

Good morning, everyone. Today, I'd like to share with you all just one story, but hopefully, that one story is enough to make you a happier person.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Jenson, also known as Jenson the juggler. I have never been the most social or outgoing person - actually, all of my friends are surprised at the fact that I'm giving a chapel talk today. Anyway, I remember freshman year being kind of a difficult time for me, and the start of my freshman year was particularly hectic and scary, especially because a friend of mine fell down from the top bunk on literally the first day of school.

Apart from that accident, freshmen year was hectic for me mainly because of social pressures. In fact, most other freshmen began to scale the popularity ladder before school even started. Soon, there were a number of popular freshmen out there, and I... was not one of them. I noticed how others would behave nicely around them, how people would laugh at their jokes and how girls would smile at them to get their approval. I had always envied the popular kids because I wanted to become one of them.

Despite having some trouble climbing a real ladder, Tyson was very good at scaling the popularity ladder. So for a long time, I hung out with Tyson and his friends to get their approval and hopefully force my way into their friend group. Given that I'm a natural introvert, I would just blend into the background kind of like a chameleon while my friends tell their jokes and got all the attention. For a time, that has really bothered me, and I was determined to fix that issue.

Fortunately, I was a fairly-talented juggler at the time and when I learned that there would be a talent show at the end of the year, I got really excited. I was secretly hoping that the talent show would give me the recognition that I was so desperately craving at the time. As the

year progressed, I started to spend more and more time in my room preparing for that big moment and perfecting my juggling tricks instead of hanging out with the popular kids.

So when the auditions came, I was more prepared than most other performers. When I walked into the auditions, most people had no idea who I was. When I walked out of the auditions, everyone was in awe. More importantly, I felt like they respected me, even the upper-formers.

During the actual performance, I was more nervous than I expected myself to be because after all, it was the first time that I had performed in front of such a large crowd. At the start of my act, I was stiff as a board and made some pretty dumb errors. Luckily, the audience was very supportive and clapped in beats to set the tempo for me. As a result, my confidence grew, and I actually pulled off some pretty complex and impressive-looking tricks. When the act was over, the entire audience gave out a standing ovation. It was a moment that I will never forget. For the first time in my life, I felt like I was the star; I felt like I was the one who was getting all the attention and I was really satisfied with that.

In the next few days, everyone that I knew from the school and even people that I had never met came to congratulate me, telling me how great my performance was. At this point, I thought that I was truly happy; I thought that I had everything that I wanted. I remember that each person who shook my hand or each girl who smiled at me was like a drop of dopamine. In other words, I was addicted to this external validation that I was getting all of a sudden.

However, this status only really lasted until the end of freshman year. The next year, everything kind of just went back to normal - people would stop saying “hi” to me - and I just kind of faded. Before I knew it, I was pretty much back to where I was before, but this time, I

was even more unhappy because all of these external validations that I once enjoyed vanished so rapidly.

At this point, you might be wondering - why should I care about this? And you have every right to wonder about that. Am I trying to brag about how impressive my juggling skills are? Actually, that is not at all what I'm getting at.

You see ...my biggest problem was that I was relying on other people to dictate my own happiness. I was unhappy at the start of freshman year because not that many people knew me. I was very happy right after the talent show because I turned into a star almost overnight and a lot of people respected me. I was unhappy again the next year because most people had forgotten me by that point.

Never had I considered that the reason I was unhappy was from something within me - something that I have control of. I had always assumed that my unhappiness stemmed from me failing to be a part of the popular kid friend group, which ironically was true because popularity was all I cared about. Maybe... I could be happy even if nobody knew I can juggle a single ball; maybe I could live a fulfilling life without all of these external validations and recognition from my peers.

I think it's critical for all of us to realize that while we can pursue external things for happiness, we must remember that the responsibility to control our emotions and happiness lies in our own hands. I have known people who spend their entire lives pursuing wealth or power, and they'll never be satisfied because there's always somebody who has more money or power than they have.

After listening to Dean Kelderman's speech and reflecting on my own for many nights, I have come to the conclusion that true happiness comes from gratitude - being thankful for what

we're given. Too many people take everything for granted, and they're unhappy because they can't see all these things that are given to them. They can only see the things that they don't have. Personally, I'm grateful for a loving family, all my friends at Kent and my talent in juggling. What about you? Thank you.