

SERMON NOTES
I Timothy 4:11-16
“New Beginnings”

Intro:

- Some of you may have felt like this on New Year’s Eve

SHOW PICTURES OF 31 DECEMBER AND NEW YEAR’S BALL DROP-KICK

- “2020 was like looking both ways before you cross the street then getting hit by an airplane.” —Unknown
- “First time in history we can save the human race by laying in front of the TV and doing nothing. Let’s not screw this up.” —Unknown
- “If you had asked me what the hardest part of battling a global pandemic would be, I would have never guessed ‘teaching elementary school math.’”
- “I’m not saying I’m going to struggle at homeschooling my kids but my daughter just asked, ‘Dad, what’s a synonym?’ And I replied, ‘It’s a spice.’”
- “2020 is the strictest parent I ever had.” —Unknown

SHOW PICTURE OF 2021 CAN’T BE WORSE THAN 2020

- The past 12 months have brought misery, turmoil, and distress on a scale that most Americans couldn't have imagined last January: *the emergence of the coronavirus, a torrent of sickness and death, economic and social lockdowns, a tidal wave of racial protests, frightening riots, a poisonous election campaign, catastrophic wildfires, a derecho storm, a nationwide shutdown of sports, concerts, and theaters, millions of lost jobs.* If it hasn't *literally* been "the worst year ever," as Time magazine labeled it, it has certainly been the worst that millions of people have known in this lifetime.
- *Last January I was thinking that after a painful second half of 2019 and then hip replacement surgery – and making a good recovery -- surely 2020 would be a better year than 2019*

- Yet 2020 brought the pandemic – Easter services online rather than in-person – emergency back surgery in June – and then COVID in November

STOP SHOWING PICTURE

- Whether or not 2021 proves to be a better year – at this time of year many of us resolve to become a better person
- *Whether or not we make formal New Year's resolutions – the transition from one year to the next year is a time for self-examination and for seeking to make some improvements in our lives*
- Most common resolutions:
 - Lose weight
 - *Get organized*
 - Spend less, save more
 - *Enjoy life to the fullest*
 - Stay fit and healthy
 - *Learn something new and exciting*
 - Quit smoking
 - *Help someone else achieve their dreams*
 - Fall in love
 - *Spend more time with family*
 - Show more gratitude
 - *Show more kindness and generosity*
 - Exercise more
- 30-50% of people who join a fitness center or gym in January are no longer active by April
- *Some are no longer active by the end of January*
- A similar pattern holds true with Bible reading plans and other endeavors
- Common wisdom teaches that the best way to achieve success in life is by setting goals – specific, actionable goals
- *Goals for grade point average / goals for running or lifting weights / financial goals / sales goals / weight loss goals / corporate revenue goals / batting average goals / church attendance goals / Bible reading goals /*

- Some goals we reach -- others we fail to reach
- *Nothing wrong with setting goals or making new year's resolutions*
- But success has more to do with systems and habits and daily practices than with goals and resolutions
- James Clear – *Atomic Habits* –
- *“Goals are about the results you want to achieve. Systems are about the processes that lead to those results.”*
- For example – winning a championship is a common goal for coaches and teams
- *The system is the way the coach conducts practices and develops players and manages assistant coaches and establishes team culture and values and studies game film and develops a program for strength and conditioning and a way of evaluating progress to make sure the team improves throughout the season*
- Setting a goal doesn't win championships
- *Building a winning system results in victories*
- Goals set direction – but systems make progress
- *And systems are made up of daily practices and habits*
- Cornerstone's vision is: Every Christ-follower a disciple; every disciple a disciple-maker
- *Vision sets direction – vision visualizes a desired future*
- You want to know where our church is headed?
- *We are headed in the direction of making disciples who make disciples – locally and globally*
- A directive that was established by Jesus in the Great Commission
- Making disciples who make disciples is a worthy vision
- *But HOW do we get there?*
- We need systems – we need a discipleship pathway – which we have
- *And as our people make progress along that discipleship pathway – the eventual result will be disciples making disciples*
- And the building blocks of the components of the discipleship pathway include building discipleship habits
- *Habits such as reading the Bible regularly and attending church weekly and serving in the church and sharing our faith and connecting with Jesus through the spiritual disciplines and practicing generous giving*

- The discipleship pathway begins with a work of God in our lives

II Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

- *God is in the process of making all things new – a process that is ongoing now and will ultimately be accomplished at the return of Christ*
- Everything that was ruined by the fall – everything that is broken in this fallen world – everything will be made new – including the heavens and the earth
- *And we become part of that new creation now through the new birth – when we are born again when we trust Jesus to save us from our sins*
- We cannot make ourselves new any more than we can renew the creation
- It is God’s work in giving us a new life through the Spirit of God coming to live within us – the life of Christ transforming us and making us new
- But realizing this new life in our daily experience requires effort and cooperation on our part

Ephesians 4:20-24 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

- *This new self is the work of God*
- Yet it is up to us to put off the old self with its sinful practices and to put on the new self with its practices
- *We do so in the power of the Holy Spirit as we walk in the Spirit rather than according to the flesh*
- What are some of the qualities of the new self – created to be like Christ – that we are to “put on”?

Colossians 3:12-14 Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

- *That godly character -- that is the goal – but how do we get there?*

I Timothy 4:11-16 Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching... Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

- PRACTICE these things
- to continue to perform certain activities with care and concern
- *Sounds like building a habit, doesn't it?*
- IMMERSE yourself in them
- *Literally – BE in them – live in them – immerse yourself in them*
- Make these practices part of your daily living – indeed, make them part of who you are – part of your essential values and identity
- So that all may see your PROGRESS
- to change one's state for the better by advancing and making progress
- *We don't get discouraged by how far we fall short of Christ-likeness*
- Rather we are encouraged by our progress as we build these godly habits
- PERSIST in this
- to continue in an activity or state—'to continue, to remain in, to keep on.'
- *Sounds like maintaining a habit, doesn't it?*
- The goal is Christ-likeness
- *The goal is becoming a disciple who makes disciples – a disciple who is able to teach others*
- And how do we get there?
- Practice these things / immerse yourself in them / make progress / persist in forming and maintaining good discipleship habits
- *And how do we form new habits so that we can grow in Christ-likeness and progress in our discipleship?*

- For Christmas, Jill gave me a NY Times bestseller, "*Atomic Habits*," by James Clear.
- "Atomic" in the sense of small but mighty. Tiny changes that can yield remarkable results. Getting 1% better every day. Day after day, year after year.
- *Making a positive change for a day or a week or even a month will not change your life.*
- But making a positive change daily and maintaining that habit for several years will.
- Key principle: "*Outcomes are about what you get. Processes are about what you do. Identity is about what you believe.*"
- The author advocates for building identity-based habits rather than outcome-based habits -- *that is, focusing on who you wish to become rather than what you want to achieve.*
- What's the difference? *It's the difference between reading a book and becoming a reader.*
- The difference between running a marathon and becoming a runner.
- *The difference between taking music lessons to learn an instrument and actually becoming a musician.*
- The difference between completing a workout and becoming an athlete.
- *The difference between writing an essay and becoming a writer.*
- In more specifically Christian terms, it's the difference between attending church and becoming a Christ-follower.
- *The difference between occasionally doing some good deeds and becoming a good person marked by a servant attitude*
- The difference between giving a generous one-time gift to the church or a missions project and becoming a generous person.
- *The difference between reading through a book of the Bible and becoming a Bible student.*
- For example, many people this time of year set a goal of reading through the Bible in a year.
- *A worthy goal. But if that's all it is – a goal – the intent will most likely fail.*
- Why? Because the goal is not accompanied by a process or habit, and the goal is not identity-based

- What is a better approach?
 - Develop a habit of daily Bible reading.
 - Start with 5 minutes a day.
 - *Why read the Bible daily?*
 - In order to achieve the goal of reading through the Bible in a year? No.
 - In order to become who we are – namely, a disciple of Jesus Christ.
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- *Disciples are learners. Learning is part of the identity of disciples*
 - Studying the Bible to get to know Jesus Christ – Who He is – What He has done for us – What His will is – What His teachings are – *that is all part of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ*
 - And learning not just to accumulate knowledge – but learning in order to put into practice what is learned – and then learning in order to teach others
 - If you wish to become a disciple of Jesus Christ – then you will develop a habit of reading the Bible
 - Better to develop a life-long habit of daily Bible reading than to become a binge Bible-reader who sporadically reads large chunks of Scripture but also goes days or weeks without any Bible reading.
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- *Please don't misunderstand. For many years I have made a habit of reading through The One Year Bible.*
 - There is great value in reading through the whole Bible in a year so that we become familiar with all that God has revealed in all of Scripture.
 - *It can be done in just 15 minutes a day (give or take).*
 - And yes, that is a goal I set each year.
 - But the key to success is the daily Bible reading habit.
 - And why do I do it? To achieve a goal? Not primarily, no.
 - I do it because I am a disciple and disciple-maker – and growing in the knowledge of God's Word and having a quiet time with God each day are essential to that identity.
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- Last Sunday Paul Hovey presented several different Bible reading plans that you can choose from
 - *Which plan you choose is not as important as sticking to a plan and building a life-long habit of Bible reading*
 - What are some practical tips for starting a daily Bible-reading habit?

- Start small.
 - *Atomic habits. Small but mighty. Start with 5 minutes a day.*
 - Start with something doable and sustainable even in the busiest of seasons.
 - If every day sounds intimidating to you – start with 5 or 6 days a week
 - *Better to start with 5 minutes a day 5-6 days a week and hit that target 90% of the time than to try for 30 minutes every day and hit that target 10% of the time.*
 - You can always increase your time as your habit strengthens.
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- Commit to a time and place.
 - For me, it's when I wake up -- sitting on a couch in the sun room looking out over our back yard. Choose a pleasant environment.
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- Attach this new habit to something you already do and enjoy.
 - I enjoy my coffee in the morning while sitting in our sun room. *So I attached my daily Bible reading to that habit.*
 - And I keep my Bible right next to where I put my coffee.
 - *So I have a visual reminder of Bible reading every time I reach for my coffee cup.*
 - Think of something you do every day that you enjoy. *Attach your Bible reading to that habit.*
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- Follow a plan that will enable you to see progress.
 - If you read just random Scriptures, it's hard to have a sense of progressing toward a goal.
 - *Reaching a goal is not the ultimate objective, but making visible progress is satisfying.* And we tend to repeat things that are satisfying.
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- Do it with someone else.
 - Find a partner and encourage one another and hold one another accountable in building this new habit.
 - *You don't have to follow the same plan, but do check up on one another to make sure you're both keeping at it.*
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- Never miss twice.
 - *No one starts a new habit perfectly. You will occasionally miss a day. But don't miss two or three days in a row.*

- If you're following a 5-day per week plan, that's fine. But don't miss three days in a row -- *That is starting a habit in the wrong direction.*
 - Even if you only have two minutes the day after missing a day, show up.
 - *Better to show up for two minutes than to tell yourself you'll do twice as much reading the following day and then before you know it, you have missed three or four days.*
 - Habits are maintained by showing up consistently.
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- Daily Bible reading is just one of the habits of a disciple.
 - *Maybe you want to focus on building a habit of showing gratitude each day*
 - Or maybe you want to start or strengthen a daily prayer habit
 - Or maybe you want to form a habit of generosity – and this year you will give a higher percentage to the church or missions than last year – *and this year you will even tip more generously than in the past*
 - Or maybe you want to start a habit of contacting each week a couple of our members who are unable to attend church in person due to COVID concerns
 - *Or maybe you want to start a habit of corresponding with a couple of our missionaries each month in order to encourage them and pray for them*
 - Or maybe you want to start a habit of going on a weekly walk with a Christian friend to encourage one another
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- The same principles apply:
 - *Start small*
 - Commit to a time and place
 - *Attach this new habit to something you already do and enjoy*
 - Follow a plan that will enable you to see progress
 - *Do it with someone else*
 - Never miss twice
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- As we begin 2021 (have we ever longed as much for a new year?), *what new habit will you form – or what existing habit will you strengthen – that will enable you to become the kind of disciple that you desire to become?*

Prayer