

2020 Vision

I had such good intentions for this past year -- 2019...I really did. This past year was supposed to be “**the year**” for me – the year I worked out, lost weight, got in shape, and rebuilt my ailing golf game. 2019 was supposed to be the year I made memories with my family, married off my kids, and planned a future with my wife. This past year was to be marked by personal growth and real change. A year of transformation. I had great intentions a year ago this time...the year was fresh with opportunity, I was ripe for change, and I had an entire year in front of me to achieve these personal goals.

So I stand here in front of you – first Sunday of the new year -- more than a little conflicted. I am definitely excited about 2020, the new year ahead of us...who does not love an annual fresh start, clean slate, a sort of “do-over” for those of us who did not accomplish everything we had intended to in the previous year? This new year – like the beginning of every new year -- is pregnant with promise, filled with opportunity, just overflowing with possibilities.

And yet – when I look back on the year just past...I am a little less hope-filled; a little less enthusiastic; a little less energized about the future – and not because of political divisiveness or the brokenness of our society; not because of the state of world affairs or the moral slide of our culture, as discouraging as those are -- but more because of my less than satisfying personal goal fulfillment during year 2019.

I mean, I had all these good intentions that fired me up with hope and passion last year...but they did not necessarily translate into personal growth for me. Let me say it this way: I am less than satisfied about the amount of change in me over the past year.

So here is what I have learned: good intentions do not bring about personal growth, character development, or transformation. Good intentions, as nice as they are, do not translate into change. There is a huge difference between having good intentions and living intentionally. Living intentionally can and does lead to growth and change. When you live intentionally, you live with a purpose, a focus, a vision -- and based on that vision you put a plan in place -- a plan that involves arranging your life in such a way that produces the changes you hope for, the results you long for.

Let me give you a personal example. There was a day when I played professional golf for a living. I lived every day with a clear purpose, a clear vision: to improve my skills each day to become a world class professional golfer. This purpose was the focus of my life and impacted everything I did: what I ate, what I read, what I did with my time, who I spent that time with. Everything revolved around this vision. I trained and practiced every day – all to maximize my golfing potential. I was intentional to do those things that would help me achieve my goal – and just as intentional to say no to those things that would detract from achieving my purpose.

I had a vision for growth – to develop my skills, my thinking, my focus, my mindset to become a world class golfer. I arranged my life in such a way to give me the greatest opportunity to maximize my potential and become the best golfer I could be.

That is how a professional golfer lives intentionally.

Whether you are a musician, stock trader, student, or firefighter: the principle is still the same. When you live intentionally, you live with a vision, a purpose, and a plan – a plan for growth. You read and study; you spend time with people who have similar goals and aspirations as you; you train and practice and work your plan to give yourself the best shot at achieving your vision and reaching your goals. Let's be clear, one more time so you cannot miss it --

Growth and change do not come about by having good intentions – they come about through living intentionally.

This principle of intentional living is foundational for spiritual growth as well – this principle is evident throughout the Bible. Jesus modeled an intentional lifestyle and taught this principle in just about every one of His parables. The principle of intentional living is taught in every one of Paul’s letters. The Apostle Paul taught that spiritual growth was not primarily achieved by having good intentions, but by arranging your life so that God through His Holy Spirit can change you from the inside out and develop Godly character in you as He transforms you to become more like Jesus. In fact, Paul states it this way in his letter to the believers in Rome: God’s purpose for His followers, the vision He has for you, is to “***conform you into the likeness of His Son.***” God’s vision for you is to grow you into someone who looks and thinks and acts -- just like Jesus. Every one of Paul’s letters contain a very similar message.

Paul encourages his young protégé Timothy to live intentionally, to have a plan for his own spiritual growth. He writes to Timothy these words in **1Tim. 4:7**: “***Train yourself to be Godly – physical training has some value, but godliness has value for all things.***” Paul says “Just like physical training has value, I want you to train spiritually with the same kind of intensity, the same kind of focus you employ at the gym– train yourself to be Godly.” And the Apostle Paul himself adopted this same kind of intentional lifestyle. He writes about his own personal approach to spiritual growth in **1 Cor. 9:25-27**. Paul writes: “***Everyone who competes in the Olympic Games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. So I train...***” Paul goes on to say. “So I train...I train like an Olympic athlete, living intentionally to achieve my goals, fulfill my vision – to attain the purpose God has for me.” “***So I train...***”

So here we are on the first Sunday of a new year – a year brimming with hope, filled with promise. And many of you have good intentions for the year ahead – intentions to develop Godly character, to grow spiritually and become more like Jesus. And I commend you for your good intentions. But I warn you – these good intentions -- they will not, they cannot, alone produce the change and transformation you long for. You need a vision for 2020. You need a plan.

Let me share with you my plan for the year ahead -- here is my **2020 vision**: I want to become so much like Jesus that people mistake me for Him – by the way I talk, serve, live and love people. I want to grow in Christlikeness so that He and I become almost indistinguishable – so people can't tell us apart.

That's my vision – now I need a plan. Because that is a big, audacious vision – one I am clearly unable to manufacture on my own. One that requires a huge amount of growth and change – I know. But I do have help – I have help because I happen to know that my vision lines up with God's vision for me – and His vision for you, for that matter. We read God's purpose, His vision for you and me, just a few minutes ago. Remember? The Apostle Paul said it this way in **Romans 8:29**: “*God determined that His purpose for you, as a follower of Jesus, is to conform you to the image of His Son Jesus.*” God's purpose for us is to make us like Him; so you and I can represent Him (Re-present Jesus) to a watching world. If you and I are to realize God's purpose for us to become more and more like Jesus in 2020, we need a plan.

Because here is what I know: **no one drifts into a life of discipleship**. No one backs into Christ like character or stumbles into selfless living. God's Holy Spirit does all the hard work of transformation. But you and I have to live intentionally, do our part, so that “*Christ can be formed in us*” -- that's another way the Apostle Paul states God's purpose for us it in **Galatians 4:19**.

Let me suggest a plan for spiritual growth for the new year – a tried and true process for genuine spiritual transformation – found in **Colossians Chapter 3**. The entire Bible serves as a detailed plan for this kind of intentional lifestyle; that’s why we say in our Starting Point groups that “BIBLE” stands for **B**asic **I**nstructions **B**efore **L**eaving **E**arth. But for the sake of time, let me refer us to a short passage from Colossians 3 that cites four practices of an intentional lifestyle – four ways we can arrange our life so God can shape us to be more like Jesus in 2020.

Colossians chapter 3. Starting in verse 12:

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”

Paul makes the case that an intentional lifestyle for spiritual growth involves other people – it is **not** just you and God. I hear that a lot: “It’s just me and God.” That’s not what the Bible says. The Bible teaches that God uses those around you to help you grow and become more like Jesus. We call it ***community*** around here.

How else are you going to learn to be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient? Where else do you learn to forgive and love and defer to others – and be thankful doing it?

You cannot learn this stuff by yourself – you do not develop these character qualities on your own. The first practice in a plan for spiritual growth is community – to surround yourself with a small group of people – imperfect, sometimes difficult to get along with, sinful people – and then let God use their selfishness and sinfulness to help mold Christ-like character in you.

Some of you need a few hard to love, frustratingly difficult people around you to knock off your rough edges, strengthen your character. Some of you have not grown in years because you are unwilling to be inconvenienced or leave your comfortable, isolated lifestyle. The question is: Do you really want to change? Make a decision today to leave your powerless, isolated lifestyle so you can grow this year. Sign up to get connected to a community of people this Winter and let God use them to help you grow. Groups start up again in a couple of weeks – but you can sign up today. Be intentional about growing to become more like Jesus in 2020.

The second practice of an intentional lifestyle for spiritual growth – back to **Colossians 3, verse 16**:

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

Sounds like a worship service to me – drinking in the truth of God’s Word and applying it to our daily lives -- linked with songs of praise to God from hearts full of gratitude for what He has done for us. That’s **worship** – genuine worship. A lifestyle of spiritual growth does not miss an opportunity to worship God – why would you? It is not like we **have to** – but we **get to** – we get to worship the Creator of the Universe – the one who loved us and sought us. We get to worship the one who saved us by giving up His Son for us! We get to worship Jesus, this great God and Savior of ours. We don’t have to – we get to!

You want to grow in your love for God and people this year? Renew your commitment to worshipping God. Let’s be real intentional in 2020. Coming prepared each week -- to give of yourself fully out of a grateful heart; ready to sing and give and hear from God’s Word. Coming each week with an open Bible, open heart. Come ready to hear God speak to you – and show you how He wants to grow you to be more like His Son. And He will.

Those who seek Him will find Him. Try not to miss one week, not one opportunity for corporate worship this upcoming year. God will change you, transform you as you worship Him. Because we become like the one we worship.

Back to **Colossians 3** – the third practice of an intentional lifestyle for spiritual growth – found in the same verse we just read, the first half of **verse 16**: ***“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...”***

Pay close attention to the pronoun the Apostle Paul uses here: ***“Let the word of Christ dwell in YOU richly as YOU teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...”***

I remind you – this was not written to a pastor, but a church, the people of the church. The Word needs to be living and active in you, it says -- not just the pastor. And you are to teach and admonish each other with the truth of Scripture – it’s not only the pastor’s job. ***“The word needs to dwell in you and you teach, you admonish one another with all wisdom...”*** That’s what it says.

You know what this means – you need to learn to feed yourself spiritually. We call this step ***Ownership*** around here – where you own your faith and you take responsibility for your own spiritual growth. You listen to God and discern what specific and unique growth opportunities you need to experience to deepen your walk and stretch your faith. It is taking ownership of your faith.

The teaching from the pulpit – this once a week foray into God’s Word – it is only a supplement to your own personal reading and study of Scripture. Thirty minutes once a week – cannot feed and nourish you spiritually if you really want to grow to become like Jesus. It’s a supplement at best. You need to feed yourself. You will never experience significant growth if you rely on a vicarious relationship with God and His Word through a 30-minute sermon. It’s not only unrealistic – it is in direct contradiction to this passage

of Scripture. ***“The Word needs to dwell richly in you and you teach, you admonish one another with all wisdom...”***

God will change you – grow you to be more like Jesus – when you own your faith and take responsibility for your own spiritual growth and learn to feed yourself spiritually. Then you will grow.

Black Rock is going to be very intentional this Winter as we engage in the ***“Red Letter Challenge.”*** Our entire church is going to feed on a daily portion of Scripture, focusing on the very words of Jesus – the red letters in your Bible – and we are going to read and practice them as a community of believers. And together we are going to grow to become more like Jesus. A simple, practical way we arrange our lives so God’s Spirit can *“conform us into the likeness of His Son.”* You will hear more about this church-wide initiative in the coming weeks...but make a decision today to take part and feed yourself spiritually.

And finally -- fourth spiritual growth practice for those who really want to grow -- **verse 17**:

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Paul continues this thought in **verse 23-24**:

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.

It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

Those who want to grow to be more like Jesus – serve. When you serve others – God is honored, His church is built, and you are grown in the process. God develops Christ-like character in you. So if you want to grow in 2020 – find a place to serve – a place where you can use your gifts and passion to honor God by blessing others. Whether it is parking cars, or teaching children, brewing coffee or welcoming people at the front door – do it with all your heart, with all the purpose and passion God supplies. Because Paul reminds us -- It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Do you want to grow in 2020? Step up and serve – you are never more like Jesus than when you serve others. Jesus needed to remind His disciples of His own mission statement: He came to serve – not to be served, but to serve and give his life for the sake of others.

2020 can be a year of change, a year of growth for you. It can be a year of transformation. I know you have good intentions. But I want you to take advantage of this new year with a plan for spiritual growth – a plan that includes the practice of community, worship, ownership, and serving. So 2020 is a year with no regrets, no missed opportunities, no disappointment over “what could have been” – but to live intentionally as a disciple of Jesus, who God is changing day by day into the likeness of His Son. So what do you say? Let’s make 2020 a year of living intentionally.

Let’s seal our commitment at the Table. Let’s seal our commitment to become more like Jesus by celebrating what He has already done for us to make a relationship with God possible – by going to the cross, shedding His blood for the forgiveness of our sins, and securing our eternity in heaven with Him. Because of what He did, we are no longer condemned, we are clean before God, and our sin has been paid for. Think about it: we have forgiveness, redemption, and salvation because of the cross. Our chains are gone and we have been set free. That’s what this table represents. So as we take the bread and the cup, symbolizing His broken body and shed blood, we commit ourselves to a year of growth – allowing ourselves to be transformed by His Holy Spirit as we adopt an intentional lifestyle for spiritual growth. That is how we best honor Jesus –by becoming like Him.

Scripture records that on the night He was betrayed, Jesus took bread and said “***This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.***”

In the same way, after supper Jesus took the cup and said “***This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this in remembrance of Me.***”

You will be served the bread – and after some reflection of His sacrifice for you, you can take the bread. The same with the cup. No need to wait to take it together...when you're ready, you are welcome to partake of the elements and we will wrap up by worshipping together. So we thank you for your sacrifice on our behalf – your broken body, your shed blood. Thank you Jesus for doing for us what we could not do for ourselves, by making us right with the Father: sins forgiven, relationship restored. You are a great Savior and we worship you. Amen.

Sanctuary

Let's seal our commitment by asking God to change us this year – to surrender ourselves afresh to God's purpose for us and to arrange our lives in such a way that God has freedom to mold us and make us like His Son Jesus. More than good intentions – but a plan for growth for the year ahead.

Some of you need to come down front right after the service and **get prayed for** – get prayer for wisdom and courage to make some strong decisions about your priorities. Don't leave tonight before committing to a plan, a vision for 2020. Let's pray...