

Read & Reach 2018

Various Scriptures

I love that video and in particular when he says that the simple reason that we don't read God's Word is that we don't want to. One of our goals in the New Year should be to develop the "want to." There will be times in 2018 that you don't feel like reading God's Word and you should read it anyway. But understand that one of the goals of sanctification is to become the type of person who wants to do the right thing. And that happens through habits and through teaching and instruction.

So, I want to spend this morning anticipating and talking about the new year and the opportunities in front of us as a church body. I don't know what your practice is when it comes to New Years Resolutions, but many people are cynical about them because we so often make them and then fail to keep them. Some Christians may even be tempted to think that making a resolution is somehow legalistic or forbidden by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when he talks about taking an oath and tells us to just let our communication be simply yes or no.

I have to tell you that I get a bit of a thrill the day after Christmas each year as my attention shifts from Christmas to the quickly approaching new year. I don't know about you but I love fresh starts and new beginnings. And I think for the Christian the time to evaluate my life in light of God's Word and then set some goals for the new year is exciting.

We sometimes think resolutions sound man-centered and like we are going to do these things in our own strength. When Jonathan Edwards was 19 years old he penned a series of 70 resolutions to guide him and help him. I want you to listen to how he began this list.

"Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake." - Jonathan Edwards

And then he said that he planned to read over these resolutions once a week throughout the year. Let me read a couple of these to you:

6. Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.

17. Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.

28. Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

And the list goes on and on with incredibly astute and passionate commitments to live for God's glory. The thing I love about Edwards passion is that he humbly acknowledges his utter dependence on God's enabling grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, yet he realizes that we cannot live well and for God's glory unless we live intentionally. If, as a church and as individuals, if we don't take opportunities every now and then to evaluate our ministry and personal lives and set some intentional goals then we will be like a ship without a rudder. It will be afloat and look good, but it won't be that useful.

So, let's begin the new year with a sense of excitement and let's commit ourselves to a couple of areas that will help us to be intentional in the new year and see God's purpose for this church body accomplished. If we don't take what the Bible says and plan specifically how to apply and accomplish God's mission we won't do it.

We'll get to our two main goals for 2018 in a minute, but I want to remind you of our mission statement. *Woodhaven Bible Church exists to make followers of Christ who worship God, connect with one another, and serve the church and the world.*

This tells us what our primary goal in existence is, we are here to make disciples or followers of Christ. This is exactly the goal of the Great Commission in Matthew 28. So, what sort of disciples do we want to cultivate here at WBC? There are 3 key words in this mission statement that tell us what healthy disciples look like. They worship, connect, and serve. They are here worshiping, they are building relationships with other believers in order to speak the truth and build up the body and they serve both the church and the world. Disciples serve the world by sharing the gospel and making more disciples who then enter this process of worshipping, connecting and serving. This is one giant cycle.

So how can we see this happen in the new year? I don't know about you, but I always need direction and help in my life. I have had the unbridled joy in my life of putting together several pieces of furniture from IKEA. I'm telling you there is more chance of me becoming the King of England than of being able to put

together IKEA furniture without instructions. But with instructions, I am able to put something together that looks decent.

So, here are the two goals for the new year. One inwardly focused and one outwardly focused. The inward serves and motivates the outer.

1. READ

If we are going to be followers of Jesus Christ in the new year, we have to have interaction with Him. There's nothing more basic or important to a disciple of Jesus than to be consistently reading and understanding His Word to us.

How do we know God? Well, we can observe creation and we have the law written on our conscience. Every human has a sense of beauty, order, and justice that is innate to us. We have these pointers that tell us there is a God and that He is able to create and order the universe, but beyond that we don't know very much from creation or conscience.

It's like the person who finds a swiss watch on the street and knows there was a watchmaker, but doesn't know what sort of man the watchmaker is. Is he tall? Short? Old? Young? Kind? Grumpy? It would be impossible to figure out what sort of man designed the watch from simply studying it.

But, if you had a copy of the watchmaker's diary and he let you read it, then you would have insight into his mind and desires. What sort of man is the watchmaker? What does he want to gain out of creating the watch? If you had a copy of personal correspondence from the watchmaker you would have insight into who He is.

This is clearly the way it works with God's Word. Listen to Psalm 119:130. When God's Word is explained and understood it gives light. It gives us direct insight into the mind of the maker. We have access to God.

But here's the thing about this. God is the one who has intentionally, lovingly, purposefully given us this access. He has chosen to reveal Himself to us. It's like he has taken a spotlight and shone it on His own plans, thoughts, and desires.

And you and I have this access in this book. We can daily interact with the God of the universe through his loving written revelation of Himself. I don't know about you, but I want to take advantage of that opportunity.

So, in 2018 to be growing and maturing disciples let's read this book about God together. In your bulletin today we put a through the Bible in a year guide. It has you reading 5 days out of the week so you can miss a couple of days and not feel like you have to read for 3 hours to catch up. We are going to be working through this together this year and let's keep one another accountable and encourage one another to keep at it. How awesome would it be if at the end of this year our whole church body has read through God's Word together, not just so we could say that we had done it, but so that we will have grown in our affection for God? I want to read you some lines from an Isaac Watts hymn that speaks of the power and place of God's Word in our lives.

1. Laden with guilt and full of fears,
I fly to Thee, my Lord,
And not a glimpse of hope appears,
But in Thy written Word
The volumes of my Father's grace
Does all my griefs assuage
Here I behold my Savior's face
In every page.

2. This is the field where, hidden, lies
The pearl of price unknown
That merchant is divinely wise
Who makes the pearl his own
Here consecrated water flows
To quench my thirst of sin
Here the fair tree of knowledge
grows,
No danger dwells within

So, let's read together and then let's reach together.

2. REACH

Once you begin to pick up God's Word and read, you discover this incredibly good God being rejected by His people over and over again. But you see him extend His grace to them repeatedly and you see His desire to restore fellowship and do good to His creatures.

God's revelation of Himself in the Bible is an act of grace that He initiates. He chooses Israel to be the nation through Him He will reveal Himself and work His plan of reconciliation. He pursues them in their sinfulness with prophets who give the people God's Word. He sends His Son to become a man and to live and die for us. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to empower and indwell His people and the Spirit sends believers into the world to bring the good news of reconciliation and God's rule and reign to all mankind.

Do you see the pattern here? If you are reading your Bible correctly you see God consistently reaching out, sending, seeking, pursuing, and showing grace. And, you see that you and I get to play a role in this mission of God, don't we? There's just not a better passage for this reality than 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

We are ambassadors because we are a Kingdom Outpost. Remember that series? We are an outpost of the kingdom of God reaching out into this current age and trying to bring the culture and reality of the kingdom to those around us. Theologians will sometimes speak of our time as the "overlap of the ages." God's kingdom has broken into the present world through Jesus and is represented now by the church. Think of it like the intersection of the ocean and the beach. There's a bit of land where you have both ocean and beach and we live in both ages at once.

It's because we live in both ages that our task is particularly important. There's an urgency to our mission.

"The meaning of this 'overlap of the ages' in which we live, the time between the coming of Christ and His coming again, is that it is the time given for the witness of the apostolic Church to the ends of the earth. The end of all things, which has been revealed in Christ, is - so to say - held back until witness has been borne to the whole world concerning the judgment and salvation revealed in Christ." -
Lesslie Newbigin

So, we have a reaching, sending, gracious God who we serve and He gives us the privilege to be ambassadors for Him in this world. What does this look like for our church body in 2018? When we set the goal of reaching what we mean is to challenge each member of WBC to find 3 unbelieving people in 2018 and make a connection with them. What do I mean by that? We mean have a neighbor into your home for a meal or for coffee. Invite them to a church event like the Easter

egg hunt or a concert. Take them out to eat or a small group invite some in the neighborhood over for a BBQ once it gets a little warmer. The point is that we want to be actively and intentionally reaching out to those around us who don't know the Lord. We want to develop relationships with them and ultimately see them hear the gospel and meet other believers.

Reaching is the overflow of reading and knowing God. But it doesn't happen automatically. Now, we are going to talk about this throughout the year and encourage everyone in this in a variety of ways, but imagine what it would be like if our 60 or so families each connected with 3 unbelievers in 2018. That's almost 200 people! I'm praying and asking the Lord to give us boldness and to allow us to see people saved in the new year and brought into our church body through baptism and to begin the process of discipleship. We depend on God for that work, but let's ask Him and then let's put our boots to the ground and get purposeful about the mission he has for us.

So, read and reach 2018. Please pray with me about your involvement in this during the new year.