

Happiness in the New Year

Dan Nelson – pastor

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

With all of the excitement in the air surrounding the start of the New Year; confetti still on the ground, ringing of fireworks lingering in our ears, and cheerful greetings from friends wishing happiness upon us in 2008, one might expect certain greatness in this upcoming year. Dick Clark has been replaced by Anderson Cooper to bring music and memories into homes across America right up until the midnight countdown. While parties packed with people, wearing funny hats, making annoying sounds from contraptions that only find buyers this time of year is standard fare for this holiday tradition, so is optimism toward peace and prosperity in the next annum. But the problem is that it isn't working.

Seemingly we need more than fairy dust and happy thoughts to make us fly. It is only Jan. 4 and the political pundits are back slinging mud on anyone's wall that it might stick to. The financial forecasters are painting a picture that is bleak. Wall Street is off to a slow start and retail sales didn't meet expectations over Christmas. We are told to expect record foreclosures in 2008 as real estate continues to slump. The headlines tell us that bad guys didn't take a Christmas break and some people got hurt. There were drunk drivers on the road again already this year. Drugs remain epidemic on school campuses. The health care crisis and the writers' strike both continue. Let's not forget there is a war going on. And if that isn't enough, it's raining outside. How in the world are you supposed to have a Happy New Year?

A lot of people have ideas for you on this. How about losing some weight? There is a myriad of advertising to encourage this. We both could drop a few pounds and not waste away but we are talking about "happiness" in this New Year. Will losing weight make you happy? There are introductory specials going on right now with just about every gym. You could sign up for one of those membership diet programs. The only problem is that you then have to eat the food they want you to. I know these programs really work for many people. What I am wondering is if this is the road to happiness for you?

How about a new hobby? You could take up model building or sport fishing, sky diving or steamboat racing, knitting or bird watching, brass polishing or shoelace tying; the list of possibilities is endless. So which one might make you happy? What new hobby will help you fulfill the wish that so many have for you to have a "Happy New Year"?

Maybe you don't need a new hobby and the weight you are about to lose is merely for good health. There are numerous directions we could go and a plethora of places we could look to fulfill this wonderful wish for you. You could pour yourself into your work. You might buy something really big like a super huge mansion on wheels that converts into an ocean-cruising yacht at the push of a really expensive button. You could take a vacation that beats all other vacations, by hitting every time zone that has a beach and a palm tree, cruise every ocean, and return in one of those high-altitude flights that include one orbit around the moon. You could forget all of that and invest in an electronic home theater extravaganza for your living room that would make the Century 16 in Ventura look like your great-grandpa's hi-fi AM antique. What do you think? Would any of these be your key to happiness this year?

My silly hyperbole and exaggeration is

actually going somewhere. I am getting to a point here. Most people confuse what happiness actually is because we have grown to settle for something far less than what is offered. Disappointments from early on have conditioned us to set the bar really low when it comes to goal setting and expectations for life. The fact is that most people have no idea how to achieve genuine happiness because it seems more of an illusion than life reality. So when they wish you a Happy New Year, they usually mean: "I hope you get whatever it is that makes you happy this year." So what is it that would make you happy this year?

Let me slow down for a moment and ask you to reflect upon a few thoughts.

If you know the reality of God and that he desires a deep spiritual connection with you, do you think he might know what would bring genuine happiness into your life? If God knows this, do you think he would love you enough to want to make this happiness available to you? If God wanted to do something like this, do you believe him to be intelligent enough and capable enough to provide a means to communicate this to you? If God did communicate his ways to you, would you be interested in pouring yourself into this year? I challenge you to do this very thing.

If you haven't been jaded due to past failures, chances are you've got your list of resolutions and fresh starts. Good! So do I. But there are some things that should be at the top of the list and others that should be near the bottom. When conflicts arise, we must be clear which takes precedent over the other. Jesus made it clear how to prioritize. Put spiritual, heavenly, godly things first. Prayer, worship, Scripture reading, and helping people should be at the top. Why not make this your key to happiness? Jesus had a lot to say about to correlation of holiness and happiness. A lot of people are starting off 2008 with a heart to press into first things. This includes cracking open the Bible every morning. How about you? Let's do it together. Let's give every well-wisher that told us "Happy New Year" a better opportunity to have their wish come true. By resolving to follow Jesus, we are pursuing something more purposeful than mere fun or esteem; a life of consequence and Meaning, our best hope for a Happy New Year.

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



P.O. Box 1443
Ojai, CA 93024
(805) 640-9498
www.calvaryojai.org

Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:45am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View