

Text: Numbers 6:24-26

Theme: God's Instruction Book for the New Year

December 31, 2017

What can you tell me about instructions manuals? Most are now in multiple languages. Some use only pictures and expect you to figure out the rest, and others look like a dictionary instead of a simple set of instructions. But the most significant piece of information known about instruction manuals is that most of us only look at them when all else fails. The words of our text are familiar words, words that provide important information for the new year, instructions worth reading, remembering, and using.

I. Out of love, our Father offers us His little instruction book for the new year. A. But as He does so, we ask ourselves, "Why do I need instructions?" 1. We need His instructions because we can't fix life. How many things are broken in our world, in Wisconsin, in Medford? Once you calculate that mental number, answer this question, "How many things are broken or need fixing in your personal life?" Of all the things that are broken, how many can you fix? In most circumstances, if we could fix it, we would have already fixed it. As we step into the new year, we need our Father's help; we need His little instruction book because we can't fix ourselves.

2. We need His instruction book because solo doesn't work. How many of you have ever played a solo or sang a solo for a concert or even listened to either type of solo? Those solos work, but solo living doesn't work. Most people still think it works as they continue to use the most popular words in their vocabulary, "I" or "Me." But no matter how much we try, it will never work. Why? Because God designed us to need each other, to work together, to function as a unit. Look at the Old Testament or the New Testament and see how many times solo worked. Time after time, they failed, and time after time, we fail when we think that all we need is "me."

3. We need God's instruction book because we don't know the future. How many of you know what's going to happen next year, next month, tomorrow, or even five minutes from now? We can dream; we can plan, but all we have to work with is possibilities. How simple is it to prepare for the future when you don't know the future? We don't want to admit that we are desperate, but we are, that we are helpless, but it's true. Because we don't know, we need to open the pages, to look beyond the parts list, to turn the book the right way so that we have the English version and then immerse ourselves in the only Book that will prepare us for the future.

B. As we consider God's instructions as found in our text, what does He offer us?

1. He offers us God's blessing. "The Lord bless you." Suppose God spoke out loud to you every day for the next year and you could hear Him say, "yes" to those things that were pleasing to Him. How would it impact your life? Wouldn't you feel invincible, that you could do it, that it would happen because God said so? Maybe God won't speak out loud, but when what you ask gives Him honor and praise, strengthens your faith or the faith of another person, you can know with absolute certainty that God is saying, "yes," that God is saying, "Go for it. You have My blessing!"

2. He offers us His protection. "The Lord bless you and keep you." This world is a frightening place. Any moment, some kind of disaster could occur. Some days,

our list of “what ifs” is incredibly unnerving because we know it could happen. Although we live in such a frightening world, God repeatedly promises to protect us. Maybe He doesn’t define the details in the way we would prefer, but, when we take God at His Word, He says, “I will keep you. I will protect you. I will guard you. I will stand beside you. I will defend you. I will take you out of harm’s way more times than you will ever realize. I am the Lord and I will do it!”

3. He offers to encourage us. How often do you get discouraged? We don’t want anyone to know because we think it doesn’t happen to others, yet it happens to each one of us far more frequently than we even realize. We hope for a promotion and it doesn’t happen and we get discouraged. We want something to change within our family and it doesn’t and we get discouraged. Our list could go on. But God’s instruction book offers the opposite as He encourages us with His word and His presence. As God offers His encouragement, we need to mentally imagine that God is smiling on us and that His face is shining on us.

4. He offers us His grace. “The Lord be gracious unto you.” Why should He? Why would He? Purely out of love. That’s His motivation. And what does He offer that we need most? Forgiveness. In this little instruction book found in our text, God offers to forgive you. Whether you look here or elsewhere, you will find something rather interesting. God never asks what, why, or the magnitude. Every moment we ask, God’s response is “Forgiven.” As we hear these familiar words at the close of each service, God is saying, “Whatever occurs in the week ahead, know with confidence before you ask that My answer will be, ‘forgiven’ because it can be no other way.”

5. He offers us His kindness. “The Lord look upon you with His favor.” How many people in Medford alone imagine God to be vengeful, waiting for them to mess up, looking for an opportunity to punish? To us, it may sound crazy, but it’s a prevalent thought. Among non-Christians, God isn’t kind, caring, loving, or compassionate. But among us as His people, we see a far different image of God. In this little instruction book for the new year, we’re reminded of what God is and what God offers. He is kind to you, caring toward you, compassionate toward you, understanding, and thoughtful. To you, He says, “I am looking on you daily with My favor.”

6. He offers us His peace. As we look at our world, our community, and, our own lives, we think, “It’s not possible. Peace may exist somewhere, but it’s surely not in my life. My life is chaotic, out of control, on the verge of or in the midst of an internal war.” Yet while we’re convincing ourselves that peace isn’t possible, God steps on to the scene and says, “Consider the evidence. I drove out demons by speaking a word. I calmed the sea with a single sentence, and I calmed the lives of My great leaders by saying, ‘be still and know that I am God’. If I can do all those things and more, is there any reason why I can not bring peace to you when you truly seek it?”

7. We may not be prone to read the instructions until all else fails, but today, as we stand on the brink of a new year, God says to you and to me, “Take My instruction book to heart for when you do, I will bless you and keep you. I will make My face shine on you and be gracious to you. I will look on you with My favor and give you My peace.” And with faith and confidence, we say, “Amen” and “Amen.”