mission or sacrifice or to give up something that stands



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in the way of being blessed, of receiving his presence and power in our lives. If this is the case, all I can say to my soul is "Give it up already!" Why delay giving Jesus what he wants *from* me, if in exchange I will receive what he has in mind *for* me? It makes perfect sense to enter into this divine exchange given that I will undoubtedly be the winner.

But this only rings true to the one who has come to another deep conviction about God, one that rules my life and relationship with Christ, namely, that "God wants only and always my good."

This is one of my mottos, a truth I live by since I first came to know the Lord in a personal, intimate, life-giving and life-changing way at the age of 15. It's foundational, for if this is not true, if God is not *for* me, as St. Paul assures us in Romans 8:28-39, then who is it that we are following? What kind of God is this,

if not the God of tender mercy, of abiding love, of a compassion that is renewed each morning?

"This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The Lord's loving-kindness indeed never cease, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lam 3:21-23)

I believe a very worthwhile goal for this year — and for life — is to come to that place in our walk with the Lord where we can say with St. Paul without hesitation or fear: "I know him in whom I have believed." (2 Tm 1:12b)

This is another one of those mottos and deep convictions that rule my life and my relationship with Christ and his church. I know God can be trusted. I know God is for me and not against me. I know the God who has my best interest in mind. That's why I can say with great joy: "God is good! All the time, God is good!" Can you?

Have you come to know the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit this way? Have you experienced the God of love and the love of God in life-changing manner? Do you experience his mercies each morning? Do you trust him? Can you entrust every aspect and area

Romans 8:28-39: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose... What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring a charge against those whom God has chosen? God, who justifies? Who shall condemn them? Christ Jesus, who died or rather was raised to life, who is at the right

hand of God and who intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or the sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

of your life — your thoughts, feelings, judgments, decisions, actions, family, love life, vocation, finances, health, your entire being — to him, knowing that God is trustworthy and true all the time? Yes, to that God who does allow our free will to wreak havoc on ourselves and others, who sees the consequences of mankind's sin and suffers it more than we? Do you trust him despite the trials he may allow you to undergo in this life?

I can. I do. But not nearly as much as I would like to, which is why my New Year's resolution is not new, but very worthwhile:

to discover and dispose myself to receive what Jesus has *for* me and give him what he wants *from* me this year. I have nothing to fear because "God is for us!" (Rom 8:31)

Have a very blessed 2008 journey of faith and may you, like St. Paul, be able to say with greater conviction than ever: "I have been grasped by Christ Jesus."

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The Holy Grail of reprogramming: It's a new era for stem cells

The recent discovery that regular old garden-variety skin cells can be converted into highly flexible (pluripotent) stem cells has rocked the scientific world. Two papers, one by a Japanese group, and another by an American group, have announced a genetic technique that produces stem cells without destroying (or using) any human embryos. In other words, the kind of stem cell usually obtained by destroying embryos appears to be available another way. All that is required is to transfer four genes into the skin cells, triggering them to convert into pluripotent stem cells. It has been called "biological alchemy," something like turning lead into gold. Many are hailing "cellular reprogramming" as a breakthrough of epic proportions, the stuff that Nobel prizes are made of, a kind of Holy Grail in biomedical research.

As important as this advance may prove to be scientifically, it may be even more important to the ethical discussion. It offers a possible solution to a long-standing ethical impasse and a unique opportunity to declare a pause, maybe even a truce in the stem cell wars, given that the source of these cells is ethically pristine and uncomplicated. As one stem cell researcher put it recently, if the new method produces equally potent cells, as it has been touted to do, "the whole field is going to completely change. People working on ethics will have to find something new to worry about." Thus, science itself may have devised a clever way to heal the wound it opened back in 1998 when human embryos began to be sought out and destroyed for their

stem cells. Dr. James Thomson (whose 1998 work ignited the controversy, and who also published one of the new breakthrough papers) acknowledged just such a possibility in comments to reporters: "Ten years of turmoil and now this nice ending." Whether this nice ending will actually play out remains to be seen, but a discovery of this magnitude, coupled with a strong ethical vision, certainly has the potential to move us beyond the contentious moral quagmire of destroying human embryos.

Change never comes easily, however, and before we can really change, we need to see the reasons why we should change. Each of us is, incredibly, an embryo who has grown up. This biological fact stares researchers in the face every time they choose to "disaggregate" a human embryo with their own bare hands. It makes many researchers edgy, touching them on some deeper level of their being. It makes many Americans queasy and eager to find alternatives. Dr. Thomson, who has overseen the destruction of numerous embryonic humans himself, had the honesty to acknowledge this fact in comments he made to *The New York Times* recently: "If human embryonic stem cell research does not make you at least a little bit uncomfortable, you have not thought about it enough."

Reprogramming eliminates these ethical concerns even as it offers a highly practical



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and straightforward technique for obtaining pluripotent stem cells.

The sheer practicality of the new reprogramming approach, coupled with its ethical advantages, really make it a no-brainer. Yet despite all

these advantages, a number of voices can be heard arguing that the bio-industrial-complex emerging around destructive human embryo research must be safeguarded and expanded. There are three reasons for this.

First, the financial investment that has already been made in this arena is significant, especially considering certain state initiatives like Proposition 71 in California which devote large sums of state taxpayer money to pursue research that depends on human embryo destruction. Once large sums of money are involved, ethics often becomes the first casualty.

Second, some of the scientists who advocate the destruction of human embryos have never really taken the moral concerns very seriously because the creed they subscribe to is the so-called "scientific imperative," namely, that science must go forward, as if it were the highest good. It must be able to do whatever it wants, wherever it wants, whenever it wants, and nobody should be pushing ethical viewpoints to limit what researchers do. That, of course, is a completely untenable position because

we regulate what scientists do all the time. The very mechanism by which we disperse federal money puts all kinds of checks and balances on what researchers can do and there are certain types of research like germ warfare studies or nuclear bomb development that the government strictly regulates already. Other kinds of research are criminal, such as performing medical experiments on patients who don't give their consent. The idea that we have to allow science to do whatever it wants is little more than "pie-in-the-sky" wishful thinking.

The third reason embryo destructive research will still likely be promoted has to do with abortion. Several astute commentators have noted recently how the whole field of embryonic stem cell research seems to serve as a kind of "hedge" for abortion. In the same way that a garden gets a hedge placed around it in order to protect it, embryonic stem cells are becoming a place holder for abortion. If embryo killing becomes incorporated into the way we cure illnesses and maintain our health as a society, then abortion on demand will be more likely to curry favor in our culture as well. If those trying to protect embryos carry the day, pro-abortionists fear that the same ethical arguments will prevail against abortion.

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