

Redeem the Time
by Dr. Shelton Smith

In just a few short days a bright new year will dawn. With its birth to come the prospect of 365 days for us to spend.

For a lot of folks, the monotony of the day-to-day grind has become total boredom. They will face the new year with a "been-there-done-that" attitude. They have no vision, little energy and no excitement. But with a world approaching six billion living souls, and millions of them perishing every year, we must not allow the spirit of lethargy to take lodging with us! We must not give comfort to indifference! We must not sluggishly and selfishly pass the time mired in defeat.

This is a dark day, but the light of the Gospel still shines. It is a strong, piercing, illuminating light. It destroys the darkness every place it is sent. We are not helpless, and we are not without mandate. Now is the time God has given to us, and frankly, we must not foolishly squander it. I am challenged by the word we have from the Lord to 'redeem the time': "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."—Eph. 5:16.

"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time."—Col. 4:5. The idea is that we make full use, wise use, of the time afforded. The New Year postures itself with a full menu of 365 days. Should the Lord tarry His coming, we should make every one of the days a day of ministry and service unto the Lord.

Surely right now is an excellent time to "push the reset button" and get a fresh start. I want to encourage every Christian and every church to do so. Just to make clear what I envision, let me offer these suggestions to you:

I. IN THIS NEW YEAR EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD "REDEEM THE TIME"

Every blood-bought, born-again son and daughter of the living God should personally and individually make heartfelt resolves for the new year.

(1) Dedicate yourself afresh to a daily walk with the Lord. Pray, read your Bible, live by biblical concepts and principles, and keep your heart open and attuned to the Lord. Ask the Lord to guide your every step. Determine that you will stay in fellowship with the Lord as you go about your daily business.

(2) Read your Bible in its entirety. You can do that, and you can do it this year. Call the Sword for our daily Bible-reading calendar (615-893-6700). It's a very handy way to set a schedule and keep a record of what you've done. You'll be blessed by systematically and

daily walking through the Bible.

(3) Commit yourself to three services a week.

I've never seen it fail! When a Christian gets fully serious about making his life count for the Lord, he starts showing up at church Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night. Building everything around your local church is neither new nor novel. It's an old-fashioned plan that produces good results. It's still the way to go. Cull out other time thieves in your schedule. Trim and trim some more until you can make it happen.

(4) Attend special meetings.

When your church has revival, Bible conference, etc., make adjustments to your schedule and be there.

You'll find vacations are well spent coming to the National Sword of the Lord Conference or a Sword Ladies' Jubilee.

These special events will add a dimension of blessing to your life. So many Christians hear of it but keep passing it up for lesser causes. This is the year to start taking full advantage of these big meetings.

(5) Give yourself to soul winning.

Take the soul winners' training your church offers. Become a part of the team of soul winners who actively go soul winning every week. You'll be amazed at how God can use you—and you'll be further amazed at what blessing comes to the soul winner himself.

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise."—Prov. 11:30.

(6) Go ahead and tithe!

You really can't afford not to tithe. If you've been trying to manage your business without this obedience to God, I'm not surprised at your stress. Rearrange your finances and put your obligation (tithe) to God at the top of the list.

If you've neglected this during this past year, why don't you write a check now and catch up before the end of the year? Start right as the new year starts!

(7) Stop rehearsing past hurts and failures.

If you are nursing some old wound, give it up! Let it go. The past is past. You have today, and with God's help you can make it beautiful. But by all means, don't let some ugly thing from yesterday steal the joys of today and the hopes for tomorrow. Clean out the attic of your mind—and stop rehearsing the trash of the past. As you enter this new year look up (to the Lord) and look forward (to the future).

(8) Share the vision of your pastor.

You'll do well to find out the dream your pastor has for your church and for reaching your area for Christ. Let yourself in on that vision. Dream with him.

Invest yourself in bringing that dream to reality. Walk side by side with the pastor. Work with him. Stand by him.

(9) Keep your spirit warm and excited.

If you fall prey to the Devil's snare in becoming a critic and a crank, you are going to lose a lot that's important. Don't let yourself become the judge and jury of everybody close to you. You don't want to be treated that way, so don't you do it to others.

Learn the good songs of the Faith and sing them every day. Be patient with the faults of your fellow Christians. Stay upbeat even when things go awry. Keep the joys of the Lord flooding your soul and flowing out through your countenance. Stay sweet and keep your spirit and attitude excited!

(10) Trust the Lord.

You can't foresee every shadow that will fall across your path. You can't stop trouble from camping in your neighborhood—but you can trust God. No matter what, you can trust Him. He never leaves you nor forsakes you. When darkness engulfs you, trust Him. When the burdens grow heavy, trust Him. When you don't know the answers and you can't explain the circumstances, trust Him. Just keep on trusting!

II. IN THIS NEW YEAR EVERY CHURCH SHOULD "REDEEM THE TIME"

The greatest place in your town is the church house. The Lord gave birth to the church. It's His idea, and He intends that it be big in your life.

Surely every fundamental, Bible-believing church should chart a course to "Redeem the Time." May I suggest:

(1) Set goals, make some plans, and dream again!

Goals are important! If you have a great cause (as we do), then there ought to be worthy goals. As we begin this new year, why don't we set goals for attendance, for souls saved, for baptisms, etc.? Make them reasonable, achievable goals, but do get them in place. Let everybody know what you're shooting for. Be excited about it.

Then make plans that will assure you of reaching the goals. It will take more than idle talk: there has to be a plan! The plan should be spread over fifty-two weeks rather than just a few weeks here and there.

Don't be afraid to dream again. The Lord put you where you are, and until He decides otherwise, you are responsible for what and where He has put you. So come on, let's get up, set the goals, make big plans, and let the dream become reality in this year.

(2) Develop a fifty-two-week plan.

Have something going on at all seasons. Plan a variety of things, a balanced program.

Set a spring program during March, April and May—maybe seven weeks in length.

Plan things for the summer too. Yes, a summer program! Keep the pace up during the summer. Don't just coast until vacations are over. Make your folks dread to go away! Amen!

Set a program for September, October, November—again, seven or eight weeks of events.

Make December a month of Christmas-related things.

In January and February put together some things that will work for winter.

The idea is, keep things happening—fifty-two weeks a year!

(3) Prioritize on soul winning!

The pastor must set the pace by winning souls every week. If you have a staff, they must do the same. Deacons, Sunday school teachers, bus workers, etc., must be active in the soul-winning program of the church.

Set up a year-round training program and train soul winners. This is the main thing, our number one business—so let's get it on the front burner all year long!

(4) Plan some big days.

Forget "it can't be done," and let's do it! Many of the churches where I've been in this past year have had all-time record days. They did it on purpose. It was no accident. You can do it too. Get your people committed to it and then go for it! Be creative, and you'll find it will come.

(5) Stay excited!

When we go to church, it's right to be warm, friendly, joyful and excited. We need to expect something! So let's talk excitedly about the church, the plans, the goals, and all that we're into. Let the excitement show!

This excitement is not just for the big day. This is to be the norm for us. Yes, even on low Sundays, when the crowds are off, stay excited. Make coming to church a wonderful experience. Build a fire in the place. From the first note of music till the last amen, let the fire burn. Amen!

(6) Preach!

Three times a week, preach! On the big days, preach! When the attendance is down, preach! When trouble's stirring, preach! Whatever and whenever, preach!

"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."—I Cor. 1:21.

Mount the pulpit! Claim the power of God! Open the Book! Read a text! Open your mouth and preach!

(7) "Spiffy" up the place.

There's no excuse (absolutely none) for Sunday and Wednesday to roll around and the building be unswept and unclean. Get out those paintbrushes occasionally.

Stash the trash. Put stuff away. Get things organized. Be ready for guests.

(8) Start something new.

Add a new class (if you have a good teacher), add a bus route (if you have workers), add a new ministry that will address a need. Find a way; get it going!

(9) Publicize what you're doing.

You must tell your story to the general public in your area. If they know what's happening at your place, they will feel much more inclined to come to see you. Write press releases for your local media. Get on radio if you can. Churches with resources to do so should consider a local television ministry. Thousands of fliers should be circulated. Gospel tracts should be scattered freely and often. Keep your church visible all year long. If people know about you, it enhances everything you're trying to do.

(10) Canvass your area.

An orchestrated effort to knock on every door in your "Jerusalem" as often as possible is a necessity. Get your troops organized and invade those neighborhoods. We'll find more and more people coming to church if we go into the neighborhoods knocking on doors. Let's stop making excuses. Put your other plans in mothballs, and let's go do it.

Oh, dear pastor, dear Christian brother or sister, let's give it a full effort.

Let's make the kind of push that is worthy of our Saviour who gave His all for us.

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."—John 4:35.

Now is the time! While there is time, there is opportunity—and we must not waste the time nor the opportunity.

"What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops."—Matt. 10:27.

We have heard from the Lord! We know what to do. We cannot be silent. Find a housetop and shout it!

A whole new year! 365 days! Let's not lose it in lethargy! Let's run the race excitedly and fervently.

In the new year let's "Redeem the Time"!