

"Facing a New Year"

Luke 2:41-52
Revelation 21:1-5
January 6, 2008

The packages are opened. The decorations are down and put away. The Christmas celebration is done. The family gatherings and vacations are over. Christmas is over. Or is it?

Christmas is so significant because it means God has reached out to us – and because of that any point in time is the opportunity to have a great new beginning. A new year, full of opportunity, lays before you. What will you do with it?

Don't think "resolutions." They come out looking like:

- I want to be a better person
- I want to save more money
- I want to be healthier
- I want to do this more or that more
- I want to lose weight or exercise more
- I want to be a better Christian.

What does all of that mean? How will you now when you get there? But rather, what will you accomplish this year?

First, be purposeful. Not good for nothing, but good for something - quite specific.

- Hank Aaron was asked one day why he went up to the plate with the trademark label of the bat facing down. He responded: "I don't go up there to read. I go up there to hit the ball."
- Bear Bryant, former Alabama football coaching great, had this sign hanging in his office: "Cause something to happen."

Second, know your direction.

Do you remember the story I told you one Sunday about the University of Illinois? How the players all got up and ran through the locker room door, right into the swimming pool? Specific goals will help you be purposeful in your life.

The Apostle Paul wrote: "...forgetting what lies behind, I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51)

Do you not know I must be about my Father's business? (Luke 2:49)

More than once Jesus went away to pray.

More than once Jesus withdrew from the crowds and went away to rest.

Choose a direction, then make purpose plans to get there.

Third, believe in yourself to achieve it.

Tom Dempsey. One of the great moments in sports history came on a Sunday afternoon a few years ago when the New Orleans Saints and the Detroit Lions were playing. The Lions were leading 17-16, with time running out. The Saints had the ball mid-field. They called time out with two seconds left on the clock. The coach then sent Tom Dempsey, an uncertain place-kicker with a deformed right arm and hand and with half a right foot – onto the field to try a field goal.

It was a 63 yard attempt. The longest field goal every kicked in the NFL to date had been 57 yards. But the athlete with the deformed foot kicked the ball through the uprights and won the game. When asked after the game how he did it, Dempsey attributed his success to high school and college coaches and the pros who “spent so much time encouraging me, that they simply forgot to tell me what I couldn’t do.”

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It was spring, but it was summer I wanted,
The warm days, and the great outdoors.

It was summer. But it was fall I wanted,
The colorful leaves, and the cool, dry air.

It was fall. But it was winter I wanted,
The beautiful snow, and the joy of the holiday season.

It was winter. But it was spring I wanted,
The warmth, and the blossoming of nature.

I was a child. But it was adulthood I wanted
The freedom, and the respect.

I was twenty. But it was thirty I wanted,
To be mature, and sophisticated.

I was middle-aged. But it was twenty I wanted,
The youth, and the free spirit.

I was retired. But it was middle-age I wanted.
The presence of mind without limitations.

My life was over.
But I never got what I wanted.

I heard a story a few years ago about a problem the Navy had in World War 2. Actually it was some of the pilots who had the problem. It seems some of the pilots who flew into heavy clouds came out of the clouds upside down. And the Navy had a problem with that! That

illustrates pretty well what happens to us when we live life without clear-cut goals in mind. Without a sense of direction in our life. Somehow life gets turned upside down.

Henry Sloan Coffin said one time: "There is nothing more exhausting in life than to live without compelling duties ... to be forever asking ourselves what to do to make ourselves feel significant or how to spend our time."

"Chicken Soup for the Soul" (Volume 1) has the story of John Stoddard who sat down at the kitchen table one rainy afternoon when he was only 15. Stoddard wrote three words at the top of a yellow pad: "My Life List." Then he listed 127 goals for his life. When Chicken Soup was compiled, Stoddard had accomplished 108 of his goals.

Christmas is not over. It is only just beginning.

MY GOALS FOR 2008 – in your bulletin

1. What do you intend to do?

Write a sentence ... "I will"

Something to do, or stop doing, or change.

Make it quite specific. Not global. Not something that anyone could do.

2. List the barriers.

What stands in your way?

What could you allow to get in the way of reaching your goal?

3. List your strengths.

What do you have going for you? Be honest.

It is never too late to begin a new habit. Or to recovenant our side of the promise to God, or to name anew the responsibilities we have as faithful people.

Mend a quarrel

Seek out a forgotten friend

Dismiss suspicion – replace it with trust.

Give a soft answer

Encourage a youth

Keep a promise

Find the time

Forego a grudge

Forgive an enemy

Listen

Apologize if you are wrong

Try to understand

Think first of someone else

Appreciate

Be kind and gentle

Laugh a little

Take a stand for something
Laugh a little more
Welcome a stranger
Speak your love.

The Christian faith is usually known for the things we are against, or the things we don't do. Living a joyous Christian life is to be found where we have a passion for something and act on it. In other words, the reality of our faith should be measured, not by the things we don't do or are against, but by the things we are for, and therefore the things we do – quite specifically – because it is an intentional expression of our faith.

WHERE IS IT IN YOUR LIFE THAT GOD IS SAYING, "Now it is up to you."