

The New Eyes for the New Year
Ephesians 4:22-24
January 6, 2019

As we begin the New Year, I wish have true happiness in life to all of us. The late entrepreneur and motivational speaker Jim Rohn (1930-2009) once said, “Happiness is not something you postpone for the future; it is something you design for the present.”¹ In other words, either you are happy now or you will never be happy at all. Happiness is something you experience now.

So what is happiness? How would you define it? Albert Schweitzer defined happiness as “Nothing more than good health and bad memory.” If he is correct, I certainly have half of it. I don’t know about the good health, but I definitely have the bad memory. Not being able to remember bad things that happened to you would keep you in a positive spirit, wouldn’t it? George Burns had a more practical definition of happiness. He said, “Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city.”²

Who do you think is happier, the people who have won the lottery or the people who have become paralyzed after an accident? A personal development consultant, speaker and bestselling author, Marc Reklau, discovered that it all depends on how happy they were before they won the lottery or had the accident.

“Yes, the lottery winners were very happy, but not for very long,” according to Reklau. “After six months, the lottery winners went back to their previous levels of happiness.”

On the other hand, “the accident victims were sad” initially and quite understandably, “but very surprisingly, after six months, they [also] went back to their previous levels of happiness.” Think about that for a moment. Six months later both groups--those who had won the lottery and those who had become paralyzed--had returned to their previous state of happiness. I don’t know what that says to you, but it says to me that happiness has little to do with circumstances. Our circumstances don’t determine how satisfied we are with our lives.

The same thing happens in career development. The researchers asked a group of college professors how happy they would be if they got tenure. For a college professor tenure means that they are given a permanent position. These

¹ <https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/happiness>

² Ibid.

professors answered that, if they got tenure, they would be very happy for the rest of their lives.

The same professors were asked how unhappy they would be if they did not get tenure. They answered, they would be “very unhappy for a very long time.”

Again, when researchers went back to check on them six months later, every one of those professors had gone back to their previous level of happiness whether they received tenure or not. If they were happy before, they were happy six months later. If they were unhappy before, they were unhappy six months later regardless of their tenure status.³

We know for a fact that many people are unhappy with their lives, their relationships, and with themselves. In 2017, about 1.3 million people attempted suicide and 47,173 succeeded. That means an average of 130 killed themselves every day in the United States. Every day well over 3,500 people try to end their lives.⁴ As sad as it is, there are many people who are unhappy with their own selves and lives.

Happiness does not depend on what you have. Rather it depends on how you perceive your own life and how you see what you have.

Human beings are very visual. We tend to process visuals faster than text because they stimulate our imagination and are easy to comprehend. Actually, much of the information we receive daily comes through images and videos: television, internet, video presentations, pictures, infographics, and so on.

According to the research done by 3M Corporation, 90% of the transmitted information in our human brain is visual. This research shows that we process visual images 60,000 times faster than text. Images are much easier to understand and remember than texts.

In the 1980's Dr. Richard Felder, a chemical engineering professor at North Carolina State University did a study on how his engineering students learn. He discovered that 65% of the engineering students are visual learners. After this discovery, many other studies have been conducted on the subject of learning styles using non-engineering students. The subsequent studies showed that even a higher percentage of the general public learn visually. Many studies have

³ Marc Reklau, *Destination Happiness: 12 Simple Principles That Will Change Your Life* (Change Your Habits, Change Your Life, Book 3; Kindle Edition).

⁴ <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics/>.

estimated that as high as 80% of the general population learn visually.⁵ What we see is what we learn. And how we see determines our mood.

Even our language shows that our understanding comes from how we see. For example, when we share our own opinion, we often use one of the following expressions: “From my perspective”, “the way I see it”, “from my point of view”, “from where I stand, it appears”, or “my views is”, etc. When we talk about our understanding, we use the expression of seeing things. In other words, how we see things determines our opinion and perspective. And often “how we see” determines our mood.

How we perceive our lives and our situations often determine how happy we will be.

In 2008, a young Australian mother of three named Hailey Bartholomew was feeling really down. She had an envious life--including beautiful kids and a loving husband. She was comfortable financially, and her health was very good, but she was not happy at all. There was no apparent reason why she should not be happy, but she was not happy. She felt disappointed with her life. She did not know why. It had been like that for a while and she was tired of it.

She finally decided to do something about her condition. She consulted with a nun who did life-coaching and counseling. The nun told her that the secret to happiness was all in reflection and gratitude. And she asked Hailey to write down what she was grateful for every night. So, she began to keep a gratitude journal, the one that I talked about before and it started to make a huge difference in her life. But she didn't stop there. She did something more.

Hailey started a project she called “365grateful.” What she did is that she took pictures of the things which made her feel grateful every day. As she looked at those pictures, she remembered exactly why she took those pictures and how the pictures made her feel. For those of you who have difficulty in keeping gratitude journal this might be something you may consider doing. It is easier to take a picture than sit down and write all the details of event and your feelings.

It didn't take long for Hailey to really change her outlook on life. The pictures she took really helped her. For example, before she started the journal or taking pictures, she had convinced herself that her husband was not very romantic. He did not have flowery words to make her feel good or bring her surprise

⁵ <https://www.imagethink.net/true-or-falsevisuals-superior-medium/>

romantic gifts. He had hardly ever done that. But this view changed the day when she took photographs of him serving dinner. For the first time since they got married, Hailey noticed that her husband served her the largest piece of pie. It was his gentle way of showing her his affection. She didn't realize that before.

And then there were her kids. The joy and happiness she saw on their faces while they played made her grateful that she was a mother. Before all of these, she thought of mothering as boring and mundane duty. But now, as she took photos of her children playing and showing her affection, she discovered how blessed she was to be their mother. As she began to see things differently, her heart was changed, and her outlook in life was transformed. She began to celebrate her life.⁶

Gilbert. K. Chesterton is right when he wrote: "The test of all happiness is gratitude." Gratitude comes when you change your views and perspectives in life.

May the new year give you a new set of eyes so that you may see things with a grateful attitude!

⁶ Details derived from 365grateful.com and a TED talk by Hailey Bartholomew.