

OPPORTUNITIES FOR A NEW YEAR

CHAD LANDMAN // 2009.0103

Revelation 21.5: *He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"*

There's something to be said about something that's *new*.

You have the new car smell. The thrill (and heartache) of moving into a new house. The nervousness of a new job. How good you feel wearing a new suit, or a new dress.

In our society, we like things that are new, and tend to look down on things that are not. We seem to measure success by how new your car or house is, how fashionable our clothes are, or how up-to-date our gadgets or toys can be. We have 24-hour news channels on television just for the purpose of getting new info to their viewers. Everybody is looking for the next big thing. Most celebrities, bands, fads, or trends that were new and popular at this time last year have long since faded away. A few have that staying power, but most don't.

We're really in to what's new even in our own lives. Talking to relatives or friends we sometimes start our conversations with, "So what's new?" We want to know what's going on, we want to hear something new about the people we care about. And sometimes we even get upset when we're left in the dark about the news of a relative or a friend, whether its good or bad.

New is what we live for. New makes our lives just a bit more exciting and enjoyable. New helps us get through tough spots in our lives.

But something that we may not look on favorably is a New Year. You may look at the New Year approaching this Thursday and say, "That's just me getting one year older." Or you may look back at failed New Year's resolutions and wonder how they got away from you. Interesting fact: people that make New Year's Resolutions are likely by 78% to falter on those resolutions before the month of January is up. Today, I'm not going to preach to you to make New Year's resolutions for God, I'm going to challenge you to make some New Year's *decisions* for God.

A New Year is the perfect opportunity to find new ways to serve God.

FOUR WAYS WE CAN SEEK TO SERVE GOD IN THE NEW YEAR:

I. CLEAN OUT THE CLUTTER

It must be very entertaining to watch Bonnie and I tackle a room to clean it. Bonnie has the style of taking one thing one step at a time and cleaning that; I tend to get overwhelmed and try to do too much at one time, while in turn not getting much done while driving myself crazy.

But we all do that this time of year, moving towards the Spring Cleaning season. We filter through things, we find stuff that we need to throw or give away (maybe that shirt that you just know you'll never fit into again but you always hoped that you would), and we get rid of junk that is no longer usable in our lives.

Sometimes you just need to get rid of clutter in your life.

The idea of cleaning really stands out to me in Hebrews 10.22 which says, *"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."*

How many things or activities or events or clubs or sports or whatever could you give up to be a better servant for God this year? How much TV or computer time could you cut out to make room for Bible study or serving others? How much would you have to sacrifice to come to worship more often? (Later I'll be talking more about this point.)

Maybe you don't just clean out the clutter... what if you added some things in place of those you got rid of with more important things, Godly things? What could 5 minutes reading the Bible do for you? What if you stepped out of your comfort zone and taught a Bible class? What if you joined a LifeGroup?

God is not concerned with our comfort, He's concerned with our service to Him. And if we sit back with the attitude of *Someone Else Will Do It*, then we have deceived ourselves. We don't know what true service is. True service to God and our fellow man and fellow Christians is hard work. It involves getting outside of our comfort zone and seeing things from a different perspective.

In the movie *Dead Poet's Society*, Robin Williams' character, a teacher at a prep school named John Keating, had his students do something very unusual. In this very strict and conformed school, he had the students do one simple thing: stand on the tops of their desks. He challenged them to look at life from a different perspective, from a different viewpoint.

How long has it been since you did that with your Christian life? How long has it been since you stood up on top of your desk and looked at your Christian service to God from a different perspective?

This year I challenge you to take that perspective. Look at your Christian life from a different angle and find that place where you can serve. Josh talked last Sunday night a little bit about how someone once told Him, “Well, that’s just not my gift.” I’ve had that said to me too, and while it is true in some cases, it’s really not in as many as you’d think. Let me tell you something, you don’t have to be an expert on evangelism to invite a co-worker or a friend at school to worship. You don’t have to have a PhD in English or “Elder” as a title to write a note of encouragement to someone.

II. DO SOMETHING

A couple of months ago Mark and I went to see Antoine Borum because he was having surgery on his wrist. You know how it is - you get to the hospital before the sun comes up, and then you wait for what seems like eternity until they finally take the patient back. I think the surgery was actually less time than the wait time was. Anyways, after his surgery, we went in to see Antoine and his grandmother and Otis and his mother were there. Thomasina thanked Mark and I for coming, and I remarked, “Well, I’m not sure we did anything at all.”

“No, but you were here. That’s what matters.”

Mark and I sat for hours not doing anything. We didn’t help with the surgery and we didn’t necessarily do anything for Antoine, but just being there for him made a difference.

Doing things on a grand scheme is great - organizing great mission trips, service projects, going out into the community to do wonderful things - but at the church’s core are the little things. The things that are small but have a big impact. Like I talked about before, just writing an encouraging note to someone. You have no idea what kind of impact that might have. Maybe sitting with someone during a minor surgery. Maybe visiting someone who can’t get out much. The possibilities are endless for you to do *something*. You don’t have to teach a class or organize a mission trip to make a difference. Jesus said in Matthew 10.42 that even giving a cup of cold water in His name is being a disciple.

It is my *guarantee* to you today that if you start a regular habit of service to others and service to God, you will be a happier more effective and more *in-fective* Christian. You will be greatly surprised by how good you can feel just by writing a note or baking someone a pie.

III. BE WITH THE SAINTS

I love grilling. I was out as late as two weeks ago grilling chicken on my grill. I love it. But I'm not a very big fan of charcoal grilling.

See, charcoal grilling is much different than grilling with gas. First, you have to stack the individual coals up like a pyramid, and then light it from underneath. You have to wait, then, for it to get hot. I used to have a small little charcoal grill when I was in college, and remember more than once knocking over the coals in that small grill too early, causing the coals to scatter and lose their heat.

Coming to worship is sort of like that. We stay hot so long as we stay together. We get that spiritual guidance and spiritual food that we need to stay hot. But you stay too long away from that warmth, and you'll get cold...and become useless in the process.

Hebrews 10:24-25 lays this out for us: *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*

Regular worship is commanded by God. It's a requirement, not a recommendation. Our priority should be worship to God. Being involved in sports, going to work, doing homework - these are noble pursuits, but they won't get you to heaven.

As a Christian, your place is here when the doors are open. Your place is in the worship of God when God has commanded it to happen. It's not at home. Lonnie has said many times, and rightly so, that you can't worship and don't worship at home.

We can't get too cold, or we will become useless. You are closer to God and spiritually stronger for being here. Your brothers and sister in Christ encourage you. Do we come to worship to see our friends and fellowship with them? Yes. Do we come to worship to keep that spiritual bond active and working? Yes. Do we come to worship God, not because we have to, but because we want to? Yes.

This new year, I challenge you to be present at every service you are able. Being here, listening to the Word being taught, actively listening to what it says, and encouraging one another in the process. Your place as a Christian is here on Sundays and Wednesdays, and whatever adjustments or sacrifices you have to make to be here, then so be it. Because your worship and dedication to God - not work, school, sports, nor anything else - is what's going to get you to heaven.

IV. WE SHOULD CHANGE, BECAUSE GOD WON'T

Some of us adapt to change better than others.

I will never forget the day I hopped into the pickup truck with my Grandfather. I was only 7 years old. We were driving down a rural road in north Alabama and I realized that hey, he's not driving between the lines. This became more apparent when cars were honking at him and veering off the road in the incoming lane.

When I got up enough courage to say something, I said, "Grandpa, shouldn't you be on the side of the road and not in the middle like this?"

My Grandpa, just as serious as ever, without taking his eyes off the road, said to me, "I'll go ahead and take my part in the middle."

Some of us don't like change. In fact, some of us are so set in our ways that a small change to our lives has a very dramatic impact.

If you haven't been the type of Christian you know you should be this year, don't be ignorant and "take your part in the middle." Change your life. Change your habits. Change your lifestyle. Change whatever you have to to get back into a right standing with God.

Because God won't change for us. He won't meet us halfway. He won't change his heart or his mind. Hebrews 13.8 says, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*"

It is we who must change. It is we who must come to God with a repentant heart and ask for forgiveness.

Don't be prideful today. Don't think you're okay with God, know you're right with Him.

A New Year is nothing to be feared. It's an opportunity to make the most out of our lives and find new ways to serve God. And if you haven't been serving God as you should, it's time to rededicate yourself to that endeavor.

The lesson is yours. If you find that today you need spiritual guidance, you need prayers, you need to be forgiven, or you need to become baptized as a child of God today, don't wait. The new year is upon us, and with it the chance to turn over a new leaf.

Won't you come, while we stand and while we sing.