

The Potter

January 1, 2023 | Matthew McNutt

[Title Slide] Happy New Year! Today is going to be a little different, so we should probably get on the same page here for expectations, right? First, this is a family friendly service. There is nothing else happening in the building unless you're a toddler. Which means – we're probably going to hear some noises over the course of this message. That's not going to faze me. I once had to break up a brawl between my sons in the front row of the balcony while Pastor Bo was preaching. There is no judgment here.

Second, it's going to be a bit interactive. I need all the elementary age kids – fifth grade and under – to go ahead and come sit down in front here. You don't have to, but I brought play-doh and it's NOT allowed in the pews. Middle school and high school people, you can come down to these front rows as well; I may need your help with some of the younger crew, and I have some stuff I'd like you to do as well.

How many of you like to make things? Maybe something in particular? When I was around ten years old, I used to make candles. All different colors, scents, shapes. I had molds so I could create dog candles, owl candles, you name it. I could never bring myself to burn them, though. Too beautiful.

I've known some people who are really good at building models. Not me. The results are always devastating when I try. Some of you build houses; that's way out of my skill set. Unless it's with Legos. Others are really good at creating incredible desserts – although it doesn't take much to find some doozy of fails. I googled "Pinterest fails" and was NOT disappointed. Check these out:

[Slide: bunny cake]

[Slide: ghost strawberries]

[Slide: Olaf cake]

[Slide: Cat cake]

I honestly believe this desire to create is in part because we were **created in the image of God**; God is the ultimate Creator, and there is something in us that shares in that joy. And it's not just in the opening chapters of Genesis that we see that; it's throughout scripture. God uses language of creation to describe His ongoing interest in our lives.

Isaiah 64:8 (NLT) And yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We all are formed by your hand.

Have you ever seen an artist at work? It's mesmerizing, isn't it? To watch them take raw materials and transform them into something beautiful. God uses the imagery of Him being the Potter and us being the clay throughout scripture. Why? Because it is an ongoing process of creation. God desires to be shaping and molding us every day. He is the master artist, the sovereign Creator – a fancy way of saying He is the one ultimately in control.

There's an artist whose work I like who does livestreams of him painting; just a closeup of the canvas and his brush. He paints with gouache, a type of watercolor paint. What I find so fascinating is that when he begins, I can't see anything. He puts the colors on the canvas and paints with intention, but I generally have no idea what he's doing – at first. Sometimes it happens early on, sometimes it's far into the painting before a moment comes when it starts to make sense, suddenly the image he is going for jumps out at me and I wonder how I didn't see it before. Have you had a moment like that before? The artist knew all along what he was painting, but for those of us watching, it can sometimes take a while before we see it start to come together.

As we go into this new year, it's the perfect moment to stop and consider; **are we allowing the Artist to work?** Are we allowing the Potter to mold us into what He has envisioned for us?

There is a verse in Proverbs that is a life verse for me; it changed my perspective when I was 17 years old, and has been an ongoing reminder to me of what it means to follow God.

Proverbs 16:9 (NLT) We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.

Why is this simple verse so profound to me? Because my tendency is to make plans – my heart wants to be in control of my life. I want to be the artist molding myself. Which is a ridiculous image if I stop and consider it.

The power is in the second half of that verse; “the Lord determines our steps.” How do we allow God to mold us? We let Him guide our steps, through His word, through teaching and preaching, through accountability with other believers, through the nudging of the Holy Spirit.

How many of us have New Year's resolutions? Today is the perfect day to make a change that really matters, the kind you will look back on at the end of your life and be proud of, the kind of change that someday when you stand before God you will be relieved to hear, “well done, good and faithful servant.” If you haven't done so, begin a Bible reading plan – there are so many online, or you can grab the free Daily Bread devotionals. Join a small group. Honestly, that's the closest thing to what the New Testament church was, meeting in homes, studying the word together. And serve.

Paul writes in Ephesians what it is that God is molding us to:

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT) ¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

We are God's masterpieces; **YOU are God's masterpiece**, you are His work of art. And we have a purpose; to do the good things He plans for us. What is God molding each of us into? Someone who serves, who puts others first, who works towards God's kingdom here and now.

I remember speaking with someone years ago about this, but he kept saying it was too late, that I didn't know all that he had done, there was no way God would want him. I have to imagine there are some of us here now that wonder that same thing. How many times can I go back to God about the same sin? How many times can I apologize before God throws in the towel?

Jeremiah 18:2-6 (NLT) [The Lord said] ² "Go down to the potter's shop, and I will speak to you there." ³ So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel. ⁴ But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again and started over. ⁵ Then the Lord gave me this message: ⁶ "O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand."

When we lived in Maine I had a friend who was a professional potter. He made luxury pottery; it went for quite a premium. We were talking about these verses once and he said he loved them because as a potter he knew that sometimes to get clay to mold the way he wanted it to, he had to introduce imperfections or break it down before it would conform to what he intended.

[Your failure is God's opportunity] Maybe what you view as failure is simply the Potter bringing you to a point where He can finally mold you into the purpose and masterpiece He sees in you that you don't yet recognize.

What will this year be? Will it be one you look back on as a missed opportunity, gone too fast, failed resolutions? Or will it be one that counts for eternity? What is it that God wants to mold in you? What failure can He transform? Write it on your connection card. If you want to get plugged in to a group, put it on your card. Text a friend. Get some accountability. Allow the Potter to shape you into the Masterpiece He knows you are.