

The Right Foot: Starting the New Year

January 14, 2018

It seems more than a bit odd on January 14 to preach a sermon called “The Right Foot: Starting the New Year.” I mean, we’re 14 days into the New Year already. Some of us, those New Year’s resolutions are a faded memory; we’ve failed already on those good intentions. It seems strange to go with the same message I was going to preach last week.

And I agree. But what I have to share is so good, and no matter what we’ve done or not done these last 14 days, it doesn’t mean that we’ve given up on 2018 already. I don’t want to simply let circumstances, known today and unknown for tomorrow, dictate my life in the coming year. So though this message is a week late, it is still vital as we begin 2018.

Now I must say that this outline comes from another pastor. On the last Sunday of 2017 as I was driving to church, I heard on the radio a preacher ending his sermon with these 5 points. As soon as I got to the church, I wrote them down. I don’t know who the preacher was, but what he said in those 5 minutes of commute time, I want to share this morning. Unfortunately for you, I will go longer than 5 minutes.

When we approach a New Year, most of us take stock in our lives and consider the areas we might improve. Maybe lose some weight or get rid of a bad habit or learn a new skill or try a new discipline in life. So with the start of a New Year, it seems logical to make this change.

Sadly, our best intentions rarely have staying power. We fall into old habits oh so quickly, and this year’s New Year’s resolution gets put into the same File 13 as so many other ones. Eventually, one can simply decide, “There’s no point in New Year’s resolutions; I never keep them anyway.” So we stop making decisions about our lives and leave our future days up to chance, to circumstances, to the events of the day.

Imagine your life is like a sailboat. We set sail on life’s journey often with courses set by others: graduate from high school, play on this team in this sport. We start out on our journey with some direction; a course for life. But if we stop setting goals, or stop trying to achieve a goal, our sailboat becomes adrift in the ocean of life. Currents take us wherever they may. The storms of life toss us even further from our dreams and best intentions. Without a plan, a goal, we never set course into the wind and waves of life.

But you and I have been given something very precious: life, and the potential to have an impact on the world and the people around us. We have something absolutely incredible: days with which we can do something meaningful, important, purposeful. I don’t know about you, but I want my life to mean something, to be a blessing to others, and I can’t do that without having a plan.

Unfortunately, people spend more time planning for a 2 week vacation to the beach or the mountains or to an amusement park than they do planning from here to eternity. Think about it. For a two week vacation, we decide a destination and who we want to experience it with. We do research to discover opportunities, potential activities, accommodations, transportation, maybe even saving money to pay for it. We do all this planning for this vacation.

But how much planning have you done for your life between today and eternity? How much thought have you put into what your life will be, will do, what you will accomplish, who you want to go with you, how you will get there, from here to eternity?

I want to suggest we start this New Year of 2018 on the right foot, even if it is 14 days into it. Let's set course this year in such a way that the rest of our days have a direction, a destination in mind.

Turn to page 5 in your bulletin, and I am going to give you 5 keys to starting the New Year off on the right foot.

First of all, Pray for the discernment of the Lord's will.

Instead of trying to come up with a direction on our own, as Christians, we should know that the Lord has a perfect will for our lives.

God spoke through the prophet Isaiah and said this:

The rain and snow come down from the heavens and stay on the ground to water the earth. They cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry. It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.¹

God has a plan for you and me. He is the only one qualified to make this plan. You and I are not. So as we begin a New Year, we should pray that we might discern what God's will in our lives is.

Second, Commit ourselves to His will.

It's one thing to pray for discernment of God's will in our lives. But some of us, once we learn it, want to question God, make suggestions, have some better ideas for God. We find out what God wants, and we decide that we are smarter than Him, and we'll just go our own way, thank you very much. How silly that is, but it's what we do.

Once we discern God's will, then we must commit ourselves to that will. No second guessing, no "God, I think we should do it this way," no deciding God's plan is foolish and doing our own thing.

This is harder than it sounds. We humans at our nature want to do our own thing. The only difference between you and I and a toddler is that we hide our willfulness so much better. We all want to do our thing, so to commit to God's will is against our very sinful nature.

I have to tell you that I am really struggling with this eye situation. Just the thought of someone sticking a few instruments inside my eye is bad enough. What I'm really worried about is afterwards; by all accounts, my eyesight will not be as good as it was before this happened. It will not, and can't be corrected with different lenses, and what worries me the most is whether I will be able to fly ever again.

So a week or so ago, I prayed this prayer:

"Lord, if this thing with my eye is a result of sin in my life, I repent and ask you to heal me. If flying has become an idol for me, help me put it in its rightful place. If this is to teach me a life lesson, help me learn it easily and fully. If it is something for me to be a witness to someone else, help me to be faithful and true to You. And if this is to demonstrate Your miraculous power, help me to trust in what You can do."

I'm not saying I've made it or understand it or have a very positive attitude about it; Myra can tell you that. I'm not perfect, folks, but I'm relying. I'm committing to God's will in my life.

¹ Isaiah 55:10-11 (NLT)

The third way to start the New Year off on the right foot after praying for discernment of the Lord's will and committing to that will is to Plan a strategy to fulfill it.

When I prepare a trip in the airplane, I do a whole lot of planning in order to accomplish that trip. I schedule the airplane, making sure I am personally capable of flying it as well as the airplane is capable of flying the trip. I study the route, including obstacles, terrain, airports, navigational aids, and communication frequencies. I plan how much fuel I will need or how much I can carry with the people and baggage I'm flying with. I study the weather and the kinds of winds I will face, even to the day of the flight. In fact, I have cancelled flights because of a dangerous change in the weather overnight. I have a goal in mind and plan to reach that goal.

So as believers, once we discern God's will and commit to it, we must plan a strategy to fulfill it.

The Apostle Paul knew what God's will for him was: to be an evangelist to the Gentiles. Look through the Book of Acts and his epistles and you see he had a plan. He always had a plan. Sometimes, that plan had setbacks or times when the Lord said, "Not yet." Other times, the plan changed because of the Lord's leading. But Paul had a plan, a strategy to fulfill God's will in his life.

So plan a strategy to fulfill God's plan in your life. Sit down and write out what it will take to accomplish that. Do the necessary planning to reach God's destination for your life.

Fourth, Carry out the plan one day at a time.

Once we have a plan, we need to implement that plan. But often, we have a plan, but fail to carry it out because we forget that we have to implement it one day at a time.

Let's say you are interested in going to the Holy Land with us in October 2019. You are planning to attend. But you need to do that every day, else the trip will come and you're not ready. Myra and I are saving money right now to go. If you start now, you probably need to save about \$200 a month per person. Otherwise, you have to come up with \$3,600 plus spending money at the end, and that's pretty hard for most of us. So we are planning each month to save that money. Any funeral honorariums I receive go directly towards the trip. I fly less (ok, that's pretty easy right now because I've grounded myself). Myra is buying fewer clothes. Right? We are doing what we need to do each and every day to reach the goal.

Same way with God's will in our lives. Maybe it is reach a non-Christian family member for Christ, or to go on a mission trip, or to become a faithful and devoted Sunday School teacher, or possibly, even become a pastor of the Gospel. The strategy to reach that calling is carried out one day at a time. You don't discern to be a pastor one day and have a church the next. You don't feel called to be in missions one day and the next be on the field. You don't feel led to lead someone to Christ and it happen the next day. You need to carry out the plan one day at a time.

Finally, Plan for failure.

There is going to be a failure, a setback, on the path towards the goal. Don't think it might happen; it will happen. And if a failure occurs, do you give up?

If Joey Votto goes to the plate and gets an out, does he give up? Does he quit? In fact, Joey Votto, one of the greatest hitters right now in Major League baseball, fails around 2 out of 3 times he goes to the plate. 2 out of 3 times, yet he is a great hitter.

You are going to have a failure in your pursuit of God's will in your life. It will happen. You need to plan for it. You need to realize that the Christian life is not a life free of trials or setbacks, even failure. Satan will try to stop you from doing God's will. Plan for it. Get yourself back up.

I want to leave you with 4 words, 4 very important words, as you start this New Year off on the right foot, and they come from Joshua 1. They are printed in your bulletin.

READ JOSHUA 1:1-9 AND COMMENT.