

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH
“Paying Close Attention to Your Intention in 2011”
James 1:18-27

Pastor asked me a couple of weeks ago if I would like to preach this Sunday. I feel so blessed to be allowed to come before you and give you something from the Word of God that will bring you closer to your Savior and equip you to live a godly life that is worthy of His honor. In considering what to preach, my thoughts went to this upcoming New Year. I look at the New Year like new beginning, and I look at these few days between Christmas and New Years as a time for reflection and preparation for this new beginning.

Here’s the question I want you to consider this morning. How can 2011 be a year of significant spiritual growth and production for you as a member of God’s kingdom? This question assumes that you are a member of God’s kingdom. If you are not sure this morning concerning your spiritual status, this would be a great day to consider a new life in Christ and make that transition from darkness to light.

Before we turn our passage this morning, I want to consider two very interesting words, intention and attention. INTENTION – It is uniquely human. Animals live by instinct and physical reaction to their environment. As human beings, created in the likeness of our Creator, and have the ability to choose purpose, action and direction. INTENTION. It is the ability to imagine, plan, dream, and commit to a course of action that has not yet taken place. Certainly we are not sovereign in the execution and fulfillment of that choice, but we do have the ability to live lives that are directed by our intention.

Now consider the word ATTENTION: It is the moment by moment focus in my life. It is what I do; the actions that I take. If you want to live a life that will bring much glory to God this year, you need to have a crystal clear and specific intention, and follow through by daily focusing your attention on that intention.

A life with attention and no intention is a life full of busyness with no direction or clear purpose. A life with intention but little attention is a life of grand ideas with little or no action. To fulfill your God given purpose in 2011, you need to spend time in His Word getting clear on His intention for your life in specific areas, and then daily focusing your attention on that defined intention.

Think of your own past spiritual struggles and failures. I would guess that when they occurred you were lacking intention, attention, or both. My hope and prayer is that this morning you will walk away with a commitment to clarify your spiritual intention for 2011, and that you will also gain some great instruction on how to focus your attention on that intention.

I believe that by the power of the Spirit each of us can clearly define our INTENTION for 2011, and then live each day of 2011 giving ATTENTION to that INTENTION.

As a church, we have just completed reading through and discussing a book by David Platt, *Radical*. That book challenges us to take our Christian discipleship seriously. With regard to developing great intention for 2011, I think you should consider this book and its concluding challenge as follows:

1. To pray for the entire world
2. To read through the entire Word
3. To commit our lives to multiplying community
4. To sacrifice our money for a specific purpose
5. To give our time in another context

One way to create a clear spiritual intention for 2011 is to create a clear action plan around each of those 5 challenges. As you have been considering these challenges, I think you would agree that if you made a specific commitment in one of these five areas and followed through, that 2011 would be a fruitful and blessed year in your walk with the Lord.

You might also be thinking something like this: What I don't want to do is to commit to something like this and not follow through. I've failed on my commitments in the past, and that always makes me feel like such a failure. I don't want to set myself up to go through the disappointment of having good intentions but not sticking with them. In other words, you don't want to have a good intention and fail to follow through.

If you dwell on that fear of failure, what will probably happen is that any inclination to currently have to commit to this endeavor will drift away into a sea of busyness, and you will likely ease back into life as usual with no significant change taking place.

If this is your current challenge and struggle, I've got some encouragement and instruction today for you from the word of God. Specifically, we are going to consider a passage from the first chapter of the book of James. I believe that we can help encourage each other with these promises and principles and make significant changes in our lives this year for the glory of our Savior. He has provided all we need. We have His Spirit, His Word, and His church, and we can live lives of excellence that will bring Him great glory by fulfilling his will on earth as it is in heaven!

Let's read James 1:18-27 together

¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. ¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. ²⁶ If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father,

is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

This passage really addresses this challenge concerning our desire to live a fruitful life in 2011! The basic message from this passage is that it is time to quit talking and start doing. To experience the blessing that comes from righteous living, we must DO the word, not just HEAR it. I am excited because this passage addresses the temptations that we all confront as we face this challenge to change. James challenges us with this question: Are we just going to continue to just hear the Word and deceive ourselves, or are we going to put the Word that we hear into practice and reap the blessing? James not only challenges our inactivity and lethargy, he also teaches us how to make that transition and where to get into action.

Look at verse 18 for the first lesson. We learn that we absolutely can live a spiritually fruitful life in 2011 because of our NEW BIRTH.

¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

If you are in God's kingdom today, it is because He called you to Himself and chose to give you new life. The means that he used to give you that new life was through the seed of His word planted deep within you, the seed of the gospel. The gospel is the essence of the word, and Jesus Christ is the gospel. When we receive the gospel, the good news that God sent His Son into this fallen world to rescue sinners through the sacrifice of His life on the cross, we receive the very person of Christ, the very Spirit of God. If you are truly saved, you have the very life of God living within you in the person of the Holy Spirit. It is Christ in you, the hope of glory. You can live a spiritually productive life in 2011 because you have the very presence and power of God in your soul. You currently possess eternal life through a new birth, because the Father chose to give it to you, and you have received it.

Now look at the second part of verse 18 - *that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.*

You can live a godly life in 2011 because the Father has defined the purpose for your life. If you have received Christ Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then the Father gave you new life for a reason. The reason is so that you might be a kind of firstfruits of all that he has created. Firstfruits is originally an Old Testament expression referring to the first and best harvest crops, which God expected as an offering. Giving God that initial crop was an act of faith that He would fulfill His promise of a full harvest to come. In this same way, we as believers are the first evidence of God's new creation that is to come and enjoy presently in their new life a foretaste of future glory. God has harvested you from the field of this world to be the first from His creation to display His glory and greatness to all the world.

All of this says that you can live a spiritually productive life in 2011 because it is God's will. If you make choose to live with this purpose, then you are in perfect harmony and synchronization with God Himself. If God be for us, who can be against us!!!

Now let's consider how all of this works. Look at verse 19:

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

In order to live a fruitful life in 2011, you must express a teachable attitude toward this implanted seed of the Word. This life that you have been given must be cultivated and nurtured. It will grow and flourish as you continue to feed it by continuing in the Word regularly and intently. It is like breathing. You have experienced the original breath of life and been born again, but you must continue to breathe each moment to continue to live and grow strong. This life giving Word is compared to daily bread and a newborn's milk. You must be quick to hear it and accept it. Your own ideas and your self-righteous anger will block your growth in righteousness. Humility and submission to the Word of God is the path to spiritual stability and a righteous life. You need to be like a tree, planted by streams of water. You must allow your roots to go deep, so that when the wind blows and the storms come you will stand strong. When you get angry and upset, then you are not giving your attention to the Word, but are distracted with your own agenda. You can't talk and listen at the same time. When you are talking and angry, then you are not listening and getting what you need to know to live a godly life. You need to be slow to speak, and very slow to get upset. This righteous blessed life grows within you when you are quiet, teachable, and listening. Your attention needs to be focused on what you need to put off, and what to put on in its place. If you choose to continue in known sin, then you are choosing to reject your sustenance. Though you have been given new life, you need to continue in this life and remove the garbage that you brought with you from your old life so that you can continue to grow and thrive.

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Now we really get down to the essence of today's message. If you want to experience a spiritually productive life in 2011, then you must direct your attention to taking action on your intention. I must do more than just HEAR the word of God, I must DO the word of God. Faith (mental agreement and understanding) without works (repentance and action) is dead – useless – vain – empty. As Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount, He speaks of two men, one who builds his house in the sand, and another who builds his life on the rock. The storm hits both houses, and the one on the rock stands and the one on the sand is devastated. The house built on the sand represents the person that hears the word but does not obey it, and the house built on the rock represents the person that hears the word and obeys it. The difference was in the doing.

The word “deceive” in verse 22 of James 1 literally means to miscalculate. Jesus tells us to calculate the cost before we start building. I encourage you to sit down over the next few days and count the cost of continuing to just hear the Word but not take action. James says there is a subtle deception in listening to sermons, reading the Bible, talking religion, even serving in the

church, but not taking action on what you hear. When the storm comes, the house that is built on hearing alone with no action will fall. There is a high price to pay for hearing and saying but not doing. The Word of God is effective in your life only when you obey it. There is no sustaining value in just hearing the Word of God. In fact, to hear God's word and disobey it is to bring a more severe judgment into your life. But look again at verse 25. The promise is that if you will continue to look at the Word, even though you stumble, you get back up, and persevere; The promise is that if you refuse to give up, and keep on seeking and looking, and learning, and repenting, that you will not be a forgetful hearer and will be blessed.

Please hear this and make no mistake. The path to blessing is not always smooth sailing. There will be setbacks, challenges, mistakes, and even failures. It is keeping your attention on the original intention that ultimately prevails. You need to continue in His Word, and refuse to quit, and persevere to the end. The Bible promises that He that endures to the end shall be saved. It is as you continue to ACT on what you hear that you are blessed. Beloved, it is time to rise up, and take action, and realize that though you will not be perfect and will slip at times, you will prevail in the end. This is where the grace of God enters and provides such sustenance and encouragement. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. It is the tenor and direction of your life in 2011 that matters. This is a progressive sanctification which is a process. It is a continual putting on and putting off. In fact, the more intently that you look into the Word this coming year, and the closer you get to your Savior, the more you are going to see your imperfections and need to change. That is great news! You can't change until you see the need to change. It is when you confess your sins (agree with God about your sins) that He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you. Living a spiritually fulfilled life is living close to the cross and the daily cleansing that it affords. It is not a walk of perfection, but a walk of mercy and forgiveness.

²⁶ If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

James really lays it out right here and deals a death blow to dead religion. The outcome that God desires in our lives is very practical. This new life that we have been given will produce useful acts of mercy towards those who cannot return the kindness, people like orphans and widows that are distressed and overwhelmed by their life situation. When we submit to the Spirit's control and domination, our attention will be on keeping ourselves pure and loving others in practical ways. When we are in step with the Spirit, our actions will match our words. Our attention will be on our intention. Anything less is empty and false religion. So here is the summary of the instructions for living a fruitful and blessed life in 2011. Be quiet and teachable. Daily receive the Word of God. Look intently at the Word and carefully consider it. Allow it to fully expose your sins and faults even at the level of your thoughts and motives. Once you have a clear picture of the Word, and also see yourself, turn away from your sin and fill your life with acts of mercy and kindness towards others.

Now for a very practical exhortation to make all of this real in your life. Here are some specific directions that you can follow over these next few days leading up to the new year. I am encouraging you to set aside some time to get alone and create a clear plan of intention for 2011, and then establish some daily routines that will help you fulfill that intention. It is that simple. I also am proposing that the five challenges from Radical can serve as a great outline to create that intentional plan for this New Year. Here they are again:

- 1. To pray for the entire world**
- 2. To read through the entire Word**
- 3. To commit our lives to multiplying community**
- 4. To sacrifice our money for a specific purpose**
- 5. To give our time in another context**

Praying for the entire world in a year seemed overwhelming to me until I went to the Operation World website recommended by David Platt. I am now receiving the daily e-mails that provide information on a certain country along with a video prayer that I can follow. If you feel compelled and would like to pray for the entire world this year, there are some very helpful tools that make this doable.

As far as reading through the entire Word, this is a wonderful specific commitment to take in a portion of the Word of God every day. Pastor Brad suggested that you start where you are – in other words, if you have never read the New Testament through, that would be a great place to begin. If you are more familiar with the Scriptures, then taking on the whole Bible in a year is very doable. John MacArthur has a great resource called The MacArthur Daily Bible that includes some notes and tools to help you accomplish this goal.

Committing to a multiplying community in my mind is making Wheelersburg Baptist Church a top priority. It is a commitment to be here at the regular services, and also to identify and use my gifts and resources to minister to my brothers and sisters and ministries. If you are not a member of a Bible believing church, I would encourage you to consider making that commitment and joining us.

Sacrificing our money for a specific purpose – For me, this means to look for and meet some specific, tangible needs in the kingdom this year. The Lord is more and more placing the Union Mission in Charleston on my heart, as well as some of our supported missionaries. I think this commitment will involve identifying some areas where I can redirect some money away from my own desires and comfort to help those that have less than me.

Finally, giving our time in another context is all about getting out of my comfort zone and taking some risk to expand the kingdom through my personal action. I am planning to begin working closer with the Union Mission in the counseling ministry this year, and actually plan to go and

offer some time to counsel with some of those brothers and sisters as they minister to the needy. I really am excited about what I will gain and learn from them, and can hopefully be a blessing and a help to them as well.

So brothers and sisters, I lay this biblical challenge from James before you, to be a doer of the Word, and not just a hearer deceiving yourself. I truly believe that 2011 can be the most blessed year of your life to date as you focus your attention on a daily basis to fulfill the intention that God has for your life. The next step is to schedule that time alone with the Lord to get clarity on your intention. Then you should identify some practical daily routines that will help you move into those intentions. If you want help with this, I would be glad to sit down with you to help you get some clarity and practical routines established. I will also be praying for you, and I covet your prayers, that as a church, we all live a very intentional life to the glory of God. May the Lord bless your endeavor to do this. I feel certain that He will do just that as we submit to Him and His great plan.