

# FIRST

A GATEWAY CONFERENCE

## CONFESSIONS OF A STIFF-NECKED, GODLY BACKSLIDER

JACK HAYFORD

**Focus** God has a purpose for each of us, and a plan for us to live fruitful, fulfilling lives for Him. When we stray from that purpose and plan, He holds us accountable to obey Him because He loves us.

**Open** What day is your birthday? How do you like to celebrate it?

**Read** In Deuteronomy 10:11–16, Moses gives instructions to the Israelites as they are about to enter the Promised Land. He tells them what the Lord requires: to fear Him, to walk in His ways, to love and serve Him with all their hearts, and to keep the commandments of the Lord. Then Moses calls the Israelites to circumcise their hearts and to no longer be stiff-necked. These instructions are also relevant to us as we begin a new year of walking with God.

Just as the Israelites were headed toward the Promised Land, we each have a purpose God has called us to. And, like the Israelites, we have a tendency to wander from God. Even when we aren't blatantly rebelling against God, our flesh can lead us to being unfruitful and losing our focus on God's plans. When we stray, God calls us to come back to obedience. His commandments are for our good and help us to live to our full potential.

A stiff-necked person will not bow in dependence on God or lift their heads up in worship. When God corrects us, it's a loving confrontation, but He expects us to respond by circumcising our hearts. This means to "cut away" anything in our flesh that keeps us from obedience. This is where we allow God to come into the most private places of our heart and change what needs to be changed. Circumcision of our hearts leads to a greater flow of God's life through us and greater fruitfulness.

**Talk**

1. What part of this message most stood out to you?
2. Are you familiar with the word “backslider”? What does it mean to you?
3. Pastor Jack mentioned some physical health struggles that contributed to him losing focus in his prayer life. What are some other things that can distract us from doing what God has called us to do?
4. Tell a story from your own life of a time when it was difficult for you to obey God. What fruit resulted when you chose to be obedient?
5. As we enter this new year of 2013, what would you like to see change in your walk with God?

**Live**

Read Psalm 119 in its entirety. List all the different words used to describe God’s Word, such as statutes, commands, etc. Ask God to give you a greater hunger to know Him and to obey Him.

**Pray**

Thank You, Lord, that You love us enough to correct us. We praise You because You are good, and Your commands are for our good. As King David prayed, we now ask You, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23–24, NIV).