

HAPPY NEW YEAR!



Have you heard anyone say this, lately? **HAPPY NEW YEAR!!** Probably multiple times. A lot of people say it, but here’s a question: What makes someone have a happy new year? What is it that makes somebody happy?

Whattaya think? What makes you happy?

I know people chase a LOT of different stuff, thinking that it will make ‘em happy. You know, things like:

If that person liked me more, I’d be happy

If I could have “*that thing*”, then I’m sure I’d be happy

If we had more \$\$\$, then I’d be happy

If I.....

The list goes on and on and on. People always seem to chase something new that they hope will make them happy (or at least happier than they are now).

Did you know that January is named after the mythological god Janus, who had 2 faces: One to look into the past and the other to look into the future? (I wonder what he would look like on Mount Rushmore!). Kinda weird, huh?

Back to Happy New Year.....

Someone once said that “For a lot of people, happiness depends on their happenings. If their happenings don’t happen to happen the way they want them to happen, they’re unhappy.”

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Alexander the Great got everything his way. He conquered everything there was to conquer ~ he had everything he set his mind out to have. And then, he sat down and cried! He cried because it wasn’t enough and it didn’t really satisfy him.

There is a time for everything.

There's a time for everything that is done on earth.

There is a time to be born. And there's a time to die.

There is a time to plant. And there's a time to pull up what is planted.

There is a time to kill. And there's a time to heal.

There is a time to tear down. And there's a time to build up.

There is a time to weep. And there's a time to laugh.

There is a time to be sad. And there's a time to dance.

There is a time to scatter stones. And there's a time to gather them.

There is a time to embrace someone. And there's a time not to embrace.

There is a time to search. And there's a time to stop searching.

There is a time to keep. And there's a time to throw away.

There is a time to tear. And there's a time to mend.

There is a time to be silent. And there's a time to speak.

There is a time to love. And there's a time to hate.

There is a time for war. And there's a time for peace.

So, happiness is NOT getting everything to happen just the way you want it to happen. Who is the 2nd wisest person that ever lived????

That would be Solomon. He wrote 3 Books in your Bible.

In one of those Books (Ecclesiastes), he wrote these words to the left of the page. Read what he said (by the way, he was one of those rare guys that had EVERYTHING!)

Here's a truth: **Happiness is not just getting all your happenings to happen the way you want them to happen.** The fact is, you cannot make that happen.

Here's a myth: **We are in charge!** One of the great myths about humanity is that we are in charge. Nothing could be further from the truth. We aren't in charge. We aren't in control.

When I read Ecclesiastes 3, there are parts of it that I like. I like peace and love and healing and embracing and laughter and celebrating and building up! I don't like war and hate and sickness and distancing and sadness and tearing down. But in this life there is the good and there is the bad and all of us experience both.

Ecclesiastes helps me to know that I am NOT in charge, I am not in control and I am limited. Which is really a good thing! Since I am limited, it makes me turn my focus to a God who is NOT LIMITED.

I am limited. He is limitless.

I am frail. He is all-powerful.

I have many questions. He knows everything.

I am weak. He is strong.

I make mistakes. He is always right.

Stuff happens in life that I don't like. But God is there to help and guide me through. The truth is, I don't want to be in charge. I don't want to be in control. I just want to trust the God who knows how to navigate me through life - every day.

Here's what makes for a better life: **Instead of trying to control life, choose instead to trust God in life.** Take a minute to write down what you think that last sentence means and give an example of that in your own life experience.

Big (& Good) Things Come Out of Small Decisions!



Ever seen Niagara Falls? Pretty amazing! A long, long time before I ever saw it for the first time, a boy named **Homan Walsh** went out to the river bank to fly a kite. Homan was taking part in a kite-flying contest, so he brought his best kite, and plenty of string.

He stood on the Canadian bank of the Niagara River, letting more and more of his kite string go out. His kite kept going higher and higher and higher. That kite stretched nearly 1,000 feet! When a stranger on the American side of the Niagara Gorge grabbed Homan's string, the crowd that had gathered shouted with a mighty roar. For the first time in history, people on opposite sides of this great gorge were holding onto the same string. And Homan won the top prize in the contest.

But there was much more than a prize at stake. The kite string was tied to a tree on the American shoreline, and a light cord tied to the Canadian end of the string. The cord was then pulled across the 800-foot span. A rope was tied to the cord, and pulled safely across. To the rope was attached a wire cable, and to the cable, a thicker cable attached. It was the beginning of an engineering victory over one of the greatest natural barriers that had separated Americans and Canadians.

Fifty-foot towers were built on each side of the river, and more cables became a part of the picture. In time, people rode across the river in buckets and then they walked on a newly constructed foot bridge. Less than a year after Homan's kite first flew

across the river, people were safely riding across the Niagara, on a marvelous suspension bridge that hung 220 feet over the rushing water. Eventually, there were several bridges that spanned the Niagara. Today, passengers cross the mighty river and never give thought to the fact that those bridges started with a boy and a kite string!

Great things usually start with small beginnings. The Bible says "**don't despise small things**" because great things often come from them! So much of the time, we don't realize how important our "*small decisions*" are and what can result from our "*small decisions*." What looks plain and ordinary to us sometimes holds hidden treasure.

For instance, what do you see in the pic to the right? Kind of looks like a dying tree with a hollow in the middle of it. That's what most people thought and they just drove right past it! But somebody was paying attention and noticed that there was something different about this particular tree and they stopped and intently watched.

And then others stopped and paid attention. What looked plain and ordinary to most folks was not ordinary at all! I snapped the picture when he stuck his head out of the large crack in the tree. Do you see what I see???





Inside that hollow was a beautiful black bear. I repeat: What looked ordinary was not ordinary at all.

Life is like that: There are soooooo many great things that come out of the ordinary. There are hidden treasures and experiences that God brings out of our ordinary-daily-run-of-the-mill decisions. That's why it's so important to make good decisions with ALL OF OUR DECISIONS.

CHOOSE TO
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Our decisions MATTER! What if today, you decided to make this important choice: ***I CHOOSE TO CHOOSE WELL***. The cool thing is that **we don't have to figure it all out on our own!** The Lord always helps us with choosing what is best, what is good, what is right, what is helpful and what helps others..... Check out these words from Psalm 25 ~

“Those who have reverence for the Lord will learn from Him the path they should follow”
(Psalm 25:12).

All Your Little Decisions

How many decisions do you think you've made today? Big decisions? Little Decisions? Did you get to choose your lunch? Did you decide to hit snooze on your alarm? Would you say you made 20 decisions today? More or less?

Believe it or not, scientists believe that the average person will make a decision once every 2 seconds, which adds up to 1800 per hour, and if you sleep 7 hours a night, that means you'll make roughly 30,000 decisions today! Wow! How do you even mentally process making 30,000 decisions in a day?

Well, the thing is we *don't* mentally process a lot of our decisions; we just make them. When you decide to keep scrolling on your phone for another second, you made a decision. When you decide to stop daydreaming and start listening to your teacher, you made a decision. When you decided on Lucky Charms instead of Cinnamon Toast Crunch, you made a decision. When you take another bite of food, it's because you decided to. Whenever you take another step down the hallway towards your next class, it's because you decided to.



Now, the more you think about it, there's a whole lot of stuff that you do on a daily basis without really thinking about it. This is totally OK! Nobody wants you to stop, take your time, and mentally process the in's and out's, the pro's and con's, and the ups and downs of every single thing you do. That's a lot of pressure on one person!

But there's a way for us to make good decisions even when it comes to the decisions that we don't really remember making!

In Matthew 12:36, Jesus tells us that we “will give account for every idle word,” that we speak.

So, just because we don't really think about most of our decisions, or the words that we say, doesn't mean they aren't important. But how can you affect these little decisions without driving yourself bananas? You can't possibly do that!

Let me ask you this: if you squeeze a LIME, what's gonna come out? How about a lemon? What comes out when you squeeze an orange?

Well, you would get, lime juice, lemon juice or orange juice, respectively.



Now, what happens when you squeeze a sponge? The correct answer would be, **whatever it's soaking in!**

You are a sponge! The things you soak in will define how you respond when life “squeezes” you.

What does that mean to “soak” in something? That could mean the music you listen to, the advice you choose to take, the accounts you follow on social media, or the TV shows you choose to watch. If you're soaking in sinful things, you're going to veer more towards sinful actions. But if you soak in Godly things, you're going to veer more towards righteousness and godliness!

Middle schooler, today choose to soak yourself in godliness!

Soaking In Godliness

Yesterday, our lesson focused on “soaking in godliness.” You can squeeze a sponge and greasy water will come out, or soapy water will come out, and it all depends on what the sponge has been soaking in.

Today, I want to talk more about how we can “soak” in godliness!

Philippians 4:8 says this: ***Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.***

Listen to [this song from Passion Worship and Chris Tomlin](#).

*I don't want to live outside Your ways, and I don't want to miss Your heart for me.
You're the only way.*

That is a great prayer that you can pray, to ask God to help you think about good things! Let's take a deeper look at the words from that verse in Philippians.

Whatever is True

1 Timothy 4:7 says this: *have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. But rather, train yourself for godliness.* There's a lot that can be said about ignoring rumors and gossip. You can't participate in gossip and lies while also training for godliness! Let these things go! Instead, think about things you know to be true.

Whatever is Noble

Nobility is like royalty. You expect someone of high status to have a good attitude and a good demeanor. You expect people of nobility to have good behavior and morals.

Don't think about the people who make a fool out of themselves on TikTok and Instagram; instead think about the people who do good!

Whatever is Right

Last week, someone on social media posted publicly about how he successfully exploited our country's tax system. Within hours, the government found out about him and he got in big trouble.

Sometimes there's things that you can do that will benefit yourself, and you may not think it's a huge deal, but that doesn't always mean it's right.

Instead of thinking about these things, think about how you can do the right thing, even when it may seem hard, or like it's not what you really want to do.

Whatever is Pure

Think about the sweetness and innocence of a baby. Babies don't want to hurt people or talk ugly. They don't even understand much. The simplest things to you and I are huge for babies! Think about the purity and innocence of a baby!

Think of what Romans 16:19 says: *be excellent at what is good, and be innocent of evil.*

Whatever is Lovely

Do you love football? Think about football! Do you love makeup? Think about makeup! It's not good enough to just *not* think about bad stuff, but you gotta think about the stuff that you like! Hobbies are a good thing! Whether that hobby is rock n roll music or fishing, is entirely up to you! Spend time on the things you enjoy!

Whatever is Admirable

When I was in Middle School, I had just finished cutting our grass. It was hot, and I came inside and got ready to take a shower. My mom stopped me and said, "look out the window, and guess what I'm gonna tell you to do." I looked and our neighbor, an elderly woman, was cutting her grass in the 95 degree weather. My mom wanted me to go and cut her lawn. So I did.

What's admirable is going out of your way to do good for others; helping the poor and the needy. Think about how you can do this for others!

Whatever is Praiseworthy

Do you have a favorite sports team? The city of Cleveland has a professional football, baseball, and basketball team. Neither of these teams had experienced a championship in 52 years, until 2016 when the Cleveland Cavaliers won the NBA finals over the Golden State Warriors. The entire city of Cleveland Ohio got to experience something they hadn't in over 50 years! How awesome that must've felt!

Anything that just makes you want to shout! These are the things that God wants occupying our minds!

What are some things you'd like to spend more time thinking about?