

NEW YEAR

“The Formula For A Great 2008”

Luke 10:38-42

My message this morning is entitled “***The Formula For A Great 2008.***” Last Monday evening 2007 played its final few notes, took a bow, exited the stage and made way for a brand new year—2008!

Did you watch the Crystal Ball at Times Square in New York City slowly descend to earth and usher in the New Year? I did. I was sick as a dog, pumped full of medicine, drowsy, sneezy and coughing...and yet there was something deep inside me that impelled me to stay up and stay awake until I could see that Crystal Ball slowly drop to earth and signal in the beginning of a brand new year.

Over a million people crowded together in Times Square to witness this simple event. Another billion people around the world watched it on television. It lasts a minute. An illuminated crystal ball is lowered from a makeshift tower 77 feet high. People count down the final few seconds and then cheer and kiss and hug and celebrate...and that’s it!

What’s the big deal with that? What’s the draw that would capture the attention of a billion people? Why would a minister, sick as a dog, stay up and watch that thing instead of get the rest that he really needs? The answer is simple. It is a living symbol of the hope and the expectations and the possibilities and the excitement and the anticipation of a New Year.

Do you know that Crystal Ball has a name, a title, a designation, a label? It does! It is called the “***Star of Hope.***” It is a Waterford Crystal, about 6 feet in diameter, weighing over a thousand pounds, covered with a total of 504 crystal triangles of various sizes and each of these triangles has a special designation, such as *Hope for Fellowship, Hope for Peace, Hope for Wisdom, Hope for Unity, Hope for Courage, Hope for Healing.*

Why would they call this New Year’s Crystal Ball the “Star of Hope”? Because that’s what people are really looking for in each

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New Year—fresh hope, the anticipation of something better, new opportunities, new plans, new dreams, new beginnings.

But the question is: **How do you turn mere wishes and hopes and dreams and plans into reality?** Because the Bible is absolutely correct when it says, “***Hope deferred makes the heart sick***” (Proverbs 13:12 NKJV).

Can we actually influence and shape what our future is going to be or do we just have to kind of sit back and helplessly throw up our hands in resignation and just swallow whatever comes? That’s what I want to talk about this morning. **I believe the Bible clearly teaches that you can do something about your future.**

So I’ve entitled this message – ***The Formula For A Great 2008.*** *What is the key to shaping your future?* I want you to listen to the words of two highly respected philosophers.

This first quote comes from a man by the name of **Edwin Markham**, an American poet who was well-known for his down-to-earth, homespun, practical, straightforward wisdom. *Have you ever quoted that little bit of verse that says:*

**He drew a circle that shut me out
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout
But love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in!**

Edwin Markham wrote those very wise and insightful words. Now listen to what he writes about what shapes and determines our destiny as human beings. “***Choices are the hinges of destiny.***” The whole direction of our lives are determined by our choices.

Now let me quote another highly respected philosopher, a man by the name of **Albert Camus**. Now, frankly, I don’t agree with a lot that he says, so don’t write me off as a heretic. I am not an existentialist. But I do think he is absolutely correct when he writes, “***Life is the sum of all your choices.***”

That sounds remarkably similar to some words that are found in the Bible. In **Proverbs 4:23**, God says to us through His Word, “***Guard your***

heart above all else (your inner sanctum, that interior chamber of your soul where thoughts are nurtured and values are forged and decisions are made), *for it determines the course of your life*" (NLT).

Someone has said it like this: ***"The doors we open and close each day decide the lives we live."*** Choices! I cannot possibly overstate the importance of the choices you make in life. The choices you will make in this coming year will literally shape and influence your future and your destiny.

So you really do have an important role to play in determining what your future will be. And I can't think of anything anymore important to talk about on this first Sunday of a New Year than this matter of making wise choices in life.

Do you remember how Charles Dickens begins his epic novel "A Tale of Two Cities"? He writes:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.

He reminds us that life is full of all kinds of contrasts, all kinds of options, all kinds of choices. And it's not just a matter of choosing between what is right and wrong or between what is good and evil or between what is moral and immoral. Some of our most difficult decisions revolve around what is good and what is best, what is primary and what is secondary, what is important and what is most important.

A writer by the name of **John Oxenham** has put it like this:

**To every man there opens
A way, and ways, and the way.
And the high soul climbs the high way,
And the low soul gropes the low;**

**And in between, on the misty flats,
The rest drift to and fro.
But to every man there opens
A high way and a low,
And every man decides
The way his soul shall go.**

So let's talk about the choices you will make in 2008. *How can you choose what is best?* That is the key to influencing and shaping your future. *How can you choose what is best?* I believe the Bible gives us the formula.

Please take your Bibles and turn to the book of **Luke, chapter 10**. At the close of this chapter, beginning with **verse 38**, we find a story in the life of Jesus that illustrates for us the process in making the right choices in life. It is the story of **Martha** and **Mary**, two of Jesus' closest friends.

Here's the story.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42 NIV

Joanna Weaver has written an excellent book that flows out of this story entitled ***"Having A Mary Heart In A Martha World."*** It's all about finding intimacy with God in the midst of the busyness of life; and I suspect that most of us here this morning would identify more with Martha than with Mary.

Now it wasn't that one loved Jesus and the other didn't or that one was a true disciple and the other wasn't or that one made a right choice and the other made a wrong choice. No, here's the difference. Here's the point

of the story. **Although both chose what is good, one chose what is best.** Listen to the words of Jesus. *“Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her”* (Luke 10:42 NIV). The *Contemporary English Version* of Scripture translates it like this: *“Mary has chosen what is best.”*

How do you make wise choices in life? How do you choose what is best? It involves 3 things. Look at the story.

Number One – Choosing The Best Means Being In The Right Place. *Did you notice where Mary was?* Circle **verse 39** in your Bible. It says that Mary *“sat at the Lord’s feet.”* She was near Him. She was in the right place.

In fact, the Greek word that is used here in this passage doesn’t mean to just “sit” but to “sit near.” It implies that Mary got as close to the Lord Jesus as she could possibly get. That’s where disciples are found—at the feet of their teacher, their master, their leader.

The apostle **Paul** once wrote that he was bought up *“at the feet of Gamaliel”* (Acts 22:3 NKJV). That’s where serious-minded disciples want to be—as close to their teacher as possible.

I’m reminded of that man in **Luke 8** who was so full of evil spirits that people called him *“Legion”* because they were convinced that at least a legion of evil spirits lived within him. He had become so anti-social, so uncontrollable, so mean and wild and crazy, that he ran around naked and made his home out among the tombs on the hillside where he would roam around at night hollering and screaming and scaring people to death.

But Jesus touched him. Jesus healed him. Jesus released him from all of these evil spirits and do you know where people found him when they heard that he had been cured and was now dressed and clean and in his right mind? The Bible says, *“They found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet”* (Luke 8:35 NIV).

When you’ve been touched by Jesus, when you’ve been healed, when

you’ve been released from all the evil spirits, when you’ve been changed, when you’ve been given a new heart and a new mind and a new life, you want to get as close to the Lord Jesus as you can possibly get. You want to be near Him. You want to be in the right place. And that’s the first step in the process of making wise choices in life, in choosing what is best. **It begins by being in the right place.**

Now here’s the second thing.

Number Two – Choosing The Best Means Listening To The Right Voice. Not just being in the right place, but also listening to the right voice. Look at **verse 39** one more time. *“She (Martha) had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.”*

You get the sense here that Mary is just hanging on Jesus’ every word. She is close to Him, at His feet, where she can really hear what He has to say. There’s this eye-to-eye, face-to-face contact. He has her total attention. She is just drinking in His every word.

But Martha is out in the kitchen scurrying around, opening and shutting the cabinet doors, clanging the plates and the pots and the pans, setting the table, stirring the stew, baking the bread. She undoubtedly hears some of the things Jesus is saying, but, listen, she is distracted. The Scripture says so. Look at **verse 40**. *“But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.”*

Jesus has all of Mary’s attention, but Martha is doing a dozen things. She’s distracted. And when you’re distracted, you never really get the full impact of the message. You just get part of it.

We were at our daughter’s home several times during the holidays. Christmas with the twins and Olivia and Craig and Lisa! Many of you know that one of the twins, **Emma**, had some very serious health issues that really challenged her the first few months of her life.

By the time she was 9 months old, she had undergone 10 major surgeries (one the day after she was born!), and was out of the hospital a total of one and half weeks. For 9 months she endured IV’s, heart monitors, feeding tubes, ventilators, x-rays, breathing treatments, and a whole host

of doctors and nurses and technicians doing what doctors and nurses and technicians do—waking you up in the middle of the night, poking you with needles, moving you around when you just don't feel like being moved around.

Let me just say it like this. Through it all, Emma developed a real fighting spirit. It was probably what saved her. Three times when she was just weeks old she pulled the ventilator out of her throat. It was like, *“I've had enough of this. I can breathe on my own.”*

Needless to say, she has developed this strong, strong spirit and Lisa has had to work really hard at teaching her and training her on how to respond to “no.” I mean, if Emma gets it in her head, she can be relentless.

And so I watched with interest several times over the Christmas holiday as Lisa would interact with Emma in correcting her when Emma was bound and determined to do what she wanted to do. Lisa would literally take Emma's face in her hands and say, *“Listen to me. Look at me.”* Emma would try to look everywhere except directly into her mother's eyes.

Lisa would say, *“Look at me. Listen to me. Look into my eyes. No! Do you understand? No!”* And when Lisa could finally get her full attention, Emma would get it. *“Okay, Mommy. Okay. I sorry. All done!”* She would really get it. And she is becoming and has become a very well-behaved child. Has a strong spirit but is so well-behaved.

You see, God needs our attention, our full attention, before we really get it. Before we really hear! Before we really listen! That was Mary's secret. That's why she got it. That's why she was able to choose what was best. Jesus had her full attention. She was not only in the right place—she was also listening to the right voice.

Now one final thing! **Number Three – Choosing The Best Means Having The Right Priority.** Notice Mary's priority and Martha's priority. Mary's priority was being close to Jesus. Martha's priority was in serving Jesus and others.

Now is serving bad? No, of course not! The Bible tells us that we should serve one another. It wasn't that Martha chose a bad thing to do. It was just that at that moment in time there was a higher need, there was a more crucial opportunity, there was a greater work to be done than that with which she was consumed.

Jesus was there. He was present, available, totally accessible to share His wisdom, His strength, His mind, His heart, His spirit...but Martha was just too consumed with other things. Not bad things. Serving others, serving Jesus is a good thing. But she was so worried and upset over all the details of serving Jesus that she completely missed the joy of His presence.

And not only that! She gets her eyes so focused upon herself and her own needs and her own problems and her own work that she ends up doing the right kinds of things but in a completely wrong kind of spirit. She lashes out at her sister who is sitting at the feet of Jesus and says, *“Lord, don't you care that my sister as left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”*

She could have chose to sit at Jesus' feet too, but, rather, she chose to busy herself with other things. So Jesus gently rebukes her. He says, *“Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”*

Choosing the best consists of not just being in the right place and listening to the right voice, it also means committing yourself to the right priority and avoiding the distractions.

So here's the **Formula For A Great 2008**. Be in the **Right Place**—close to Jesus. Listen to the **Right Voice**—the voice of the Lord. Choose the **Right Priority**—to be totally open and available to Jesus, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.