

Happiness

Prayer

This morning, I want to ask you a question... Are you happy? Jesus wants us to live life abundantly. He wants you to be happy, so... here we are today talking about some practical principles to see real joy in your life.

For that matter, is happiness important? Where do we find happiness?

In answer to the question, "Where is happiness?" Clarence Macartney said, "It's not found in pleasure--Lord Byron lived such a life if anyone did. He wrote, "The worm, the canker, and the grief are mine alone."

Happiness is not found in money--Jay Gould, the American millionaire, had plenty of that. When dying, he said, "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth."

It's not found in position and fame--Lord Beaconsfield enjoyed more than his share of both. He wrote, "Youth is a mistake, manhood a struggle, and old age a regret."

It's not found in military glory--Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept in his tent because, he said, "There are no more worlds to conquer.""

One of the most significant issues I have found in counselling couples on their relationships is that there is an expectation on the other person in the relationship to make them happy.

Here is a hard learned tip folks... you need to own your happiness. If you are not happy inside yourself, how can you ever expect anyone else to make you happy?

Each one of us needs to learn to be happy within ourselves and not expect our spouses, our kids or our toys to make us happy...

So... My first point is:

You need to own your own happiness because happiness is a choice and a matter of faith and perspective.

It is really hard to be unhappy if:

- You are fully trusting God in your situations.
- You are disciplining yourself to look at positives instead of the negatives of any situation.

- When you make others happiness a priority in your life.

What is that crazy pastor saying: He just said: I need to find happiness in myself. What is this about others happiness affecting my happiness?

Try one or more of these and try it out for yourself...

- Look into the face of a baby and open your heart to the wonder of life
- Give somebody something they need with no strings attached
- Take time during your day to thank God for all that you have. Intentionally adopt a thankful attitude.
- Pray and give your worries and problems to God and believe that he will do something about them
- Do something kind for someone but don't tell anyone about it, let it be between you and God

The simple fact is... If you are not happy inside yourself and your happiness is dependent upon others... you will seldom be happy... But others can be a part of your happiness.

If you can truly cast your cares on God, He becomes a source for your internal happiness. He can remove those things that cause you to fret and worry. He can help bring peace to your life, as you trust him.

Own your own happiness by choosing to discipline yourself to be happy.

One of my favorite authors as a child: Robert Louis Stevenson once said something that is profound in this context. "There is no duty we so much underrate as the duty of being happy."

My second point:

You need to reassess who you think you are

How do you talk about yourself? Is it positive?

Have you ever called yourself down to fit in? I don't mean in a humorous way to make a point, I mean actually talked about your self in a negative way? Have you labeled yourself by your job? "I'm Just a grocery store clerk or I'm just a bus driver" Did you notice the "I'm just"? What If I said: "I'm just a PHD in astrophysics with a second doctorate in mechanical engineering"

We have bought the package that we need to be humble and while that is very true, humility is not what many people think it is. It is not calling your self down or being a doormat for someone to walk on. Humility is knowing that you walk in power and authority and yet choosing to be equal and respectful with another person.

Personally, when I think about arrogance and pride vs. humility, I see absolutely nothing valuable in claiming to be superior to another person. I believe humility is being superior to who I was yesterday. Humility requires self-introspection and really being honest and appropriately valuing myself and then using myself as an indicator of progress with my goal to be more Christ-like. When comparison to another person comes in I believe that humility no longer exists.

Unfortunately, people call each other down; they backbite and gossip about each other all the time. The worst thing is when people believe they are actually inferior to another person. We can see evidence of this in our perception of sin. All sin is sin to God and yet as mankind we assess one sin greater than another. What is wrong is our perception.

So many people believe hurtful things that they have been told by others... Have you ever heard things like: "You never finish what you start." Or "Boy, you are as useless as teats on a bull" Perhaps you have heard "You are so stubborn" or "You are so messy" How often have these words programmed who we think we are... especially if the person is someone we love and/or respect.

The time has come for a real look inside at who you really are and an expulsion of those ideas that others have negatively impacted your life. I find diligent prayer and honest self-evaluation help with this process. We need to get rid of the negative garbage we have accumulated over our lifetime and stop putting ourselves in a box.

When this is gone, you will be amazed at how much happier you are with who you really are.

My third point:

You need to take time to smell the roses on life's path

As a 14 year old boy, I can remember thinking, "Man, I can't wait until I'm 16 and I can drive. It's going to be so cool when I can drive." At 16 I remember thinking, "I can't wait till I'm out of school so that I can get a better job and some decent wheels" At 18 I remember thinking... "Work is hard, bills are hard, I wish I was back in school and my parents were paying for everything again."

Why do we live in the past dwelling on past hurts or past accomplishments?
Why do we live in the future with a focus on what will be or what we will achieve?

Society has taught us that:

- We are the sum of our experiences
- Fame or accomplishment is fleeting or temporary, you will only get 15 minutes of fame.
- Things are always getting worse and there is nothing you can do about it

- We are guilty if we let go of mistakes, so instead of just learning from them, we allow them to define us.
- We are not good enough unless we are at least average with what everyone else has
- We are superior and happier if we have more money and/or stuff

Don't believe me? Look at Hollywood... Suicides and divorce are rampant.

Let's look at Elvis as an example... Six weeks before he died, a reporter asked Elvis Presley, "Elvis, when you first started playing music, you said you wanted to be rich, famous and happy. Are you happy?"

"I'm lonely as hell" he replied and he meant it.

He found that success, fame, fortune didn't bring happiness, it brought isolation and a living hell on earth. He felt isolated and alone.

Which leads me to a sub point... Life is not the pursuit of happiness. Elvis did that and it lead him to fame and fortune, but not happiness. The pursuit of happiness is a wild goose chase. Try many different paths and they all wind up the same... I know, I speak from experience in this area.

But there is some awesome news. By following some simple principles and pursuing a Godly life we achieve a side effect... We can receive the blessing of happiness and joy. God will pour out his joy upon you, but it comes back to what we talked about earlier, you need to choose to be happy. Every circumstance will not be pleasant, but we can be content because of our faith in him.

So... Pastor what is it you are trying to get at in this point? Well, it is simple to say but hard to do... But here goes: "Be present right here, right now. Seize the moment and make the most of it. Planning is good, but we need to live every day as though it were our last day on this earth. We need to toss away feelings of apathy towards life and grab hold of each and every moment and make it count. Then we need to mine each moment to recognize the goodness of God in our lives and celebrate what he is doing right here and right now. We need to choose to change our perspective. And as Christians we need to avoid the trap of the enemy and simply enjoy the journey and not just the destination...

In short, live your life abundantly...

My Fourth point:

We need to be relational with each other

In Genesis 1:28 and in Genesis 9:7 we are told as a people to be fruitful and multiply. Now we all know that this means to uh... propagate the species, but I'd like to point out that God has been in the relationship business from the start. He is concerned about relationships in the New Testament too.

Does God want us to produce spiritual fruit as well? Does God want us to multiply his kingdom?

The answer is of course he does... He tells us so in his word.

Which leads me to the fact that to be happy and fulfilled we need to be fruitful and multiply, it is our purpose... but this is not a sermon on the great commission. Today, I want to focus on one aspect of this truth... Relationships

No one can accomplish a single thing on their own. That independence is an illusion... Consider the mother cooking dinner. One might say she did that task on her own, yet, what about the grocer who sold her the food, what about the truck driver who delivered the food to the grocer, what about the trucking company that provided the job to the trucker, what about the coop that sold the food to the grocer, what about the farmer who grew the food in the first place, what about God who provided the light, water, plant and so on... ultimately, even though activities look independent they all depend on relationships.

When we become self-absorbed or self-focused we can miss the big picture. Our culture has taught us to validate ourselves by what value we added to the value chain. Not to look at the chain as a whole. We are assessed by our efforts, we are rewarded or punished based on our performance. So we are literally programmed to think a certain way.

Here is the revelation for you this morning. You cannot produce fruit without relationships. God wants us to produce fruit and he tells us not to skip getting together as a church for a reason...

Since our relationships are actually more important than many of us realized before, it suddenly become important for us to assess the relationships that we surround ourselves with.

While we need to engage, invest time, and love on people with dysfunctional things in their lives, it is important that we are a strength to them, not another black hole of emotional need. To be strong for those in need, we ourselves need a strong infrastructure of supporting and loving people around us to support us and strengthen us. This is why we need a culture of honor.

Fifth point:

We need balance

It has been said; “Work hard, play hard” which I agree with, but there is also the aspect of “Play hard, Don’t work” In which case you simply starve to death as the life of the party. Some people spend so much time on their future that they lose the present. My wife dropped me hints when I was away too much by arranging for me to have a new job...

It is all great to make money and have a great career, but if it costs us our happiness or hurts our families, then we need to really look at our priorities.

Work hard, but do what you love to do... seize every moment of this life. Make your life enrich you not just your bank account. Enjoy the journey. Sometimes we have to do jobs that we don’t like or are not our passion just to get by. In these cases look for positives that can move you forward. Don’t resent the job embrace the opportunity to advance. Don’t let competition discourage you.

I have found that being a life-long learner is an incredibly enriching experience. I enjoy the learning process, but I had to choose to enjoy it...

Here are my wrap up points.

People need to get to know you. They can’t do that if you don’t really know who you are. You need to reassess what you have been told about yourself and only hold onto what is true. You need to trust God to work out areas that you are not happy with and believe that you have tremendous worth and value. You need to forgive yourself for failures and move on. You need to choose to be happy. If you can’t do it within yourself, call on the Lord and give your cares to him.

Friends you need to enjoy life’s journey, not be so wrapped up in the rapture that you forget to live where God has placed you today. You are here to make a difference. Be present in the present and take the time to stop along the way to celebrate your life. Enjoy perfect moments and smell the roses.

We actually need each other. Everyone has a purpose. This is why the bible tells us that every joint supplies in the body of Christ. We need to see each other as equals and brothers and sisters. Personally, If you think you are worthless... Uh... I don’t want you to think of me as your equal. God has given us both a purpose. Change your view of yourself. If you want friends, make yourself friendly. Open up and be vulnerable.

Finally, it is great to press into the good things of God. Sometimes we let our jobs or careers consume us. My point to you this morning is that we need to have a balance between work and play. Even God rested. Get some Sabbath once in a while. Rest is good. Spend time building the relationships around you and enrich your life.

As you get closer to each other, you will get closer to God, because God is love.

I hope that you will take these five simple principles and apply them to your life as I know from firsthand experience that they will absolutely increase the joy and happiness in your life.