

How To Make The Most Of Your New Year - Proverbs 17:24 (GN)

Welcome on this first Sunday in the New Year. Did you know that New Year's Day is the most universal holiday of all? It is the world's most observed holiday.

I trust you've made your New Year's resolutions one of which is to be in church each week. Well done for this first Sunday.

The late **Erma Bombeck** made some memorable resolutions over the years:

1. I will go to no doctor whose office plants have died.
2. I'm going to apply for a hardship scholarship to Weight Watchers.
3. I will never loan my car to anyone I have given birth to.

Resolutions are good, especially if there are changes we need to make in our lives. I heard about one poor guy who called his girlfriend and got the following recording: *"I am not available right now, but thank you for caring enough to call. I am making some changes in my life. Please leave a message after the beep. If I do not return your call, you are one of the changes."*

It's hard to believe that it is already 2010. With each passing year time just speeds up, especially the summers when the Silvers are running in Seward.

It's not all bad though because even the winters seem to speed by faster than they use to. But in any case, we are now faced with a New Year.

We all can do one of two things:

1. We can **waste time** sitting around and worrying about the things we failed to accomplish last year and the mistakes we made. We can have a pity party because things didn't go the way we wanted. OR
2. We can decide to **make the most** of the New Year that God has granted us. It is even possible that this could be the greatest year of your life if you make a conscious decision to do whatever it takes to have a great year.

Whatever we're going to do we better get **to it** because time is **moving on**. Time doesn't stop while we are trying to make up our mind about what we are going to do.

And if you are not going to do something with your life it really doesn't matter how fast the time goes by.

In **Alice in Wonderland**, Alice comes to a junction in the road that leads in different directions, she asks the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends a good deal on where you want to go to," said the Cat. "I don't know," replied Alice. "Then it doesn't much matter which way you go."

So what are you going to do with 2010? Will this year be any different than last year? **How many of you would like 2010 to be better than 2009?** For some of you last year was a great year, a year full of joy, but for others, there were challenges and crises. For some, 2009 was more of a disappointment than a joy.

There is nothing we can do to change last year but the good news is we can learn from last year and that gives us the opportunity to make some changes.

The Lord gives us **time in small pieces** that we know as hours, days and months. At the beginning of every year it is like He wipes the slate clean and gives us another shot at it.

Proverbs 17:24 (The Good News Version) *"An intelligent person aims at wise actions, but a fool starts off in many directions."*

Hopefully the part that says *"an intelligent person aims at wise actions"* describes you and not the part that says *"a fool starts off in many directions."* You don't want to be the one that starts the year off going in a lot of different directions at one time with no plan of action.

An intelligent person has a **goal**, something he or she is aiming at, a target they are trying to reach. Have you set any goals for 2010? Or are you just going to hope it's better? You need to have a plan. If like Alice you don't know where you want to go then you can't plan how to get there.

We are going to look at **four keys** that will help all of us get the most out of 2010. Maybe these keys will open some doors for you and start you out on the right foot.

A. Accept responsibility for your life.

This is hard for many people to do. Some would rather blame someone else for the problems and difficulty in their lives. They want to blame someone for the way they live their lives and the choices they make.

Accepting responsibility for your own life is not a popular concept in our society. We live in a culture that teaches us that none of our problems are our own fault. Everything bad that happens to us is someone else's fault. Blame the schools, blame your parents, blame everyone else but it's not your fault.

If you lose your job it's because the boss had it out for you, if you get into an accident it's never your fault. It's always someone else's fault.

We will never be a success in life and we will never make our lives count if we have the attitude that it's someone else's fault. We must accept responsibility for our own lives.

Galatians 6:5 *"Each person must be responsible for himself."* I am responsible for my own life, if I like it or not.

All of us are going to face two kinds of circumstances.

1. There will be things we have no control over. All of us will face surprises this year. There will be things that happen to us that we didn't see coming. **We** can't control the weather, the economy, the big corporations that some of us work for, or the words or actions of others.

2. But there will be some circumstances that will happen **as a result of your choices**, the actions you took or perhaps didn't take. Now if you quit your job before you have another job to go to things might get tight but that was your choice.

Maybe you quit your job because it was boring, or you didn't like it, or you got mad but now money and food are getting low and your family is not willing to help because they are refusing to accept responsibility for the decisions and actions you took.

In these kinds of situations what a person really wants is for someone else to accept responsibility for their lives and bail them out of trouble. Now, I'm not talking about someone **who has fell on hard times**, I talking about someone who did something without considering the consequences of their actions.

And while we may not be in control of all the things we are going to face this coming year, we do have control of how we will act and respond to them.

For the purpose of this study, there are **three kinds of people in life:**

- The accusers.
- The excusers.
- The choosers.

The **accusers** always blame everyone else for their problems.

The **excusers** always have an excuse for not making a decision or doing something. I have noticed that whenever I want to procrastinate on something, any excuse will do.

Then there are the "**Choosers**" who say, *"I choose to accept responsibility for my own life and happiness. I'm not dependent upon someone else. I choose the direction of my life."*

B. Believe you can change. Stop saying, "I can't" and start saying, "I can". The person that believes that they can change with the help of God will be able to change.

Philippians 4:13 (Jerusalem Bible) *"There is nothing I cannot master with the help of Christ who gives me strength."*

Do you really believe that verse? There's nothing you can't master with the help of Christ! That means there's nothing that's going to hit you in the next 362 days that you can't master.

There is no problem, no situation, no circumstance, no hassle that you can't handle, that you can't manage, that you're not competent to handle with the help and strength God gives you.

There are people who have **never succeeded** in life because they believe they can't change. They never enjoy life because life to them is just one big failure after another.

They face a new year with **regret** rather than the **joy** of knowing that God has given them the opportunity to make a difference in their own and other people's lives with the help of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Maybe that is why there are so many New Year's parties where people get drunk. They want to forget the past year and are afraid to face the New Year.

With the help and grace of God you can overcome the past and face the future. You have a new handle on life for this coming year. Do you believe and know you

can change? Not on your own power, but with the power that Christ gives you.

The Bible is full of stories of people who changed because they believed that they could change after God touched them.

God told **Moses**: *"I want to use you to save a nation."* Moses said, *"Me? I got kicked out of Egypt because I killed a guy. I'm a murderer. Now I'm out here feeding sheep. And on top of that, I stutter! I'm slow of speech. You want me to be the spokesman for a nation?"* God said, *"Yes. I'm going to use you."* And Moses believed Him and did change.

God called **Gideon**, at a time when Israel was overrun by the enemy: *"I'm going to use you, Gideon, to save the country."* Gideon said, *"Me? I am the youngest kid in the poorest family in the smallest tribe in the nation."* God said, *"Yes. I'm going to use you."* And Gideon believed Him and did change.

The good news is God wants to use you and me. But first you must accept responsibility for your own life. And second you must believe you can change, that God can give you the power to change if you will trust Him.

C - Clarify what you really want.

You must decide what's important and what's not important. God has given each of us the freedom to choose, the freedom of choice. That is one of the things that makes us like God. When God says in Genesis 1, *"Let Us make man in Our own image,"* that included the freedom of choice.

This is one of the ways that we are different from animals, we have the freedom to choose between good and evil. We have the freedom to choose what we want in life.

The only way we can clarify what we really want is to make a list and decide what is important and what is not. It's amazing but most people never do this. They never stop and think through and write down on paper what's really important to them. How about you? Have you ever done this?

You must ask yourself, "What's important to me? What really counts? We can't **do** what's important until we **clarify** what's important. Otherwise you're going to be pushed around by the pressures of life and then all of a sudden the year is over and you're saying, "Where did the year go?"

Most people have never made up their mind what they want out of life and if you

aim at nothing, you're going to hit it. Most people have this vague feeling of, *"I just want to be happy."*

But they've never really sat down and figured out what is it that's going to make them happy? What does God want me to do with my life? Why am I here? They have never written out their values.

I want to challenge you to make a list of the things that are important to you, a list of things that you want to accomplish. What do you value? What do you want to change? Put it down. Then make this your prayer list.

Pin it up on a wall and review it every day and pray about it. Then make a plan of action that will help you accomplish your goals for this year. Then do whatever you have to, to make and get the most out of this coming year. Then watch God do miracles in your life. **Clarify** what you really want.

I helped a friend make such a list a number of years ago and they long since moved out of Alaska but once in a great while I get an email from her letting me know that she has crossed another item off of her list.

There are some things in life that we will do that are permissible but not necessarily to our advantage. There will be some things that we will do this year that will not benefit us at all.

We are going to have to make a decision between what is good and what is better. Between what is better and what is best. Some things aren't necessarily wrong; they're just not necessary. We don't have time for everything.

We need to clarify the two or three things that we have to get done this year. What are the things that are really important? What is the one thing that is so beneficial that it **must** happen this year?

May I suggest three that need to be at the top of your list?

- **Your relationship with God needs to be #1.** What are you going to do this year to strengthen and improve your relationship with God? You need to make your relationship with God a top priority.
- **Your relationship with your family.** What are you going to do to build a stronger and better relationship with your family? What are you going to change about yourself that will help you to accomplish this?

- **Your relationship with your church and church family.** What are you willing to do to improve the quality of your church? How involved are you willing to get to help your church accomplish the commission that God has given it? How committed are you going to be in your attendance and support to your church? **Clarify what's important.**

D - Don't wait to begin.

Do it now! These three words can change your life. Do it now. If we wait for the right situation or the right circumstances we will miss out on life all together. There will never be an ideal time or set of circumstance to start. To make the most of 2010 and to accomplish the things you want to accomplish, start now. Don't wait to begin.

Ecclesiastes 11:4, *"If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done."*

People say, "When things settle down." Or "When things get better." Things may never settle down or get any better. **That's called life!** If you say, *"When things settle down, I'm going to start having a daily quiet time and read my Bible every day,"* you're never going to do it.

You learn to read your Bible and pray when things are unsettled and not so good. *"When things settle down, I'm going to spend more time with my kids."* They'll be grown and gone!

We must learn to enjoy life under circumstances that are less than perfect. Whatever you're going to do, whatever you want to do, start now! Because things will not settle down or get better until you're in the coffin.

A Middle Eastern mystic said, "I was a revolutionary when I was young and all my prayers to God were: **'Lord, give me the energy to change the world.'** As I approached middle age and realized that my life was half gone without my changing a single soul, I changed my prayer to: **'Lord, give me the grace to change all those who come into contact with me, just my family and friends, and I shall be satisfied.'** Now that I am an old man and my days are numbered, I have begun to see how foolish I have been. My prayer now is: **'Lord, give me the grace to change myself.'** If I had prayed for this right from the start, I would not have wasted my life.'

What kind of person will you be this year? Will you be an **accuser**, an **excuser**, or a **chooser**? Will you choose to make the most of 2010? Will you accept responsibility for your life? Will you believe you can change? Will you clarify what you want and what is important to you?

Will you start right now? Will your relationship with God be on the top of your priority list? Will your family and church be at the top of that list? The choice is yours. What will it be?