

Today, on this first Sunday of a new year with starting a new three-part series called “Small things, big difference”. This is the time of year when traditionally we make our resolutions and very often by this time in the year, we’ve broken them. There’s something psychological about this time, being a good time to start again. Of course we can start to make changes at any time of the year but there is something hopeful about a new year.

When I look in the lives of people who seem to have everything organised and sorted it can be a bit intimidating. I often wonder what major changes I would need to make in order to be like that – you know the thing: how often would I have to go to the gym to look like that; how many hours would I have to spend learning the bible to know it as well as her. If that’s how you feel then I have some good news this morning - the key thought for this series is that it is **often small things that nobody sees that bring the big things that everyone wants.**

First thing I want to do is build a foundation and look at Zechariah chapter 4:6-10 *He said, “This is the message from the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Your help will not come from your own strength and power. No, your help will come from my Spirit.’ This is what the Lord All-Powerful says. 7 That tall mountain will be like a flat place for Zerubbabel. He will build the Temple, and when the most important stone is put in place, the people will shout, ‘Beautiful! Beautiful!’”*

8 The Lord’s message to me also said, 9 “Zerubbabel will lay the foundations for my Temple, and he will finish building it. Then you will know that the Lord All-Powerful sent me to you people. 10 People will not be ashamed of the small beginnings, and they will be very happy when they see Zerubbabel with the plumb line, measuring and checking the finished building.

The context of this is that God’s people were in captivity and the Temple had been destroyed. In the year 537 BC Zerubbabel led a remnant of people back to Israel in the hope of re-establishing the kingdom. In chapter 4 the Lord tells Zerubbabel that he will rebuild the Temple but it was not going to be built in a way that he would get credit for, but because God’s spirit was in the building of it. You see, we can try to do things, including change, using our own strength and we may even be reasonably successful. You can try your best to make changes in your life but when you tap into the Spirit of God there is a strength beyond what you can muster up on your own. Some of us have tried for years to change something, or to improve something, but we’ve not been able to do it. It may be we think it’s too hard; or will take too much time; maybe were trying to change the wrong thing.

Verse 10 asks who will despise the day of small things, because the Lord rejoices to see the work begin. You have to start somewhere. Sometimes we look at the great incidents in the lives of Bible characters and think we couldn’t be like them.

- David was a man after God’s heart, and he killed Goliath. What we forget is that he had been faithful in tending the sheep for years, protecting them from animals and learning to be faithful in small things.

- Ruth got the handsome husband that she wanted, but it was because she had been faithful to Naomi, which she didn't need to be and it would have been easier not to be. God's blessing came through her faithfulness.
- We desire Daniel's unwavering faith in the face of the lions, but we're not so keen to stop what we're doing three times every day to seek God in prayer. What do you think your life might look like if you had devoted three half hour slots for prayer every day for the last 20 years.

It's the little things that no one sees that result in the big things that everyone wants. Later today and in the next two weeks we're going to focus on three important areas - our thoughts, our words, and our habits. These are three things that if we give them to God and ask for his help to change us I believe we will see significant improvements in our walk with God and each other.

So, just a reminder, that *it's the little things that no one sees that result in the big things that everyone wants*. Over these next three weeks we're going to look at the fact that our thoughts, words and actions might seem small but are actually very important. *Our thoughts influence our words which influence our actions which influence our habits and end up with the potential to create a destiny.*

Today I want to talk about our thoughts because they are so important in determining who we become. In Proverbs 23, Solomon says, "*As a person thinks in his heart, so he is.*" Essentially he's saying that your life will always move in the direction of your strongest thoughts, and they are the ones you spend most time on.

In other words, if you think you can't, you probably won't.
 If you think your life is going to be awful, it probably will be awful.
 If you think you don't have anything to offer, you probably won't make a difference.
 On the other hand, if you think you can, you probably will.
 If you believe there are opportunities out there to serve God, you will see and take those opportunities.
 If you believe that God is for you and with you, you will experience power and his presence.
 Our thoughts matter - *as a person thinks in his heart, so he becomes.*

I want you to think about how you think and I'm going to show you a little chart that has some opposites.

THOUGHT AUDIT

Worried	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Peaceful
Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Positive
Worldly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Eternal

So, for the first one, are most of your thoughts more focused on worry or are they peaceful? If you worry about everything, then you would be one but, if you're really secure in the promises of God and are unperturbed even if something bad happens then you would be a ten.

And then on the second row - some people have the spiritual gift of negativity. You can pick out the mistakes and the negatives even before the conversation is finished and you deal quite a lot in the "if only". Others believe the best in people; rejoice in what God is doing, even if it's somewhere else; and, like to encourage others. Where would you be?

And you know the score was the last one - do you spend more time thinking about what kind of car you have, the clothes you wear, what people are going to think about you - not bad things, just thinking about more worldly than eternal things. Or, do you often think about how to make a difference for God?

If you did not circle a 10, 10, and 10 then this message is for you. If it's true that we move in the direction of our thoughts, and you are consumed with worldly, worried and negative thoughts, then that's the direction in which you're moving. If we are honest, most of us wouldn't put a 10 at all because our culture, our world, our friends, what we see all drives us towards the wrong side of that scale. Paul writing to the Christians in Rome says this, "*Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.*"

Don't be like them – let God change your thinking: their thinking is wrong – real transformation comes through faith when we accept Christ as our Saviour – our status is changed because we become children of God. Longer term change starts with our thinking!

But, I hear you ask, how can I change my thoughts? Well, I have two things to help with that.

Number 1 – We're going to **learn how to capture destructive thoughts.**

2 Cor 10:3-5 "*The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*" Paul says that although we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world's does. In other words, the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. We have supernatural weapons available to us. Paul says our weapons have the power to demolish strongholds. The Greek word translated as power is 'dunamis' from which we get the word dynamite. The word translated as stronghold means a prisoner locked up by deception. So we fight with the explosive power of God which sets people free.

Our spiritual enemy the devil is called the father of lies and what he tries to do is convince us of things that are not true, so that we build our life on a lie, rather than on

the truth. Jesus said, “the truth will set you free”. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul says, *“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.”* The explosive power of God demolishes the stronghold! The father of lies sets himself up against God but he is not invincible. Paul continues, *“and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”* So what does that mean? It means that when we think, “I can’t make a difference”, or “I’m useless”, or “I can’t beat this” – the lie will be different for each of us because we are all different. I have told you this before but it illustrates the point – I remember one evening at CLAN looking around at all these people praying and worshipping and dancing: people speaking in tongues and I sat there thinking, “Where’s mine God? Why am I left out? I want some of that”. I had convinced myself that there was something wrong with me and God was ignoring me. At the end of each session there was an invitation for prayer and at the start

We are expected to take those thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ. The truth is we have all messed up but God works in all things to bring good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. We overcome by the blood of the lamb and because he is in us is greater than the one that is in the world.

So, number 1 we need to learn to capture destructive thoughts. And number 2 - having captured the wrong thoughts we need to fix our thoughts on spiritual things, to focus on the eternal. Writing from a prison cell Paul 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. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”*

Think about things that are excellent or praiseworthy and the God of peace will be with you –amazing!

What a difference it would make to all of our lives if we stopped believing the lies of the evil one, and embraced the truth of God. When you know the truth, the truth will set you free. So we need to fix our mind on spiritual things. And that’s where we get back to the little things that no one sees that result in the big things that everyone wants. If you look for spiritual things, you’ll find spiritual things. Take small steps: decide to read one chapter of the Bible a day and take a few moments to ask God to help you to understand it and what he wants you to learn from it. Pray every day, even if it’s only two minutes. Keep it simple. Pray something like this:

God, thank you for this day. I know it's a gift from you. Use me wherever you want. Help me to be sensitive to Your Spirit. God, let me see where you're working. Guide my words, guard my thoughts, help my actions to bring glory to you. God, I give you permission to interrupt me all through the day. Help me to see where you're working and I will join you. Amen

If you pray something like that every day I will absolutely without reservation or hesitation guarantee that you will see God at work. Instead of your usual music, put on some Christian music to listen to a sermon - it's about renewing your mind. You become more sensitive to the things of God, because as a person thinks, so he becomes. Decide to trash the lies and focus on the life-giving truth of God. Decide to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. Fix your thoughts on things that are pure and lovely and admirable – and the peace of God will go with you. Try it each day this week and see what happens.