

Title: Blessed
Date: May 29, 2022
Subject: We gain happiness when we grow in our spiritual connection with Christ.
Scripture: Psalm 1

So far in our trip down the happiness highway we've stopped to see what true happiness isn't and what it is according to what the Bible says, spent time focusing on being on God's team and encouraging others, loving one another and serving others instead of being self focused. All of these have been about what we give. This morning . . . we're going to be more self focused as we look at one of our major needs.

Patrick Morley in his book "10 Secrets for the Man in the Mirror" identifies a problem in an interestingly titled chapter - "To know enough about God to not be disappointed" – where he writes: "Most men" (women, don't tune out as what he says is for everyone) "only know enough about God to be disappointed with him. They listen to the sermons, they try to do the right things, they have it in their hearts to be faithful Christians, but they don't seem to possess much joy and they certainly seem to lack consistent victory over sinful habits. Often, they feel a nagging sense of shame. Why? Perhaps for several reasons, but at least for many it's because they have never actually been "educated" about what it means to "be" Christian. They are not disciples. Many of us tend to think, "Well, I've learned about Jesus. Now it's time to move on to the next thing." Like politicians working a crowd, we meet Jesus, then move on to the next interesting idea about how to improve our lives. We never actually devote the time to grow into an intimate friendship with and a life-changing knowledge of God..."

He recalls a basketball game between two Christian high schools who had been longtime rivals. He said some of the fans from high school his son attended "were getting a little too animated, a bit too much "into" the game." He doesn't specify what they said or did or how they acted. He continues his story: "Finally, the referee stopped in front of our section in the stands and yelled out, "You're Christians! Act like it!" Admittedly a bit unusual, but it raises a good question. How does a Christian know how to act?"

"Passing the bar exam will give you a ticket to practice law, but it won't make you a good lawyer. In a similar way, becoming a *believer* will give you a ticket to heaven, but it won't make you a good Christian. For that you must become a *disciple*... To be truly happy a man must become a disciple... *A disciple is one called to walk with Christ, equipped to live like Christ, and sent to work for Christ*"... Discipleship means to "attach" Jesus to our minds and hearts. It means to let him apply the gentle, steady, constant pressure that will change the location of our desires, motivations, and ambitions. It's a slow process. To become a disciple means entering into a long-term process to increasingly become more like Jesus" (Patrick Morley, 10 Secrets for the Man in the Mirror, pp. 79- 83, 85).

There's the challenge, no matter how far we've traveled on our spiritual journey with Christ. We need to be careful to not fall into the trap of thinking a disciple is bland, boring, even miserable, not something that

will produce happiness. This doesn't mean we'll never have any setbacks in our walk with the Lord. We're going to link discipleship to holiness as discipleship is meant to produce holiness. Holiness is becoming more like Christ in our attitudes, lifestyle, words, actions and thoughts.

Read Psalm 1.

Most translations of v. 1 use the word "blessed." The New Living Translation, "Oh, the joys." The Amplified reads "Blessed [fortunate, prosperous, and favored by God]." The original Hebrew can be understood as happiness or how happy with an exclamation mark following it (source: biblehub.com).

The first of the 150 Psalms sets the tone for the entire book and serves as a summary of Scripture even though it doesn't use New Testament wording. It sets up a distinction between the only two kinds of people there are. There's the righteous who've established a relationship with God. They are the people of God and walk according to his ways. There's sinners - the wicked - who haven't, aren't and don't.

First let's look at the end game for the two groups beginning with the wicked. V. 4 describes them as chaff blown away by the wind. One of the worst jobs on the farm was baling hay when the hay was really dry and dusty or combining oats when there was no breeze or you were downwind from the breeze. And if it was hot day where we were sweating, the dust and chaff stuck to us, making us itch and be uncomfortable.

Ancient harvesters depended upon the wind to help separate the edible part of the grain from the non-edible. After beating the stalks into the ground or having oxen walk over them, workers would throw the material into the air so the wind could blow the light chaff away to leave the good grain. The chaff would be burned for fuel or simply discarded.

The wicked are like chaff. They have no spiritual substance, are of no value. They won't stand in the judgment. They'll be blown away by the wind of God and find themselves in hell forever. They'll be subjected to the fire of his wrath. They'll be in a state of continually perishing.

Contrast the righteous. In v. 3 they're compared to a tree planted in a conducive setting. It has sufficient water to provide nutrients and strength. The tree isn't subjected to seasonal changes as their leaf doesn't wither.

This results in life, vibrancy. It produces fruit. What good is a fruit tree that doesn't bear fruit? What good is a cherry tree that doesn't bear cherries? Jean and I had a cherry tree at our first house. The blossoms were nice to look and smelled great, much better than a Bradford pear tree. Whoa. Nasty. As nice as the appearance and smell were, we anticipated and were interested in the fruit the tree would bear. The only problem, so were the birds. They devoured most of the crop before it was ready. At least the birds were blessed by the crop.

Followers of Jesus Christ should be like trees planted by water. The water they drink from is the water of life that comes from Jesus. He provides the nutrients necessary for growth. The purpose isn't just to look good on the outside but to bear fruit. It's to be done in and out of the storms of life as the leaf doesn't wither because it maintains the connection to the source. Sounds a lot like the teaching given by Jesus – he's the vine, his followers are the branches and his followers need to remain connected to him so they can bear fruit.

There's the word prosper that some misinterpret. The Hebrew means to push forward (source: biblehub.com), to bring to perfection (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary). As one person expresses God's intent: "All his actions, being directed by the word, providence and grace of God, shall be crowned with success in one respect or another, (for even disappointments, losses, and afflictions, shall work for his good,) and with a blessed effect or end" (Benson Commentary). We are being pushed toward the ultimate blessing of being with Jesus in heaven.

You may have heard it said that happiness and holiness are opposites, that God created us to be holy not happy. That false distinction is prevalent because of a desire for followers of Jesus Christ to be separate from the world system and what it says provides happiness – things like fame, power, prestige, money. This sometimes results in saying that all happiness or being concerned about happiness is wrong.

When our daughter Tiffani was young, she did something Grandpa Essink found funny but she didn't find all that funny. As a little child, she was quite serious when she blurted out, "No laughing grandpa."

Puritans are viewed as the no laughing, no fun, no happiness Christians. Stereotyped as wearing black, being ultra-serious and scowling all the time. That's far from the truth. Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) authored a 450-page book titled: *The Crown and Glory of Christianity: Or, Holiness, The Only Way To Happiness* (1662). "Holiness differs nothing from happiness but in name...Holiness is happiness in the bud, and happiness is holiness at the full. Happiness is nothing but the quintessence of holiness...God is the author of all true happiness; he is the donor of all true happiness...He that hath him for his God, for his portion, is the only happy man in the world."

Other great preachers thought the same way. John Wesley: "When we first know Christ...then it is that happiness begins; happiness real, solid, substantial." Charles Spurgeon: "Holiness is the royal road to happiness. The death of sin is the life of joy." Matthew Henry (1662–1714): "Those only are happy, truly happy, that are holy, truly holy...goodness and holiness are not only the *way* to happiness but happiness *itself*."

Bring it in to our day. John Piper on an episode of his *Ask Pastor John*: "Happiness is part of holiness. If you tried to describe for me what it means to be a holy person, leaving out happiness in God, you can't do it. There is no such thing as holiness *minus* happiness in God. Happiness in God is — I will risk it — the *essence* of holiness...When we say God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him, we are saying the essential warfare of holiness, or sanctification, is the warfare to be satisfied in God."

Hearing these words helps us think of holiness and happiness not as enemies. The purpose behind this series is to focus on what constitutes true happiness. In terms of Psalm 1, what true blessedness is.

What allows a person to be proclaimed blessed? V. 1 speaks of what he doesn't do. He doesn't lean to the side of wickedness. There's to be a separation from wickedness. In Christian terms, this begins when a person is born again. They've chosen to follow the God of the Bible rather than any other belief system.

The second part means they don't plant their roots in the city of wickedness. Abraham's nephew Lot is referred to as a righteous man who lived in the city of Sodom and was distressed by the filthy lives of the

lawless men (2 Peter 2:7). It's hard for us to understand how he could be righteous and willingly subject himself and his family to continually reside in the middle of the wickedness. He certainly doesn't seem like he was blessed and/or happy.

We aren't to be like Lot. We're to distance ourselves from the ways of sinners and from following their counsel. It's impossible to remove ourselves from living in the world. The only way to do so is through death. We live in the world, try to reach people who are under the world system opposed to God and need Jesus as their Savior, but we aren't to be conformed to the world's ways and standards. We should be distressed by them.

V. 2 shows us what the righteous do. "His delight is in the law of the Lord." He takes pleasure and finds happiness in God's Word. He spends time interacting with it, meditating on it, letting it murmur through his mind. Day and night.

We can make it one of the first things we think about, whether we read something in God's word or recall a verse or verses. We can use it as a means of going to sleep -- thinking God's words or singing songs. And do so when we wake up in the middle of the night. It helps to orient our beings.

The person who engages in delighting in the Lord and meditating on his law invests time. He disciplines himself. He schedules it in his routine. He forms the habit. Have you ever noticed it's easier to break a good habit than to form one? For instance, flossing your teeth. Skip a day and if we're not careful it becomes a second day and then another day and another day. It's harder to get back in the habit.

Form the habit of getting into God's Word. Mark out the time. Set aside a place. I usually do my Bible reading when I get to my office. I can read and walk at the same time. Prayer is a little bit harder because when I walk and pray, I see stuff which makes me think of other stuff. This past week I took some time just to sit in a chair to try to be still before the Lord and pray. Sometimes the problem is that when you sit still and close your eyes, you'll fall asleep, so that's something else to deal with.

When we're increasing in holiness, growing to be like God and set apart to him, becoming more of a disciple, when we are growing spiritually, becoming more spiritually mature, turning into the person Jesus wants us to be, we'll grow in true happiness.

Let's jump ahead to some verses from the New Testament where we find similar teaching. Luke 11:28. Jesus had just been accused of casting out demons by the power of the devil. He pointed out the falseness of that idea by stating a kingdom divided against itself can't stand and that he had greater power than the devil. He then spoke of an evil spirit that came out of a man. It couldn't find any place to go. It returned to the man who was like an empty house. The spirit brought seven other spirits along to fill the void. The condition of the man was worse than it had been at first. Reforming a life isn't enough. A person needs to have God inside.

A woman in the crowd shouted this was absolutely fantastic teaching, partially because it silenced Jesus' detractors. She proclaimed, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." Jesus' response is in Luke 11:28. READ.

“Blessed are those who hear and obey.” I'm sure Jesus thought his mother was wonderful, great and appreciated that she bore him. But he says the true blessing isn't for someone who gave birth to him but those to whom he gives spiritual birth and who hear and do the word of God.

Though it isn't stated, we certainly could make the case for the opposite: unblessed or unhappy are those who don't hear the word of God or who hear the word God but don't obey it. This could be one of the causes of why there are so many Christian sourpusses.

Jesus made this same connection after he washed the disciples' feet. He told them he provided an example: “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (John 13:17). He goes on to give some of what blessing means. These people will be loved by the Father (John 14:21), the Father and Son will make their home with them (John 14:23), they'll remain in the love of Christ (John 15:10), and will be his friends (John 15:14).

Jesus gave a picture of the difference between the blessing received by those who belong to him and what happens to those who don't (Matthew 7:24 - 27). Two men built houses. One man built his on a rock. It withstood the rain and storm and winds and the rising river because it was build on a solid foundation. The other person built a house on the sand – nice, smooth, easy to move sand. The storm and the wind and the raging streams came and the house collapsed. The first man, the wise man, represents those who hear the words of Jesus and put them into practice. The other person characterizes those who hear the words and don't put them into practice. We could ask: which of the two is going to be happy, eternally unhappy?

Jesus prayed that the Father would sanctify his followers by the truth (John 17:17). He wanted them to be set apart in the continuing work of allowing God to have his way in their lives. It comes through surrendering and yielding ourselves.

Jesus doesn't leave us out in the cold when it comes to the main method God uses. He tells us it's through the truth which is the Word of the Father. We understand and believe this refers to the Bible, God's holy word, Scripture. It's the tool he's going to use. It's the mirror we look into to see what it says, hear and not forget what we've heard but put it into practice and therefore will be blessed (James 1:22 – 25).

More from Morley: “When a man takes time to be “with Jesus,” what will he learn? The disciples who sat at Jesus' feet learned what it meant to love, pray, worship, serve, cry, obey, humble themselves, be under authority, resolve conflict, take care of the poor, resist evil, denounce hypocrisy, and have compassion -- all in the very way Jesus did those things” (10 Secrets for the Man in the Mirror, p. 86).

The number one Sunday School kids' song is “Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.” There's another one that's often sung with actions: “Read your Bible, pray every day and you'll grow, grow, grow.” The second verse looks at the opposite approach: “Neglect your Bible, forget to pray and you'll shrink, shrink, shrink.”

end with verses

“Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:2; 3:18).

“Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord” (Proverbs 16:20).

“The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes” (Psalm 19:8).

“Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them” (Psalm 32:1 - 2).

“Praise the LORD. Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who find great delight in his commands” (Psalm 112:1).

“Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to him” (Psalm 128:1).