



Glendive/Wibaux United Methodist Church
January 5, 2020

1 Peter 1:13-25 Colossians 3:1-4 Luke 9:18-27

Title: A Different Take on New Year's Resolution

Over the weekend I read a New York Times article that spoke to me spiritually. It was advice on simple ways to be a little kinder to ourselves in 2020. This time of year, brings out a lot of these messages and programs and books. Some I read and most I ignore. But these eight simple things also spoke to my spiritual self.

Let us pray: Eternal One, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you and may the hearers and readers find a moment of reflection. Amen.

This article was written by Mr. Tim Herrera who writes smarter living articles for the New York Times. He also co-edited the Smarter Living book. Often the advice we get comes in the form of doing more as a way to improve or simplify - more healthy eating and more exercise, more getting rid of stuff, work harder on relationships, do more to keep our climate healthy, etc. All these are good, but the emphasis can sound like just adding more to an already busy or overwhelmed life.

Mr. Hererra uses “more” too, but in different ways.

Take more time for your self

Take time to do nothing at all.

Cultivate more casual, low stakes friendships.

Learn to enjoy things when they're good.

Lean into your "guilty" pleasures.

Learn to accept a compliment-even if it's from yourself.

Embrace the unexpected joy of repeat experiences.

Tune your regrets into self-improvement.

Take more time for yourself is something I've encouraged folks to do for a long time. I am guilty of not doing it, I know. The great commandment to love God with all your heart and soul and mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves, came to mind. We must take time for ourselves; to revitalize, reenergize, and in prayer. Self-care provides you renewed strength and creativity and opens your heart to focus on what's important in life.

We should ask ourselves each night, what have I done for myself today? This isn't selfish. But we move away from completing our 'to do' list mentality. What did you do to feed your soul in the past 24-hours?

Take time to do nothing at all. I wonder if, when Christ wandered off into the wilderness, he really hoped for some serious solitude. Did he know the devil would be there to tempt him throughout his retreat? That can't have been very restful.

Being busy is not the same as being productive, something encouraged in our American and western cultures. Busyness is unfortunately also equated with personal importance or status. Have you been guilty of being too busy for God? Doing nothing at all is the perfect time to spend time with Him.

Cultivate more casual, low-stakes friendships. I liked this one. According to Herrera's article, studies have found that these low-stakes ties help us feel more into the community,

increase our overall network of people and improve our personal sense of belonging to community. A 2014 study revealed that the more so-called ‘weak ties’ a person has through groups (classes, book clubs, coffee klatches, etc., they happier they feel. This is affirmed by the AARP in their research on healthy living.

Think of all the groups you are with that have these low-stakes friendships. Aren’t these opportunities to also share the good news of Jesus Christ? You already know them, being low risk situations, what have you got to lose by sharing God with them.

Learn to enjoy things when they’re good. I have a challenge with this, as a bit of a worrier or someone anxious about what’s around the corner of life. I know this can take the joy out of the everyday. And it may be the same for some of you. God tells us to lay everything at his feet, so why do we worry? And all the time spent worrying hasn’t changed the outcomes, has it?

Living in the moment doesn’t mean you don’t need to plan and prepare within reason and resources, but you can’t live in the worry either. We haven’t been promised a life without suffering or hard times so why not enjoy the good times. Do you know where to find your joy every day?

Live into your “guilty” pleasures. I know we had a lot of guilty pleasures last Sunday with our leftovers potluck! Our guilty pleasures aren’t just about food though. I’m not talking about the illegal or sinful guilty pleasures. But, read the Amish romance book, watch the sappy movie, play solitaire for an hour or watch puppies and babies’ videos on your phone.

These mindless times where thinking and deep feeling aren’t front and center provide us rest and mental downtime. In the past few weeks, I have managed to spend several days just being creative with paper crafts. It may not be a guilty pleasure but it’s time away from other busyness and responsibilities and thinking about sermons and church administration.

Learn to accept compliments, whatever their source. I expect most of us give compliments when we see something that needs to be remarked on. Just this week I received

several compliments about the Christmas Eve service, one even came via e-mail from a visitor from another state. Of course, I said thank-you but then immediately thought, “Hey I’m just doing what I’m supposed to do.”

We are more ready to give than to receive. This human trait is what keeps us from understanding and accepting the ultimate compliment that we are loved by the Creator whatever we do and whatever we say. His love, mercy and forgiveness are freely given, if we just accept them in the Holy Spirit way they are intended. Will you accept God’s freely given compliment which is your very life?

Embrace the unexpected joy of repeat experiences. According to Herrera, novelty is overrated, and we can enjoy something even more and get more out of it a second time around. Have you read the Bible only once? Do you only come to worship once a year?

How many times do we need to experience Paris before we feel like we’ve had the real experience? Certainly, more than once. How many sermons of Epiphany do you need to hear before you really can honestly express that we understand it as the first public appearance as one commentator called it, the first public appearance of the Christ child to the world through the Magi. We need to see familiar events and read familiar stories with new eyes and hearts. We change and our perspectives change, so too our experiences with Bible stories. And another reason to use more than one translation of the scriptures.

Turn your regrets into self-improvement. Again, according to Herrera’s article, researchers found that when people find a silver lining in their regret, they are able think more clearly. Philippians 3:13 *“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Pressing on through the regret helps us to live into God’s will for us. Atone for something you regret. Ask forgiveness and move on. Can you do that even today?

I encourage you to lighten up on yourselves this year. Still, I don't want you to lighten up on your unique call to serve God or to be the best servant you can. And, I pray we may all have a wonderful, even in hard times; healthy, even when we're ill or diseased; loving, even when we're with folks who can be hard to love; and fruitful New Year as we continue to make disciples of Jesus Christ to transform the world through our open hearts, open minds and open doors.

Amen and Selah

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/24/smarter-living/8-ways-to-be-kinder-to-yourself-in-2020.html>