

Today Can Be a Masterpiece

“This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Psalm 118:24

People create success in their lives by focusing on today. It may sound trite, but today is the only time you have. It’s too late for yesterday. Yesterday ended last night. You can’t depend on tomorrow—you don’t know what tomorrow holds. That’s why today matters.

“Now listen, you who say, ‘Tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, we ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or do that.’ As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.”

James 4:13-17

The Fact Is...

- We exaggerate yesterday.
- We overestimate tomorrow.
- We underestimate today.

How Does Today Impact Tomorrow’s Success?

The way you choose to invest your time today directly affects your future.

Consider this: you will become what you are becoming right now. If you take a faulty approach to today with a faulty view of success, you won’t capitalize on today’s potential. Let’s examine some common misconceptions regarding success.

Common Misconceptions and Reactions:

1. We believe success is _____—so we criticize it.

Often, people become disillusioned because they feel life should be easier than it is. This is a faulty assumption. Life is difficult. The moment success doesn’t come quickly, many become negative and say, “I didn’t want it anyway!” or “I knew I couldn’t achieve it from the beginning.”

2. We believe success is _____—so we search for it.

Sometimes people approach success as if it were a magic formula. All they have to do is discover the formula, and they’ll arrive at their desired destination. To them, success is a mystery that requires a hunt.

3. We believe success comes from _____—so we hope for it.

Many times, we believe success comes from simply being in the right place at the right time. It isn’t talent or hard work, we say, it is an accident of chance. The truth is that luck alone won’t help us. It is a myth.

4. We believe success comes from _____—so we work for it.

While hard work usually does accompany success, it is one-dimensional. Many people who work hard don’t see success. Some work hard and neglect important relationships and other higher priorities.

5. We believe success comes from _____—so we wait for it.

Those who believe this have a motto: “If only...” If only my boss would give me a chance; if only my wife would...if only my church would... If all we do is wait for an opportunity, we won’t be ready when it comes.

6. We believe success comes from _____—so we leverage resources.

Some people associate success with power. They pursue their goals at any expense. They push ahead and may even hurt others in the process, all in the name of succeeding. But force never produces long-term fruit.

7. We believe success comes from _____—so we network for it.

These people believe success does not come from what you know but from who you know. They build relationships hoping to manipulate their way into fame or fortune, but connections alone won't furnish success.

8. We believe success comes from _____—so we strive for it.

Every profession has their own form of recognition. Some strive to be recognized by their peers; their motive is to be noticed and affirmed, but these are usually unhealthy motives that put us in a performance trap.

9. We believe success is an _____—so we schedule it.

While events are important, they cannot provide success. Events are good for inspiration and challenge, but real sustainable change doesn't happen in a moment. It comes from a growth process that follows an event. This is the Law of Process: Development doesn't happen in a day, but is a daily process. Success comes from many private, unglamorous disciplined days.

Our Days Are Short

There have been only two men in history for whom God allowed the "sun to stand still" so He could prolong their day. God prolonged the day for Joshua to win a battle (Joshua 10), and for King Hezekiah to fulfill his dream (Isaiah 38). Most of us don't get this luxury. We must make the most of the days we have, focusing on today. Moses wrote: *"Teach us to number our days..."* (Psalm 90:12). We all have been given a mission to fulfill with our lives. What are you doing about yours today?

Discussion:

- What has been your view of success in the past?
- What are you pursuing right now that you believe will foster your success?

Daniel: A Man Who Demonstrated That Today Matters

Daniel was one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament. He lived during the Babylonian captivity—one of the most difficult periods of Israel's history. Somehow he knew success would come from choosing well early in life. He continued to live by those decisions when it wasn't easy or glamorous. He began good habits as a young man and never turned back. Here are some of the lessons we learn from Daniel:

*"Daniel made up his mind...so he sought permission from the commander...
And God granted favor to Daniel..." (Daniel 1:8-9)*

1. Effective people make right decisions _____, and then manage them daily.

Daniel made up his mind he wouldn't compromise his values even though the king offered him great food and comfort. He made some right choices early in his life and managed those decisions for the rest of his life.

2. Making right choices may go against the trends of popular _____.

Daniel took a stand in the face of what everyone else was doing. His decision seemed like it would put him at a disadvantage with his peers; however, he stuck with it, and his convictions were proven to be right.

3. The secret to your success is determined by your daily _____.

Daniel began living by his values as a young man. He may have begun as a child. Every day he practiced certain decisions he made, such as praying three times a day. He continued doing this even when he did so in civil disobedience. He knew what he stood for and what he wouldn't stand for.

4. When opportunity arises, it is too late to _____ for it.

Daniel didn't wait until he had become a famous prophet to begin practicing important decisions. He was preparing for his future when no one was watching. Because his spiritual life was in great shape, he was ready when the king needed him to interpret a dream or provide some wisdom. He was open to scrutiny after just ten days in Babylon.

5. You never change your life until you change something you do _____.

You will become what you are becoming right now. Great accomplishments are the result of a daily routine that compounds over time. Life change happens when habits change, and habits change when you change what you do in your daily agenda.

6. Decisions help us _____. Discipline helps us _____.

Daniel made right decisions early on, which helped him begin in the right direction. However, it was his daily discipline that allowed him to follow through on those decisions. The decision is an event. The discipline is a process. Decisions help you to start well. Discipline helps you to finish well.

Discussion:

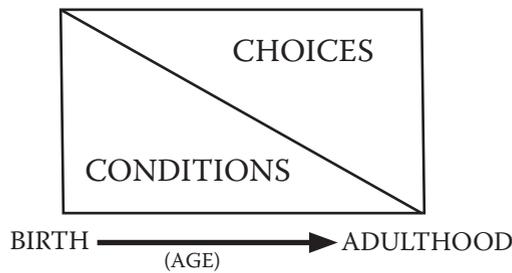
- Consider the life and leadership of Daniel. What impresses you most about him?
- Which of the lessons above are most challenging to you?

Focus On These Twelve Big Decisions

You begin to build a better life by determining to make good decisions, but that alone is not enough. You need to know WHAT decisions to make. We believe there are twelve important areas to focus on in your life:

1. **Attitude: Choose and display the right attitudes daily.**
2. **Priorities: Determine and act on important priorities daily.**
3. **Health: Know and follow healthy guidelines daily.**
4. **Family: Communicate with and care for my family daily.**
5. **Thinking: Practice and develop good thinking daily.**
6. **Commitment: Make and keep proper commitments daily.**
7. **Finances: Earn and properly manage money daily.**
8. **Faith: Deepen and live out my faith daily.**
9. **Relationships: Initiate and invest in solid relationships daily.**
10. **Generosity: Plan for and model generosity daily.**
11. **Values: Embrace and practice good values daily.**
12. **Growth: Seek and experience improvements daily.**

Discussion: In which of these twelve are you the strongest? Where are you the weakest?



This simple diagram reveals how success really happens from God’s point of view. As adults, it isn’t about good or bad circumstances around us. We cannot blame bad situations for our consistent failure to become who God wants us to become.

As you can see, the left side of the diagram represents our early life. When we were born, the conditions and circumstances around us dictated what happened and when it happened. We were helpless as babies. However, as we grow into adulthood, the chief factor God holds us responsible for are our choices, not our circumstances.

Making the Twelve Big Decisions a Reality in Your Life

1. Review the decisions and discover which ones you have already made.
2. Identify the decisions you still must make.
3. Choose one of those decisions and determine to make it this week.
4. Learn the disciplines that go with each decision. (We will do this together throughout the course of this notebook.)
5. Repeat the process until you’ve mastered each of the daily dozen.

Assessment and Application

Assessment:

Write out your top three strengths and weaknesses from the list of twelve decisions. Which are you doing well in and where do you need the most improvement?

Application:

Now focus on one of them and try the 5 steps previously listed about how to make them a reality in your life.