

Lines and Lanes –

1. Ministers are often masters of the obvious so let me start by saying that I think we all know that a new year is right around the corner. It is an arbitrary thing, something we have laid over the chaos of the universe in order to help us regulate our lives and give ourselves a semblance of order and control. And it let's us have a party.
2. Kami and I have a solid set of traditions built around New Years Eve. We have found that we are lost past being able to identify the singers on the networks' New Years Eve broadcasts. Sometimes, we are unable to identify the species. So, we watch what we want and allow ourselves to go to bed anytime after midnight, Greenwich Mean Time...which is 6hrs ahead of Central Time.
3. As long as I'm being obvious, let me also mention that people like to make resolutions around this time of year. Again, it is a highly arbitrary date but, if you want to improve your life, you have to start somewhere so this time is as good as any.
4. We are starting a new series in the New Year. Months ago, the shepherds had a retreat and asked that we examine what it means to live a Christian life. We determined that this time of year, after studying Thin Places and the Creeds, would be perfect.
5. We will begin by closely following the classic Richard Foster book, "The Celebration of Discipline" and then go on to look at other disciplines from other books. We will take care to credit the original authors but we will place our own Fourth Avenue spin on things.
6. I want to examine the concept of celebrating a discipline. It sounds...odd. This is a nation that was born out of an absolute belief that we are created to have life, liberty and the freedom to pursue happiness. The social contract we had with the British Empire was too constricting so it was time to break those bonds and set out on our own...
7. And we immediately began debating the rules of how to live as a free nation. The Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights...And, today, the amount of regulations is

staggering. Every single one of us is a felon. Period. It can't be helped.

8. Our grandparents sang "I Gotta Be Me" and "I Did it My Way." We are their heirs and we rejoice in throwing off the rules and conventions our grandparents (who were singing those songs, remember) expected us to embrace forever. So why are we talking about disciplines?
9. In the early 1980s, a passenger jet crashed into a mountain in Central America. The black box was found as well as the voice recorder. The recording was chilling. Investigators sat and listened as the voice warning system repeatedly told the pilots to pull up, that a ground contact was imminent. The last thing heard was the pilot laughing, saying "Shut up, Gringo." The pilots didn't believe the warning. They thought they knew better than the instruments – and the rules in place about paying attention to the instruments. (my own experience with thinking I was straight and level)
10. We can get upset that we have to go to school but we absolutely insist that our doctors, pilots, and engineers go to school – and take HARD courses and pass them easily (nobody wants to have a surgeon who was a D student). When we get into our vehicles, we insist that people stay on their side of the road, pay attention to lights and signs, take their turns, and play nice on the road.
11. And when they don't? We want police officers who have undergone extensive training to come and enforce the law. It seems that we like disciplines – some disciplines. (teaching chords and patterns – you only have to learn them once)
12. In short, when discipline, work, and focus bring us something good, worthwhile, and satisfying, we agree that the discipline is right and proper. We become cheerleaders for the discipline (weight loss, exercise, vocal training, martial arts).
13. The Christian life is far more than just belief. Our belief is to show itself as an active faith, a game changing, life altering faith. If your beliefs change and your life doesn't, it is time to question your

faith. Jesus told us that getting where we want to go, spiritually, would not be easy. Look at these scriptures: **Matthew 7:13,14; Matthew 10:34-39.**

14. We are not first century Jews and we frame our thoughts in our ways so these verses seem startling, breathtaking. Jesus is saying that if we are not willing to lay aside what needs to be laid aside, we will never make it where we want to be. If you want to be a doctor, but you don't want to hurt your parents' feelings, you don't want to make your roommate unhappy, etc. and you give that equal weight, you will fail. In Semitic terms, you will have allowed yourself to have many eyes. Jesus put it this way: **Matthew 6:22-23 (IN KJV!).**
15. Paul put it in sporting terms: **1st Cor. 9:24-27.** The writer of Hebrews put it this way (**Hebrews 12:1,2**). And there is the secret – focus on Jesus. He is not just Lord, Savior, and King...he is the goal. He is the finish line.
16. When we speak of disciplines, we are not bringing in a new legalism; far from it. We are, instead, bringing in life skills that we can practice, hone, and perfect so that we can look, think, and live like Jesus.
17. We practice guitar so that we can sound like our heroes. We work out so that we look and fill like our athlete heroes. And we practice spiritual disciplines – not that we might be saved if we reach a certain standard – but so that we will look like Jesus, our hero, the author and finisher of our faith, our Lord and our God.
18. We have to draw some lines and we have to have the discipline to stay in our lanes (recent questions about construction, etc. that I have fielded). I turn away questions about medicine, anatomy, politics, etc. constantly because those aren't my lanes. And...
19. I don't have to be an expert in the things of the world. I don't have to know its entertainments, politics, fears, and passions. I can step outside those lines and stay in my lane: a pilgrim and an stranger on earth. (far too many churches attempt to be engaged with culture and end up married to it). Let's stay in our lane. Let's be a

Matthew 25 people who are about the work, business, and passion of our Christ. Let us be a disciplined people who look like Him.