

Where Are You Seeking Happiness?

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Date: 16 June 2019

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[0 : 00] Are most people you know happy? Are you? Would you call yourself a happy person right now? Let's think about it for a minute.

What makes people happy? What makes you happy? Having plenty of money? Having a lot of free time?

Children who obey the first time every time with a good attitude. Parents who are not so doggone strict and nag you all the time.

How about a spouse who makes you the center of his or her world? Now these are all what makes us happy.

Not many people happy are we? But the common thought in such responses is that that kind of happiness is dependent on our circumstances.

[1 : 05] Now it's true. What's going on around about us, it does contribute to our just happy moods or not.

But we've got to all guard against finding our happiness or tying our happiness to pleasant circumstances.

No one's life is always pleasant, is it? Our circumstances are in a constant state of change.

Sometimes everything's going our way or at least most things.

But sometimes it seems that nothing goes the way we want it to. If that's the case, we're going to be emotional roller coasters.

Well, I want us to look this morning at a passage of Scripture. It's Psalm 1 on the screen. I want you to go ahead and turn there. There's a way that we can experience a deeper level of happiness happiness than what we normally think of when we use the word.

[2 : 13] That doesn't have anything to do with our circumstances. It's described in Psalm 1 and it begins with the word blessed. And this word blessed is sometimes translated, especially in paraphrases, with the word happy.

Now the word we're going to look at, we're going to read the psalm in just a moment. But the word here in verse 1 is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word that is found in Matthew 5 that describes what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount.

He described certain character qualities of His people. And He talked about them in terms of blessed are the, and a lot of you in here, you're very familiar.

I'm going to give you three examples that might make us scratch our head. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. That doesn't sound like a kind of circumstance. None of those, poor in spirit, mourning, being persecuted for any reason, even right reasons.

[3 : 23] That doesn't sound like the kind of circumstance that would make anyone happy, does it? Well, that's a clue that the word blessed is not talking about a happy feeling.

That word blessed really means to be fulfilled. To be satisfied. To be content. It refers to an inner joy and satisfaction that is found in a right relationship with God.

And it is experienced as we live our lives in a way that pleases God. So as we talk about happiness, we're not talking about, you know, just good feelings.

We're talking about something on the insides. A real joy. A real sense of contentment. We're talking about something that God gives us through our relationship with Him.

Knowing that He is God. He's in control. He's working in our lives. And if we're His children, no matter what, we can count on Him.

[4 : 41] Psalm 1 describes two contrasting ways to pursue this kind of happiness. Let's read the Psalm. Psalm 1, beginning with verse 1.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord. And on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season.

And its leaf does not wither. And all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment. Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

[5 : 47] If you want to experience deep down, satisfying joy. That is not dependent on how somebody's treating you.

Not dependent on how your job's going. Not depending on your physical health. We need to heed the warning of the psalmist.

Number one, you won't find true happiness by associating with ungodly people. And I want to add to this in terms of application. You won't find true happiness by living under ungodly influences.

Now, as we go through this, we're talking about ungodly people. But I want you to think, the application, this is broader. We need to be careful of who we are allowing to influence us.

Not just face to face. But the things that we read. We need to be careful about the people we are allowing to influence us.

[6 : 53] By the things we watch, we view. By whatever we take in through our senses. Whatever form of media it may be. We are constantly being influenced by people.

And what people are doing. So as we go through this, don't just limit your thinking to the influence of a particular ungodly person.

Because you really may be in your family, in your job. You may be surrounded by some pretty good people. But if you live in this world, unless you're just in a cave somewhere, you're bombarded by all kinds of ungodly influencers and influences.

So keep that in mind as we go through this. The psalmist begins with a warning about what will happen if we allow ungodly influence to just permeate our lives.

First, verse 1. You will be led on a downward path away from God by associating with ungodly people. Look at it.

[8 : 03] The downward path begins when we walk in the counsel of the wicked or ungodly, some translations will say. The actual verse says, Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.

Now, in this context, you look at, we're talking about the wicked. Then we're going to look at the word sinners. Then we're going to look at the word scoffers. He's talking about a downward spiral here.

So this first person or type of ungodly influence is referring to people who do not take God seriously. We're not talking about here someone who is just maybe overtly evil.

We're talking about somebody who has just basically a secular worldview. Their view of life just has no place for God.

They may not be openly opposed to God. May never say anything negative about God or the Bible or Christians. They just ignore Him.

[9 : 07] Now, who are some of the people that you admire and want to be like? You may know them. They may be in your family. Maybe somebody a little bit older than you in school.

Or they may be someone you just read about or watch on TV or in movies. The people that you admire and they are influencing you. You want to be like them.

What are they teaching you about God, about a relationship with Him? What are they teaching you by the way they live about living a Christian life?

Think about it for just a moment. What would following their example, what would it be if you allowed them to influence you?

Would they help you draw closer to the Lord? Would they really help you to develop Christian character? Would they help you to be a true person of integrity?

[10 : 13] You say what you mean, they mean what you say. People who do not take God seriously. They don't have to be just terribly evil people.

They will have an influence on us. They will gradually influence us. And if they don't take God seriously, we will take God less seriously.

Even though we're in church here this morning. If you walk with the wicked, as they're described here, long enough, it will lead to a more serious problem.

He describes it as we'll stand in the way of sinners. This refers to getting involved with people who are truly rebels against God. We're talking about people who are, they don't agree with what the Bible teaches.

About how we should live morally and ethically. The idea here is becoming friends with people who openly disobey God. The idea here is running with people in a circle, in a group.

[11 : 25] With people who, they knowingly, willingly live a life contrary to what you know. And what you've been taught. The Bible says a Christian ought to live.

Now, I want to pause here. This does not mean we should not develop relationships with people who are not Christians. We as Christians are called to live in this world and be a part of the world but not be like it.

We're supposed to be salt. We're supposed to flavor society. We're supposed to be a preservative. We're supposed to be light as Christians in this world, in this, what the Bible talks about, a dark world.

So we need to be in the world. We need to be influencing people. But here's the caution. The idea is for us to be around people and influence them.

But not be around people if they're going to have the wrong kind of influence on us. I have heard young people say before, especially a girl with a guy.

[12 : 32] A girl who's a Christian. A professing Christian at least. Christian parents. And she wants to date a guy who is not a Christian. Doesn't go to church.

Obvious not a good choice. I have heard this. The excuse to the parents is, well, I can be a good witness to him. You're not going to be a good witness, most likely, getting involved in a dating relationship.

It usually doesn't work that way. And there's people in your life, if you talk to them about it, they can give you example after example of how that did not work.

And did not end well. This is a warning about allowing yourself to be influenced with people.

You may not even know them, but what they teach, what they're doing, their example, their model. They're going to influence you in such a way as to corrupt your mind.

[13 : 37] They're going to turn you away from God and the kind of life that pleases God. The way that God clearly tells us we ought to live as Christians in this world. It's a warning. But that's not where he stops.

People who walk in the counsel of the wicked and then stand in the way of sinners. If you just continue that way, in time, you'll sit in the seat of scoffers or mockers.

We're talking about people here who, they're not just against God. They ridicule. They curse. They show contempt for anything about God. The Bible.

Christian truth. These are the kind of people you need to avoid. This is the kind of influence you need to avoid at all costs because it will corrupt us quickly.

Now, I want you to think with me. This should make sense that we distance ourselves from such people that we don't associate with them because they're hostile toward God.

[14 : 46] Do you or would you associate with someone who spoke disrespectfully about your spouse?

Would you associate yourself with people who all they did was put down your children? No.

I mean, there's something terribly wrong with you if you would allow someone to just show great contempt and disrespect to or about your spouse or your children.

We don't do those kind of things. It's common sense. We're offended. You don't offend those who are closest to me.

Well, if we are close to God, why do we associate with people who speak and act in a way that disparages God?

[15 : 49] That dishonors Him, His name, His word, His will. Why would you want to be around such people? If, if Jesus is real to you and you love Him, you want to defend His name, His character, just like you would a family member.

If you want to live a family member. If you want to live a family member. If you really want to live a life of happiness in terms of joy, contentment, don't allow ungodly people to influence you directly or indirectly.

They'll lead you down a path that will take you further and further away from God and the kind of life that you really want to live if you're a Christian.

The kind of life that God says we ought to live if we're His people. But also notice in verse 4, you'll find nothing of lasting value from the life of ungodly people. The psalmist describes such people as chaff.

Chaff is the outer skin of wheat. It's the dry little shells that blow away in the wind or are collected and burned. Think about it this way.

[17:06] Ungodly people and their way of life is like the shells of a sunflower seed. A lot of people love to eat sunflower seeds.

Some people, I haven't got the knack for sticking a wad in my mouth and being able to get the seed out and spit out the hole. But you know what I'm talking about, you spit out the hole. They're like, ungodly people are like the wrappers of a candy bar.

You throw it away. Now, we all know ungodly people who've experienced great success in this world.

I mean, you may have some family members. They're just ungodly. They may even make fun of you being a Christian or coming to church.

And they, from all outward appearances, they're very successful. We all know professional athletes, actors, politicians, educators, people from every walk of life.

[18:10] We know people who are not Christians. And they're more than not Christians. They're just plain ungodly. And they have experienced worldly success to some degree.

We're not going to deny that. We're not going to pretend that they're not living a great life, being ungodly, because some people are, and they're content in it.

But because they have no place for God in their lives, Scripture says they're going to end up like chaff. Like the wrapper of a candy bar.

Do you really want to envy such a person? Do you really want to follow the example of someone, do what someone like that says?

That you know, if you truly believe in God and believe in a judgment at the end of your life, do you want to follow someone and be influenced by someone who's going to lead you to be condemned on the day of judgment?

[19:18] That's what you see next in verse 5, latter part of verse 6. You will be condemned along with ungodly people on the day of judgment if you follow their example, if you allow them to influence you.

This is a warning to us. Now, the psalmist doesn't just warn us about the ungodly.

He's not just warning us about the wrong road through life. He encourages us also about the right road. About the right kind of influence. So let's look at that now.

Number two, you will find true happiness only in the life God approves. The happiness that brings lasting joy.

I'm talking about that which the circumstances can't take away from you. Contentment. Let me say this. I've just seen some people in this church right now.

[20:14] It makes me think about this. I have visited members of this church and some family members over the past year, two, three.

That have had major bypass surgery. And I have seen in them as they are in the hospital in real pain, also having joy that they know they're in the hands of their Heavenly Father.

They're suffering physically, but emotionally and spiritually, they are still experiencing the joy of being a child of God, knowing there's no better place, no safer place to be than in His care.

Now, let's look back. You will find the keys to true happiness taught in God's Word. That's what He's talking about in verses 2 and 3. I want you to look at the verse or the term, the law of the Lord in verse 2.

It can be translated instruction of the Lord, as the English Standard Version footnote indicates. John MacArthur comments on verse 2 in a helpful way.

[21:35] Look at this. Switching to a positive description, the spiritually happy man is characterized by the consistent contemplation and internalization of God's Word for ethical direction and

obedience.

The Word of God, the Bible, can be compared to many helpful tools. It's like a compass. It points us in the right direction for living a faithful Christian life.

The Bible's like a compass. It points us the way to live a life that will please God and ultimately bring the most joy to us.

The Bible's like an owner's manual. It provides instructions on how to live life as God designed it.

You see, God made us as we are.

He has a way that He intends for us to live outlined generally in Scripture. And if we'll follow His way, live life according to His design, life will work better.

[22 : 43] And it certainly will be more pleasing if we'll just take Him seriously. I want you to look at how the psalmist tells us to delight. But His delight, the person who does not follow the wrong crowd, who is not influenced the wrong way, but His delight is in the law of the Lord.

Let me ask you this. And you just, only you can answer this for yourself. Do you find joy and pleasure in knowing and doing what the Bible says will please God?

Do you find joy? Do you find delight in living a life that pleases God?

I do not like cats. If you do, I'm not trying to hurt your feelings or anything like that. I do not like them. I'm being nice. I normally would say I hate them, but I'm just saying I do not like them.

I don't have one. And I don't want one. The only way you'll ever know that there's a cat at my place is if I cannot kill moles any other way.

[24 : 03] I've been told that that's a surefire way to get rid of moles in your yards to have a cat. And so, if I can't control them any other way, I may get a cat.

I won't treat him like Bernie Sanders. I'm not going to feed him, take care of him, meet all of his needs where he don't want to work. I'm going to so work with that cat if I ever get one to make him hungry enough to go out there and find those moles and kill them.

But I don't like them. I would never choose just of my own choice to buy a picture of a cat. But I want you to know something.

Last year, I went to the book fair at Pickens Elementary School with a special little girl. My granddaughter, Olivia, wanted a poster of a cat.

And you know what? When she told me that and she looked at me and said, Bop, would you buy me that poster? I was delighted to buy Olivia the poster of that cat with the condition that it be put up in her house and not mine.

[25 : 30] Now, I don't think we will take delight in the Word of God unless we first define delight in the person of God.

I have no delight in cats. But I have great delight or had great delight in buying that poster for the person that I love dearly, my little granddaughter.

And so I think it's just, it's this perspective. If we truly know God as our Heavenly Father, we have a relationship with Him. We love Him. We have delight in Him.

We'll have delight in the teaching of His Word. And as He talks about meditating, we'll think deeply about what we read in God's Word because we want to understand it.

we want to make it a part of our thinking. We want it to guide the way that we live. That's what the psalmist is telling us.

[26 : 39] Look at one more thing in verse 3. You will enjoy stability and prosperity by living in obedience to God's Word. Look at it, first part of verse 3. This kind of person is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither.

The psalmist is describing a man or woman of God as a tree planted beside a river with a continuous source of water is what it's talking about. It never fails to be fruitful. It doesn't wither.

It doesn't lose its leaves from a lack of water. If we will seek our happiness by living the kind of life that God approves, we'll find it.

Now everything will never go our way. You can't have a life that everything goes your way. Every circumstance is favorable to you. But it doesn't have to be when we take delight in the Lord and His way and will because our delight will be found in Him.

and our relationship with Him and our love for Him. Note the last phrase of the verse of this psalm. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous or the Lord watches over the way of the righteous.

[27 : 56] That means God is not, that does not mean God's standing back and just sort of observing our life. It's talking about how He is involved. He guards us.

