

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Shepherd Empowers Us

Sunday, April 7, 2019

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Psalm 23

One Sunday morning the pastor noticed a little boy staring up at the large plaque hanging in the foyer of the church. The seven-year-old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up, stood beside the boy, and said quietly, "Good morning son." "Good morning pastor" replied the young man, focused on the plaque. "Sir, what is this?" Johnny asked. "Well son, these are all the people who have died in the service," replied the pastor. The boy just stood there and looked very seriously at the plaque. The little boy barely broke the silence and he asked very quietly, "Pastor, which one, the 9 or 11 am service?"

Well, I think after being inspired by our music today we can say that we are fully *alive* in this service! Aren't they wonderful? You know, we have a wonderful church. Today reminds me of one of the things I love about this church that other people love about this church. We are a friendly and happy church! I hear this all the time from visitors who come here for the first time. "I love your church. Everyone is so warm, friendly and happy!" We are!

Of course, all churches should be happy. All churches should have "the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in their hearts" because we have experienced God's love. God's love should make us happy! The Bible says, "O Taste and See that the Lord is Good! *Happy* are those who take refuge in Him!" (Psalm 34:8).

Now, I know that some of you in worship feel happy now but you dread tomorrow. You dread Monday morning. Some of you wish you could feel the joy of Sunday morning every day of the week. You think of that boss who is not your favorite person. You think of your busy schedule. You think of that boring class you have in school. You think of how lonely you will get during the week. You think of that deadline. You think of that project looming over you. You wish you could feel the happiness you do right now the rest of the week. I am here to tell you this morning that you can! You can feel the joy of Sunday the rest of the week. All you have to do is remember one of the key messages of the 23rd Psalm.

To me, one of the most significant phrases in the 23rd Psalm is "My cup runneth over." What do we think

that means? It means that God's love is the source of our joy and happiness. Our joy is found in the abundant life God desires for us, *if we choose to live it*. That's the key, isn't it? We must choose to live it. God gives us free will. We can choose to be happy and hopeful in the Lord or we can choose not to be.

The sad truth is people actually choose not to be happy. Drive by a cemetery next week and look at all the tombstones. As you do, I want you to remember something: *Every single day people die unhappy*. Now, let me ask you, "Do you think they planned that?" Do you think they said to themselves, "I want to have an unhappy life."? Did they wake up and think, "I hope my life is bland, meaningless, and full of fear"? Heck no! Do you think God wanted them to live life like that? Heck no!

Yet every single day people die unhappy. Why? Because they choose to be unhappy. Now, it is usually not, "I will choose to be unhappy! I will choose to live an unhappy life!" It's more insidious than that. It's the little choices that are made every day that add up to an unhappy life.

What most people don't realize is that our daily choices accumulate. When we choose "bland, meaningless, fear, negativity, criticism," day in and day out it eventually it all adds up to an unhappy and miserable life. This is why happiness hope in the Lord must be a daily decision. We are the sum total of our daily decisions. Here is the truth: "You are what you do, not what you hope you'll do" (thedailypositive.com).

So today I want to shoot straight with you and give you some helpful advice on how to live a happy and hopeful life in the Lord. If you do what I am going to suggest to you, you will find yourself living the life you've always wanted – a happy, hopeful, healthy life in the Lord. You can be happy tomorrow morning, and the next day and the next and the next. And in the next few minutes I'm going to tell you how.

I just read about a ninety two year old man named John who is blind. He just lost his wife. He didn't feel he should live alone, so John decided to move into a nice retirement home. The next morning he was up

early. He put on his best suit. His hair was perfectly combed and his face was neatly shaven.

A cab picked him up and took him to the retirement home. John arrived early and waited more than an hour before a young aide, Miranda, came to show him to his new room. As John maneuvered his walker through the hallways, Miranda talked about how wonderful the room was. She said there was a big window that the sunlight shined through. She said the room had a comfortable couch and a useful desk area. Right in the middle of her description, John interrupted her and said, "I love it. I love it. I love it." Miranda laughed and said, "Sir, we're not there yet. You haven't seen it. Hold on just a minute, and I'll show it to you."

John said, "No, you don't have to show it to me. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on how the furniture is arranged. *It depends on how my mind is arranged.* Happiness is something you decide ahead of time."

John understood one of the most important truths about life: *Happiness is a choice!* When you wake up in the morning *Happiness is a choice.* You can choose what kind of day you want to have. You can choose to be in a good mood, or you can choose to be in a bad mood. It's not up to anyone, anything, or any circumstance. It is up to you! Abraham Lincoln said, "Most people are as happy as they've decided to be."

You know a recent study found that happiness increases 10 percent on Fridays. Why is that? People wake up on Friday and are excited about the weekend, so they choose to be happier. And guess what? They end up being happier! Imagine that! Most people are as happy as they've decided to be!

It is your choice to be happy. Make that choice today. Things may not always go your way in life but keep choosing to be happy and you will find that you are happy no matter the circumstances. It is not so much what happens to you but how you react to it that makes the difference. What you think determines what and who you are! We become what we think about!

When we were kids we knew this. We could make our own fun wherever we were. We could use our imagination and play and be happy. But so often as we get older we let the negative circumstances of life drag us down.

We have to realize every day is a gift from God. Once this day is gone, we can never get it back. If we choose to be miserable one day, we've wasted an entire day that God has given to us!

Some people squander moment after moment, day after day, year after year, being unhappy. They see the shadows instead of the light. They see only the bad instead of what's good. They think only of the people

treating them badly instead of the people who love them. They think of what they don't have instead of what they do have. What a waste of the precious time God has given us on this earth! Let's decide today to be happy and not waste any more days that God has given us. Let's decide to open our eyes to the ways God is working in our lives. Let's decide today to see the many blessings God lavishes upon us each day. Let's do what the Bible tells us to do each do in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, rejoice!"

Don't limit yourself and your happiness with limited thinking. Don't be a buzzard! If you put a buzzard inside a pen, 6 feet by 8 feet, you don't have to put a top on it. Even though the pen is completely open at the top, and despite the ability to fly, the bird will not be able to get out. You see, a buzzard always begins his flight from the ground with a ten or twelve foot run. That is his habit and his limitation. Without that space to run, the bird will not even attempt to fly. It will be a prisoner for life in a little jail with no top. Freedom is above it the whole time but it can't get out.

The same thing is true of the bumblebee. Unless you take a bumblebee out of an open cup, it will be there until it dies. It will attempt again and again to find a way out through the sides of the glass, staying near the bottom. It never sees that the way out is at the top. It will continue to seek a way where none exists, until it completely destroys itself.

So many people are like the buzzard and the bumblebee – unhappy, looking around, complaining, worrying, trying to find a way out that isn't there. They don't realize that the way out of their sadness and despair is right above their heads.

We must remember that the solution to every problem, the answer to every issue, and the way out when there seems to be no way out is above us. We just need to look up to God and seek Him and have faith in Him. When we do we will come to know the empowering truth that with God failure is never final.

A person is never defeated until they accept defeat as a permanent reality in their mind. I have learned that people's greatest achievements and successes usually come just one step beyond the feeling of defeat and discouragement. You see, most people quit on the five yard line, just inches away from their greatest achievement.

Ever heard of Bernie Marcus? He was an executive for Handy Man Stores. One day corporate headquarters didn't like what he was doing and they fired him. His friends began encouraging him and they threw around some ideas. They came up with a new

concept. You may have heard of it – The Home Depot. Failure is never final.

I am sure you have heard of Thomas Edison. He had this crazy idea that light could be powered by electricity. People called him crazy. He failed thousands of times, but he would not stop trying until he succeeded. And he did! Failure is never final.

Oh, the Bible tells the same story. What about David? He failed God. He had an affair with Bathsheba, and murdered her husband. He disappointed God, himself, and the ones he loved. Later, he was redeemed and used by God in mighty ways. He ended up a hero. Failure is never final.

What about Peter - always getting it wrong around Jesus, always saying the wrong thing? He even denied Jesus three times. Later, Jesus has to ask him three times if he loves him. Peter felt like a failure. 50 days later Peter preached the Pentecost sermon. Three thousand people were saved and the church was born. Failure is never final.

Then there was Paul. He murdered Christians. He was a great enemy to the faith. Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road, and he was transformed. He ended up the author of most of the books in the New Testament! Failure is never final.

God uses adversity to strengthen us and to mature us. James 1:3-4 says, “Whenever you face trials of any kind consider it nothing but joy because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.”

How will you handle your failure? You have a choice. You can give up or you can allow God to use your failure to strengthen you for the future.

Life is filled with examples of people whose destiny was based on how they chose to deal with failure. I think of Adolph Hitler. He used his time in prison to write his famous book in which he perpetuated the radical hatred and violence that resulted in great human destruction around the world. But then there was John Bunyan. He was imprisoned in England and wrote the famous Christian classic, “The Pilgrim's Progress,” in which he so beautifully described his experience of the grace of God. Helen Keller was deaf and blind. Beethoven was deaf. Milton was blind. Yet, they all chose to turn their trouble into triumph.

The final round of the Masters will be on television today. I am sure many of you will be watching. I know I will be! There is an old saying about the Masters: “The Masters does not start until the back nine on Sunday.” In other words, it is the finish

that counts. You can play great for the whole tournament, but your mettle is not tested until you get to the final nine holes at Augusta. It is how you finish that counts.

This is why golf is such a great game. It is the ultimate test of character. Golf is a game of recovery. You will make many mistakes on the golf course, but it is how you recover from those mistakes that determine the kind of golfer that you are. The same thing is true in life. We all make mistakes in life, but it is how we recover from those mistakes that make the difference. Being successful in anything requires persistence, patience, and perseverance.

I think of a lady who came to see me in my office a while back said it best. She had faced great difficulty in her life and was able to get through it valiantly. She said, “I have learned that I can get bitter or I can get better.” Now, that is the right attitude! God will give you double for your trouble. Failure can make you better.

Someone said, “Worry looks around. Sadness looks back. Faith looks up.” The Bible says it this way, “I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:1-2).

You want to be happy every day? Make up your mind to be happy. Choose to look up and thank God you are alive. Choose to see your blessings and thank God for them. Choose happiness.

I want to give you another way you can make yourself happy every day. Next to choosing to be happy, the following is the quickest way to find joy. If you do this every day you are guaranteed to be happy every day. It is something I learned from Ben Franklin. Well, not personally. I read about it.

As many of know, Benjamin Franklin invented the bifocals, the lightning rod, and the first odometer. He also helped to draft the Constitution, among his many other accomplishments. He’s probably one of the most productive people of all time. You know how he was able to accomplish so many incredible things? He asked himself just two simple questions every day. You can see actual photos of his real schedule and see that these questions are on there.

In the morning when Ben got up, he would ask himself, “*What good shall I do this day?*” And at night before he went to bed he would ask himself, “*What Good have I done today?*”

What good have you done for others today? Ben Franklin’s questions reveal that *the quickest way to be happy is to make other people happy*. Jesus said so. He said, “It is better to give than to receive.” He also said that those who lose their lives for him will find life and joy. And, you know, it doesn’t take much from us to

make others happy. Sometimes a smile and a kind word will do.

It's amazing what a smile and a simple question can do to make a difference to others. A few months ago I was waiting in line to check in at the doctor's office. The administrator was clearly tired and frustrated from a long day of dealing with insurance issues and complaining patients. I didn't blame her.

When it was my turn she called out unenthusiastically, "Next." I smiled and said, "Long day, huh?" The tension left her face and she let out a sigh and said, "You have no idea." She then began to tell me a little bit about her rough day. When she gave me the spiel about the Hipaa form I asked, "How many times have you said that today?" She laughed. When I left the front desk to sit in the waiting room her disposition had totally changed. She greeted other patients with a smile.

Now notice that I did what any human being is capable of doing. I smiled and asked two simple sympathetic questions. It takes very little to make a big difference.

Also notice what she decided to do. She decided to be happy. That one little encounter enabled her to make the decision to be happy. When I went into the see the doctor, I was happy and she was happy. The quickest way to get happy is to make others happy.

You want to be happy? Wake up every morning and say, "Lord, this is the day you have made! I will rejoice and be glad in it!" And then ask yourself, "What good will God and I do today?" Do that every day for the next week and I guarantee you will be happier than you were before!



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