

# New!

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John 10:7-10

January 1, 2017

Good morning! Let me be one of the first to wish you a Happy New Year! Thanks to you, we had 2200 people worship at Anderson Hills on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. We asked you to share the invitation and you did! We asked you to share it on social media and you responded. That means for those who experienced our love, experienced heart-felt worship, or heard our message about the light of Christ, we hope that a life has been forever changed.

If we continue our passion for reaching others AND we all begin to look for those daily opportunities to engage and invite a neighbor, a co-worker, friends and people we see day in and day out, we will continue to be a church that reaches

people for Christ. Every day, everywhere. We have plenty of exciting things happening within this church. God is at work through this church. People are hurting and the need to reach those people is real and great. Collectively we all will reach more people for Christ.

We are in the final week of what has been our Advent series entitled: “Why in the World” and the question we have been asking throughout the course of this series is: why in the world would God become one of us? Who is Jesus really and why did he come? Since late in November, we have explored six reasons “why” Jesus was born. In case you have missed some of those weeks, here are those reasons again...

1. Jesus came into the world to communicate and demonstrate what God is like.
2. Jesus came into the world to model God’s mercy and grace.
3. Jesus came into the world to elevate the status of everyone.

4. Jesus came into the world to show what is most important to God.
5. Jesus came into the world to be light in the darkness.
6. Jesus came into the world to shepherd God's people.

Today we are going to explore one final reason why Jesus was born: that Jesus came into the world to give us new and abundant life.

I am reading from John chapter 10, beginning with verse 7.

*<sup>7</sup>Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

#### *Living in the past*

It is so easy to live in the past. It is so easy to allow the past to cloud our vision for the future. We've all got regrets. There are things that we wish we had done differently. If only I hadn't said that. If only I hadn't jumped to those conclusions. If only I hadn't let that bother me so much.

Jesus says in John, chapter 10 that the enemy; the "thief" comes only to steal, kill and destroy. The devil wants to steal our attention, kill our dreams, and destroy our future. The best way he accomplishes this is by getting us focused on the things we wish were different about our past. Dwelling on past mistakes is debilitating. We see it in the workplace, in the home, in the marriage, and in our relationship with God.

It's not easy to let go of our past. We try to use our will power to overcome these

issues. We determine that we will never take another drink, never again lose our temper, never again to argue with our spouse, or to get into a bad relationship, and we mean it. Maybe we do OK for a while. But then the next situation arises and we find ourselves repeating our behavior. So we redouble our efforts, we determine to try harder next time but it does no good. We can't do it.

#### *Jesus, our gate and shepherd*

While the "thief" comes to steal, kill, and destroy, Christ has come into the world that we may have life! And not just any old life either. Jesus wants you, me, us to have the best life; a full life! A relationship with Jesus offers us the promise of eternal life in heaven, but it also affords us abundant life this side of heaven. Jesus wants to give us a new beginning in life. He wants us to have our best year ever!

My favorite verse is 2 Corinthians 5:17,

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

Jesus has set us free! He is our liberator. Jesus; who took on our human condition, became one of us, entered into the disordered mess of struggling humanity and set it right once and for all. It is an accomplished fact! All that is left is for us to believe it and receive it by faith as a gift from God.

When we realize we are helpless to change ourselves, we understand our need for Christ as Savior. We surrender our will to God. We allow him to work in us. We yield control of our will to his. The whole Christian life could be described as a process of surrendering ourselves to God.

God knows about your issues; your addictions and habits, your anger issues, your dysfunctional relationships. Jesus

took care of it all on the cross so we could live a new life.

Not only is Jesus the gate for the sheep, we learned last Sunday that he also wants to be our shepherd. A shepherd has an incredibly close relationship with his sheep. As our shepherd, Jesus wants to guide our steps. As the psalmist wrote: He leads us beside quite waters; He moves us into greener pastures. His rod and staff comfort us, particularly in the dark and desperate times of our existence. No matter what happened last year, it is over now. Today is the best day to start living the full life that Jesus offers.

So we don't have to worry about that past anymore. So the next time something reminds you of your past and wants to hold your failures against you, remember this. You aren't the same person anymore. You're a new creation. The old is gone. The new has come. You have a

new identity. You were a sinner. And while you still stumble, you are now fundamentally defined as a saint.

#### *Commitment*

So how does this happen? How do we make the transition from sinner to saint? It begins the moment we surrender our lives to Christ. This is called conversion. For me it was a long process in which God was working in my life until finally on May 1, 1973 I quit fighting with God and said yes. I surrendered! On April 30<sup>th</sup> I was not a Christian and on May 1st, I was.

When that happened many things quickly began to change. God began the process of making me a new creation. I began to act differently, think differently, and speak differently. Things that I once valued, I no longer did. Things I didn't care about now had great importance. Some bad habits were immediately changed.

Many did not. Some took years. Some I still struggle with. Like sarcasm, anger, and pride.

#### *recommitment*

And then I found periods where my spiritual life cooled off over the years. I had made a commitment to Christ but I let something else push it away from first place to second place. Or third place.

I've been a Christian for over 40 years and I've discovered that it's easy to fall into a spiritual slump. You go through spiritual dry spells. Times when you don't feel close to God, when your heart is cold, when you feel empty inside, when you think your prayers are kind of bouncing off the ceiling. Every one of us goes through these times when we feel disconnected with God. We feel like David in Psalm 71 "*O God, do not be so distant from me.*" We all go through these dry spells and we recognize that we're not as close as we used to be to God.

When you're going through a dry spell, when you're going through a spiritual slump, you don't lose your salvation. It's not that God has moved away from us or is unhappy with us. But you do lose the joy of it. You lose the happiness. You lose the peace. You lose the confidence. You lose the closeness that you felt to God. And you feel kind of dry and empty and dusty inside.

#### *The six habits*

On the day of my ordination my District Superintendent gave me a book that would change my life. It was called the *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster. In this book I learned the ancient Christian disciplines that help move us from sinner to saint. Here at Anderson Hills we call them the six spiritual habits. They will help you get a new start in 2017.

#### *worship*

Number one is worship. The church exists to worship. Worship is the heart of who we are. I hope you are here every Sunday for worship. I hope it's not something optional for you. But here is what you need to know: worship is not just something we do on Sundays. We need to be worshipping God every day. The psalms are continually encouraging us to magnify the Lord and exalt his name. That's why you and I were created...to worship and give praise to God. If we don't worship him, we'll worship something else; we will be in danger of worshipping a false god, of putting something else in place of God. So make worship a priority in 2017.

#### *Small group*

Number two is joining a small group. As Christians we are called not just to believe but also to belong. Once we say yes to God, we become a part of his family. These people in this room are your brothers and sisters. God did not

design us to live solitary lives. We need each other for support. And one of the principle reasons the church exists is to provide fellowship. There are so many people who have helped me in my spiritual journey. Sunday school teachers, Bible teachers, small group leaders, pastors, professors, friends. There is no way I could have gotten where I am today in my walk with Jesus without their help. We are meant to live in relationship with each other. We have all sorts of small groups you can join; Sunday school class, life groups, UMW circles, ARMM squares, some fifty groups. We are forming new ones during our authentic study coming up in two weeks. Join one in 2017 if you haven't already.

#### *Share your faith*

Number three is to share your faith. God has designed us so that when we share our faith with others, we grow in our faith. The church exists to reach out beyond its walls and invite people in, to

communicate God's Word to the world. We are called in 2 Corinthians, "Ambassadors of Christ." Our mission is to share Christ. I don't know of a more significant cause to give one's life to. In Anderson Township, 50% of the residents have no relationship to any type of faith community. That means that there is a good chance the person living next door to you is one of them. They may be waiting for you to give them an invitation to church. In fact, in a recent survey 51% said they would attend church if someone invited them. So let's do it. Invite a friend to worship with you in 2017.

#### *Serve in a ministry*

Number four is serving others. When I serve others, I am serving God. Jesus said in Matthew 25 that whatever we did for the least of these, we did it for him.

But I don't do it out of duty or fear, or guilt. I serve him out of gratitude for all that he has done for me.

If you look at most of the epistles in the New Testament...Paul's letters, James', Peter's, and John's, they call themselves, "Servants". They saw themselves as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were totally sold out for Christ. Their life was now Christ's. And that is what made life meaningful for them. Find a way you use your gifts and talents to serve in 2017.

#### *Spend time daily with God*

Number five is spend time daily with God in prayer and scripture. Reading God's word on a daily basis and spending time in prayer will catapult you into the spiritual life. It is life changing. It is the central avenue God uses to transform us. It is the heart of your relationship with God. In prayer we begin to think God's thoughts, to desire the things he desires,



to love the things he loves. We will learn to see things from His point of view. Prayer is the main business of the Christian's life.

#### *Give generously of resources*

Our last habit is giving generously. The Bible's word for it is stewardship. It includes our time, talent and treasure. Stewardship is simply recognizing that God owns everything and that you and I are simply the managers. God created us to manage the resources that God put here on earth for us to use. God says to us, "I've created the world. Here are the raw materials. Now go out and make something of it. And make me proud."

Sometimes people ask how generosity helps us grow spiritually. In Galatians 5, Paul listed the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The fruit of the Spirit in a person's life marks their spiritual growth. The more

you have, the more mature you are in your spiritual development. One of the fruit is generosity. The more generous you are, the more you are growing. Let's become more generous in 2017.

#### *Conclusion*

Many of us go into the New Year hoping to shed the unwanted weight and to get ourselves in better shape physically. But let me suggest that today is a great time to commit to a new beginning with Jesus.

The prophet Isaiah said,

*"Forget the former things;  
do not dwell on the past.*

*<sup>19</sup> See, I am doing a new thing!*

Isaiah reminds us that the past is just that, the past, and God is interested in a new thing. God doesn't think about our past; it's over. God is more interested in our present and our future. Don't listen to all the other voices that want to remind you of your past mistakes. Jesus is



holding open the gate for you to walk through and find green, lush pastures this year. This doesn't mean that everything is suddenly going to be perfect. A sheep with a shepherd faces the same obstacles and enemies that a sheep without a shepherd faces, but his chances of survival are also much greater! In 2017, I would challenge you to start these six disciplines. They can help you get a brand new start with God.

Please turn to page 602 in your hymnal.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, recognized the need too and so he designed a Covenant Renewal service that he used on New Year's Day. It's about 230 years old. The heart of this service is the covenant prayer.

Let's pray it together and then if you are serious about getting a new start in 2017, sign the covenant card and put it in the basket as you come forward. I will sign

each one, pray over it, and put it in plastic and mail it back to you. And then God will seal this covenant as he reminds us of his love for us in the bread and wine of communion. Let's pray.