



**By President
Dieter F. Uchtdorf**

Second Counselor
in the First Presidency

THE BEST TIME TO Plant a Tree

In ancient Rome, Janus was the god of beginnings. He was often depicted with two faces—one looking back on the past, the other looking forward to the future. Some languages name the month of January after him because the beginning of the year was a time for reflection as well as planning.

Thousands of years later, many cultures throughout the world carry on a tradition of making resolutions for the new year. Of course, making resolutions is easy—keeping them is a different thing altogether.

One man who had made a long list of New Year's resolutions felt pretty good about his progress. He thought to himself, "So far, I've stuck to my diet, I haven't lost my temper, I've kept to my budget, and I haven't once complained about the neighbor's dog. But today is January 2 and the alarm just went off and it's time I got out of bed. It's going to take a miracle to keep my streak going."

Starting Over

There is something incredibly hopeful about a fresh start. I suppose at one time or another we have all wanted to start again with a clean slate.

I love getting a new computer with a clean hard drive. For a time it works perfectly. But as the days and weeks pass by and more and more programs get installed (some intentional, some not so intentional), eventually

the computer begins to stall, and things it used to do quickly and efficiently become sluggish. Sometimes it doesn't work at all. Even getting it to start can become a chore as the hard drive becomes cluttered with miscellaneous chaos and electronic debris. There are times when the only recourse is to reformat the computer and start over.

Human beings can likewise become cluttered with fears, doubts, and burdensome guilt. The mistakes we have made (both intentional and unintentional) can weigh upon us until it may seem hard to do what we know we should.

In the case of sin, there is a wonderful reformatting process called repentance that allows us to clear our internal hard drives of the clutter that burdens our hearts. The gospel, through the miraculous and compassionate Atonement of Jesus Christ, shows us the way to cleanse our souls of the stain of sin and once again become new, pure, and as innocent as a child.

But sometimes other things slow us down and hold us back, causing unproductive thoughts and actions that make it hard for us to get started.

Bringing Out the Best in Us

Setting goals is a worthy endeavor. We know that our Heavenly Father has goals because He has told us that His



TEACHING FROM THIS MESSAGE

President Uchtdorf explained that when we fail to reach our goals, “we can be empowered. . . . Even though we might fall short of our finish line, just continuing the journey will make us greater than we were before.” Ask family members to share experiences in which they learned more from the process than they learned from the outcome, such as graduating from school or receiving an award.

work and glory is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

Our personal goals can bring out the best in us. However, one of the things that derail our efforts in making and keeping resolutions is procrastination. We sometimes delay starting, waiting for the right moment to begin—the first day of a new year, the beginning of summer, when we’re called as bishop or Relief Society president, after the kids get into school, after we retire.

You don’t need an invitation before you start moving in the direction of your righteous goals. You don’t need to wait for permission to become the person you were designed to be. You don’t need to wait to be invited to serve in the Church.

We can sometimes waste years of our lives waiting to be chosen (see D&C 121:34–36). But that is a false premise. You are already chosen!

At times in my life I have spent sleepless nights grappling with issues, worries, or personal sorrows. But

no matter how dark the night, I am always encouraged by this thought: in the morning the sun will rise.

With every new day, a new dawn comes—not only for the earth but also for us. And with a new day comes a new start—a chance to begin again.

But What If We Fail?

Sometimes the thing that holds us back is fear. We might be afraid that we won’t succeed, that we will succeed, that we might be embarrassed,

that success might change us, or that it might change the people we love.

And so we wait. Or give up.

Another thing we need to remember when it comes to setting goals is this: We almost certainly will fail—at least in the short term. But rather than be discouraged, we can be empowered because this understanding removes the pressure of being perfect right now. It acknowledges from the beginning that at one time or another, we may fall short. Knowing this up front takes

away much of the surprise and discouragement of failure.

When we approach our goals this way, failure doesn't have to limit us. Remember, even if we fail to reach our ultimate, desired destination right away, we will have made progress along the road that will lead to it.

And that matters—it means a lot.

Even though we might fall short of our finish line, just continuing the journey will make us greater than we were before.

The Best Time to Begin Is Now

An old proverb says, “The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.”

There is something wonderful and hopeful about the word *now*. There is something empowering about the fact that if we choose to decide now, we can move forward at this very moment.

Now is the best time to start becoming the person we eventually want to be—not only 20 years from now but also for all eternity. ■

YOUTH

Become Your Best Self—Starting Now

President Uchtdorf teaches that “personal goals can bring out the best in us.” Consider setting some goals in two or three areas of your life, such as physical health, spiritual health, and friendships, for example. What successes would you like to have in these areas this year? As you prayerfully think of some goals, make sure they are attainable but will require you to grow. In your journal, describe your goals in detail so that you will be able to see your progress when a year passes.

