

Dearly Beloved of God,

A Happy New Year to each one of you and to all those you love. May 2008 be a year in which you grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you do, then grace and peace will be multiplied unto you, and how good is that?

We all know that a common thing that accompanies the new year is something called a New Year's resolution. I'm not going to comment about the value of New Year's resolutions. I believe that any resolution to seek and follow God's plan for your life will bear good fruit. But if we should fail in keeping our resolution, let's not wait until 2009 to make a new one. It's always good to keep in mind **1 John 1:9 (NIV)**

<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Since every resolution represents a way in which we want to live our lives, the real point I wish to make, and to illustrate from an event in my life is this. **Proverbs 16:9 (MSG)**

<sup>9</sup> We plan the way we want to live, but only God makes us able to live it.

Another translation puts it this way: **Proverbs 16:9 (NKJV)**

<sup>9</sup> A man's heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.

I have this little statement programmed into my PalmOne; "Lord, I need you today and I want to follow you." In keeping with that, I set out this morning for a bi-weekly prison visit. My plan was to go and be a blessing to an inmate who will be released in about 17 months. I've been visiting him since 1994 and when he gets out he will have done 20 years. God has been doing a marvelous work in this man's life, but that's a story for another time. Today I was asking God for a little extra because I wasn't completely up to speed (touch of a stomach bug yesterday). When I got to the correctional facility, the parking lot was quite full, and it had been plowed a few times due to recent storms. So, I parked a long ways from the gate house, and, because of the piles of snow in the medians separating the various parking sections, I walked at a right angle to the sidewalk, then down the sidewalk to the gate house.

I've been making these visits for so long that I can go through the pre-entry ritual in my sleep. (That can be a mistake.) However, today my familiarity bred carelessness and I forgot to remove my fire/ambulance pager from my belt. These are not allowed in the facility, and I know it. So when the guard brought the contraband to my attention, I was more than a little chagrined. Out of the guard house I went, making the long trek back to my car in 9 degree temperature. As I started to grumble, that still small voice sounded on the inside. "I thought you wanted to be a blessing. I thought you wanted to follow me." I started to protest with a strong "Of course!" But I was beginning to see the bigger picture. A sudden peace descended upon me and I just sighed. "OK, God." Just before I got to the row where my car was parked, I felt a nudge to approach my car from an angle, which meant I would have to walk through one snow pile. The snow was frozen solid, so it wasn't much of a challenge, but right there in my path, in the snow, was a set of car keys. The insignia indicated they went to some model of Lincoln.

Attached to the key was a remote entry fob. I figured that if the car to which they belonged was close by, pushing the panic button would reveal its whereabouts. Sure enough, the lights started flashing and the horn sounding on a new Lincoln Aviator, one row over. Well, I got a description of the vehicle, ditched my pager in my car, and drove my car to a new parking spot that had just opened up right near the gate house. When I checked it, I gave the Lincoln keys to the guard and described the vehicle. All of a sudden, he and his two co-workers in the gate house started cracking up. The keys were to a vehicle owned by a Captain who happened to be the shift supervisor. They all thanked me and I didn't ask what sort of devious plan they were up to. I only knew that it wouldn't be as bad as the Captain ending his shift, walking to his car and not being able to get in it.

I had a plan, and God directed my steps. In this case, my plan was not pre-empted, but expanded. And you know what? It usually takes my inmate friend 15 minutes to show up for the visit, once I am cleared. Today, it took only 5 minutes. And my God-ordained steps - well, they didn't take any more than 10 minutes, and when my visit was over, I was the first visitor to get in their car, beating the rush out to the main road.

Go ahead and make plans. That's a good thing. Just be open to God directing your steps. As David realized, long before he became king, God leads us in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. Have a blessed journey into and through 2008. And to those of you who were part of LWF's 20th anniversary celebration, and the overwhelming blessing poured out on Barb and me, THANK YOU!!!

Yours for His Purposes,

Pastor Les