

**December 30, 2007**

**“Trouble, An Opportunity For Joy”**

**James 1:2-4 (NLT)**

Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.

This is the last Sunday of 2007. So it is time once again for resolutions and predictions...and I predicted we will make, but not keep our resolutions in 2008!

I think I can make some predictions about your resolutions:

2003: I will read at least 20 good books a year.

2004: I will read at least 10 books a year.

2005: I will read 5 books a year.

2006: I will read some articles in the newspaper this year.

2007: I will read at least one article this year.

2008: I will try and finish the comics section this year.

2002: I will get my weight down below 180.

2003: I will watch my calories until I get below 190.

2004: I will follow my new diet religiously until I get below 200.

2005: I will try to develop a realistic attitude about my weight.

2006: I will work out 5 days a week.

2007: I will work out 3 days a week.

2008: I will try to drive past a gym at least once a week.

2005: I will go to church every Sunday.

2006: I will go to church as often as possible.

2007: I will set aside time each day for prayer

2008: I will try to catch the late night sermonette on TV.

Leonard Sweet says, There are two kinds of travelers.

There are those that pack two days ahead of departure, prepare a meticulous triptick, map out the roads they will take, the stops they will make, and the timetable they will keep. These kinds of travelers pack first-aid kits, extra socks and underwear, and tuck energy bars, fruits, and water bottles into every aperture they can find in their luggage. Their cell phones are fully charged, and they have re-charging cords for every electronic device they carry—all with car adapters as well. Any of those kinds of travelers here this morning?

Then there are others kinds of travelers—the rest of you who didn’t raise your hands. You scrape clothes off the bedroom floor and chair (some clean/some not), stuff it into a

backpack, grab keys and go. No toothbrush? Pick one up on the road. No map? More fun to just head in some general direction (“north”) and see what comes their way. Side roads, cut-offs, short-cuts, long-cuts, and detours are all part of the adventure. For these travelers there may be an ultimate destination in mind. But wherever they find themselves they are never “lost”—just getting where they are going by a different route.

In August, Ann, her sister, and I had to go to Florida on some business. Being the plan everything out kind of people. We called ahead to reserve a rental car, we packed just the bare necessities, and we each packed our things in a small carry on bag. Our plan was to get to the air port, not have to check any bags, arrive in Florida, not have to go to the baggage claim, get our rented car and be on our way.

When we arrived at the airport it was crowded with people. We learned it was the last day before college students had to be back and school was starting in Florida as well. When we saw the crowd outside the airport checking their bags we were glad we brought carry on luggage. We called my sister-in-law on her cell. *She was* checking her luggage. She was on the end of the line outside and, because of the crowd was told to get off the line and go inside the airport to check her bag. She told us to meet her there. When we found her, in a long line, she told us we all should check our luggage. Because of new requirements they would take certain containers, shampoo for example and she didn’t want us to be held up in security. Furthermore we had to make a stop over in Baltimore and she didn’t want us to have to be lugging around our bags. Ok, we’ll check our bags, and so we got into the line with her.

After being on line for quite some time a women behind me asked if we had gotten pre-boarding confirmation over the internet. We said we did, she said, “I did also, but I think we are on the wrong line. Save my space,” she said, “and I’ll go check on that.” She came back and sure enough we were on the wrong line. Already nothing has gone as planned. We got in the right line, but it was getting late. I said we should just carry on our bags, and start for the gate. My sister-in-law, said we had enough time, not to worry our turn was coming up soon.

Well, our turn finally came, we went up to the women that called, “next” and gave her our bags. Then she said, “Oh, your not going to get on this flight.”

“What? Why not?” Then she informed us that the plane was already full. “But, I have a reservation,” I said. Now, I felt like a Jerry Seinfeld episode, “you know how to take the reservation, you just don’t know how to hold the reservation. And that’s the most important part of the reservation, the holding...any one can take them!”

“So,” I asked her, “what do we do now?” She said, “I can book you on an early flight tomorrow morning.” This isn’t going as planned at all. Now we are stranded at the airport without a ride, our car rental in Florida would have to be rescheduled. Just then I heard my name paged over the loud speaker, telling me to report to gate 4 immediately. I told the women my name had just been paged. She said, “really? Ok, I will check your bags, you get to the gate. Now the three of us are running through the airport, suddenly

security was not that important as they rushed us through the line. I ran ahead. People were boarding. I went up to the person checking the boarding passes, but was informed I had to go to the desk.

I went to the desk and told the woman there my name had been paged. She asked me for my name, typed it into her computer and said, "I have bad news, your luggage made it aboard, but your not." This is definitely not how we planned this. Finally Ann and her sister got there and I informed them about our luggage making the trip without us.

Then a stewardess from the plane came and said she had two seats left. We looked at each other, and my sister-in-law said we should go, she would book another flight and we could pick her up the next day at the airport in Florida. As we are running to the plane Ann remembers, we don't have a key for the house in Florida or the code for the alarm system. She yells out for her sister who practically threw the house key at us and was yelling out the code as we were going down the narrow hall way to board the plane.

We get in the plane, that is full, and hundreds of people are staring at the two people that have held up their flight. Then the stewardess informs us that we will not be able to sit together. My wife, who by the way, hates to fly and panics at the slightest movement in the plane, who screams at the sound of the landing gear coming down, she's thinking, "I can't sit between two strangers, I can't dig my nails into a strangers arm when I'm frightened, What is a stranger going to think when I have to scream?" But, like it or not we were going to be separated. Ann took her seat, but I could not find another seat available. I told the stewardess I couldn't find another empty seat and she said I would have to get off the plane. Ann jumped up and said, "if he's leaving, I'm leaving!" Just then another stewardess found me a seat.

After our layover we were glad to reach our final destination in Florida. We went to the baggage claim and stood by the carousel to wait for our *and* my sister-in-laws luggage to come around. And we waited, and we waited...no luggage. A young lady brought us to a small office where we were told our luggage didn't make it. I said, "You know, in NY we were told our luggage made it but we weren't going to make it."

"Well," said the young lady, "the opposite happened." I asked when we could expect it, she wasn't sure, "could be tonight, or tomorrow, if...if it's not lost completely." Ann said, "what are we going to do? We have no clothes, or anything else we need, my prescription drugs were in the bag too." No, this was not going as planned at all. I told Ann not to worry, it wasn't like we were stranded in some third world country, we were only in Florida for Pete's sake. Our luggage did arrive that night and we drove back to the airport to pick it up.

You can plan when you travel, but you can't always predict what will happen. And as we plan to travel into a new year we can't predict what will happen either...can we? We always have great hopes and want encouragement as we face a new year, but we have no guarantees. Yet, as we approach a new year I would like to make a few predictions about 2008. This year I predict...as a matter of fact I guarantee that you will experience in

2008 the following, ready? You will experience confusion, disappointment, and conviction...how's that for encouragement?

I am not trying to bum you out - I do hope to make this a more encouraging message...so hang in there with me – but you *will* have times of confusion, disappointment, and conviction this year, I guarantee it. I know it, and you know it, because it's true of every year.

There will be circumstances we will face this year in our lives that will completely confuse us. Some may confuse us to the point that we will question God and even our beliefs.

There will be people and events this year that will disappoint us. So much so that if we allow it, we could lose all hope.

We will be convicted this year of behaving in ways we ought not to. And worse we may even see that our heart is not as good, pure and loving as it should be, and as we thought.

When Ann and I were in that little office at the airport in Florida, there was another couple there too. They also did not have their luggage. The husband was screaming and cursing, and telling the young lady in the office how tired he was of the terrible company she worked for. The girl had nothing to do with his lost luggage...she was trying to help him. But, he kept on screaming at her. She finally had to tell him that if he didn't calm down and stop the obscenities she was going to have him removed from her office. His wife looked disappointed in how her husband was behaving. It certainly was not what any of us needed at that moment.

An honest look at life will produce confusion about what we see in our world and in ourselves. It will cause disappointment in others when they fail to respond the way we need. And it will provoke conviction over the ways we violate the command to love.

So I predict confusion, disappointment, and conviction for you this year. The prediction is guaranteed and there is nothing you can do about it. But you could make some resolutions. A resolution is a firm decision, and pledge, to do something you are determined to do. Today I want you to be firm in your mind that your purpose for 2008 will be to not allow the confusion, disappointment, and conviction that you will experience this year have a negative effect, but, rather, a positive one.

How can those things have a positive effect? You may ask. Glad you asked, let's think about this:

God wants to use all things to promote a Christ like character in us. Therefore:

Confusion does not have to lead to bitterness and discouragement, but to faith. It can lead to faith as we realize that God is at work, He has a purpose, and He never requires from us something we cannot do. He wants to accomplish His good purposes in our life.

Our faith is often weak, but the kind of faith that develops to support us through times of overwhelming confusion is strong and resilient. So, Confusion can be the route to a stronger faith.

Disappointment can cause us to avoid people for fear we will only get hurt again. We lose hope in people and it hurts the way we relate to people. But, disappointment can drive us to hope - a hope that can keep us steady even when people let us down. This hope can motivate us to pursue rather than avoid relationships. It's hope in Christ, He meets all our needs and one day we will be with Him forever. A hope that keeps us going when we feel most alone will take over. And so disappointment can be the route to steady hope.

Conviction over our own lack of love can run deep. We don't always behave as we ought just like those who disappoint us. We must become sensitive to even the subtle violation of love in our lives. The love that grows out of a deep repentance over our self-protective sin is insightful, and fruitful. Therefore, conviction can be the route to deeper love.

1 Cor 13:12-13 NLT

Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now.

There are three things that will endure--faith, hope, and love--and the greatest of these is love.

Confusion, disappointment, conviction, is this the path to joy? Yes, because they develop faith, hope, and love. James 1:2 (NLT) "Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy."

During January Pastor Nick and I would like to talk to you in more detail about this. We invite you to come and hear this new preaching series, "Trouble, An Opportunity For Joy"