

John 15:1, 7-11 ¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower... ⁷ If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

John 15:1, 7-11

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The Quest for Happiness: Never Having Enough

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Do these words ring any bells? We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. Our country, here in the US, was based upon the pursuit of happiness. However, the pursuit of happiness wasn’t isolated to a moment in US history. Anne Frank said; “We all live with the objective of being happy; our lives are all different, and yet the same. The thought of Happiness is, also, prevalent in modern society. In 1988 we were introduced to the Bobby McFerrin Hit Don’t Worry, Be Happy. Then in 2013, Pharrell Williams sang the words, “Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth” in his hit, Happy.

No matter who we are, where we are from, or what time period we live in, there has always been a quest for Happiness. We have asked questions like: How can I be happy? What can I do to be happier? Can you imagine how much better my life would be if I were only happier? Happiness encompasses our thoughts and our lives. Even when we don’t realize it, we are seeking it.

I have an old Italian Folktale that I want to share with you about this.

Once there was a king named Giphad. He ruled over a very peaceful yet powerful kingdom. His people all loved and adored him. All was perfect in his kingdom.

Except for his son, Jonash. The king's son was very unhappy for no known reason.

He would always sit in his room staring blankly out the window over the lands, frowning.

The king addressed his son: "What on earth has upset you, Jonash? What is it that you lack? What is making you so distraught?"

The young prince only shrugged.

"Could there be a girl, a certain woman that has caught your eye? Tell me her name and I'll move mountains to have you two married at once!"

"No, it's not a girl. I don't know why. I'm just so unhappy."

The king nodded and walked off. If this state of affairs continued the king feared his son would die of melancholy.

Deciding he needed more help, the king issued a decree to have all the top physicians, astrologers, and wise men of the kingdom come to him. When they arrived the king showed them to his son. After three days the astrologers had finally come up with a solution.

"Your Majesty," Janklo, the head astrologer, spoke. "We have given the matter close thought. In order to help your son you must find a happy man. A man that is happy through and through."

The king raised an eyebrow at this. "I must find a happy man?!?"

"Yes, and when you find the happy man you must trade his shirt for your son's shirt, then all will be well."

The king agreed and dismissed them. He called in his ambassador to the throne room, and told them to go out and find for him a truly happy man. He had notices placed all over the kingdom offering a handsome reward to anyone who could find a truly happy man.

The first person to be shown before the king was a priest.

"Are you happy?" The king's question was simple and to the point.

"Yes, milord, I am very happy."

"Well then, how would you like to be my bishop?" at this, the priest perked up. "Oh yes, your majesty, nothing would bring me greater joy!"

"Get thee hence from my palace before I have you enprisoned!" Yelled the now furious king. "You are no happy man so much as a liar, and only looking to better himself. Out of my castle!"

The search continued. Not a week went by but there was news of a neighboring king who was described as a real happy man. He had a lovely wife and many children. He has no enemies and he too has a peaceful but powerful kingdom. Thinking this was his solution, the king sent his ambassador to inquire after him.

"It is true that I have all I could ever want, but I fear that I will die soon and lose it all. Every night I lie in bed thinking of what I will lose."

With this answer the ambassador thought it wise not to take the king's shirt. When he was told the news, King Giphad was furious. He had no clue what to do next. His son was going to die sad and depressed. In desperate need of fresh air the king went off on a hunting trip.

In the fields, the king shot out at a hare a few meters away. The arrow only grazed the hare, and it escaped into the woods. Following quickly, the king moved far away from the rest of his party. After a few minutes he gave up looking for the hare and made to head back but suddenly stopped. There was a noise coming from his left. As he drew closer the king realized that it was someone whistling a small tune. Reaching the noise he saw a dashing handsome blond youth lying in the reeds. The lad was on his back gazing up at the many clouds in the sky.

"You there! Boy! Tell me...how would you like to be appointed to the highest position in the land as the king's personal advisor?"

"Advisor eh?" the youth sat up and scratched his chin. "Such a troublesome position. Sorry I'll have to pass. I'm fine enough as I am."

The king beamed at this answer.

"You're the one! Quickly! On your feet, boy!" He grabbed the youth and ran back to the men and his camp. "My son is saved! My son is saved!"

He turned to the young man and gestured warmly: "You, boy, may have from me whatever it is you wish. But I need...I need..."

The youth looked at the king strangely. "You need what?"

"My son the prince is dying and only you can save him. Come closer."

The king grabbed the youth, smiling his brightest smile and quickly began to unbutton the youth's jacket, then suddenly stopped.

His arms drooped to his sides.

The happy man wore no shirt.

This story tells us of seeking for something that will make someone happy. In this folktale, it was the shirt of a happy person. While we may scoff at the thought of this quest, that is not the point. The king seeks someone who had something that could make his son happy. Yet, even as the king of a powerful kingdom he failed in his quest. We may not be kings and queens but many of us are seeking things to make us happy. For some of us, we have found happiness in the pursuit of our career. For others, we seek to achieve our happiness through those around us, whether it be family or friends.

Some of us, find happiness in our hobbies or activities. There are a million memes out there about the source of happiness being crafting, old cars, books, or chocolate among a million other things. If you are looking for a thing or a method that will make you happy, all you need to do is perform a google search on books about happiness and you are going to be busy for quite a while. Each book will give you the author's quote unquote secret to happiness and how you can achieve it.

Yet, all these methods have you chasing the elation and the feeling of happiness that is here one moment and gone the next. It has many seeking to always have that feeling. This is actually one of the ways that addiction starts. It does not matter whether it is alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, or anything else. The catalyst, whether it is alcohol, drugs or something else, is used because of the happiness that it brings or the happiness that comes with event or people that are connected with the catalyst. For instance, some would say that when they go out drinking, they go with their friends and they have fun. Thus, they want to have that happen again. However, over time, the catalyst, in this instance, the alcohol, ensnares the person into believing that the happiness is coming from the alcohol and not the time with friends. The addict will start drinking alone for that feeling. The amount is increased over time to get the same feeling. In time, when not kept in check, that person is completely addicted and they are drinking because of the need to drink and the original pursuit of happiness is lost in the addiction. This can happen with drugs. This can happen with cigarettes. This can happen with things that some might not even consider addictive. Yet, this was all started in the quest for happiness. Some might even argue with me that they drink and this has not happened to them. You are right, that isn't what happens to everyone when they drink. My question for that person though is What is it that makes you happy and how has that affected your life?

While that question is hanging in the air, let me ask these things as well. Are we on a quest for the wrong thing? Is happiness really what we want or is there something wrong with happiness? Mark Twain seemed to think there was a problem with happiness. In his unfinished story, *Mysterious Stranger*, Mark wrote the very contentious thought; "Are you so unobservant as not to have found out that sanity and happiness are an impossible combination? No sane man can be happy, for to him life is real, and he sees what a fearful thing it is." Thus, In his mind those who were happy had no chance of being sane.

While Mark questioned sanity, I want us to look at what the bible says. Jesus as He was preparing his disciples for his crucifixion said, as it is written in John 16:22; "Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. We hear in this that while His disciples would be sad at his crucifixion, their joy would not be able to be taken away once he was resurrected. Jesus goes on to tell us, as is recorded in John 16:24; "Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." Thus, Jesus is telling us that if we ask in His name, we will have joy.

The Psalmist adds to this in Psalm 16:11 which says; "You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; in your right hand there are pleasures forever." We learn here that the fullness of joy is found in the presence of God. Then we hear in 1 Chronicles 16:27; "Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his dwelling place." So, wherever God dwells, there is joy.

Jesus also told us, as we hear in John 14:26; "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." Just as the Holy Spirit is there to teach us of what Christ taught, with the Holy Spirit comes the attributes that mark the Holy Spirit in us. We hear in Galatians 5:22-23; "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such

things there is no law.” With this, we learn that joy is but one of the incredible attributes that the Holy Spirit brings us.

So, while there are so many seeking happiness, we hear from Jesus and in other places in the Bible about Joy.

So what is the difference?

While happiness is a feeling that comes for a short while with something that gives us elation, it leaves us missing it when it is gone. Joy is a sustained emotion that comes with the Lord Jesus. It is a feeling of elation that is combined with peace and contentment. Those without God cannot find or maintain this in their lives. They can try as they may with every activity or plan that the world has to offer but without the Holy Spirit in their lives, they are trying to fill a void that can only be filled with a relationship with God.

Now please do not misunderstand my words. Having the joy that comes from Christ does not mean you will never know sorrow. It does not mean you will never feel pain. It does not mean that you will never experience hardship.

It means when we encounter these things, we will still have the joy of Christ. We will still have the peace and understanding that allows us to understand that no matter how things go here, our treasure is in Christ. Our joy is in Christ. We will stop endless seeking something that is fleeting. We will still have moments of happiness and there is nothing wrong with that. However, we will stop seeking happiness because we have joy. We will always have joy unending for Life in Christ is never ending.

If you are walking with Christ today, you already know joy. We may need to focus on it instead of seeking temporary happiness like so many others, but, we are blessed to know joy. We are blessed to know the Lord Jesus Christ. If we keep our focus on Him, on what He has taught us, and how to bring others to him, we cannot help but focus on the Joy that a life in Christ brings. We cannot help but see the beauty of God that surrounds us every day.

However, there may be some among us today or watching online that don't know Jesus. They don't know the love of God? They don't know the freedom that comes in the salvation of Jesus Christ. There are those who do not know the joy that the Holy Spirit brings.

Are you one of those people who don't know Christ? Are you someone who has turned away from God to seek temporal happiness? If you are, I have some questions for you.

Do you want to understand what it means to experience joy in your life? Do you want to know elation, peace and contentment like you have never had in your life? Do you want to be free from the things that bind you?

The joy that I have spoken of today comes from Jesus Christ, who came to save us from ourselves. God sent his Son upon the Earth to be born, to teach, to die and to be resurrected, so that in His death and resurrection we might be cleansed from our sins and be able to become part of the family of God. Upon His ascension to the right hand of the Father in Heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to Guide us, to Teach us, To Comfort Us, to Empower us, and to bring us the Joy that can only come from God.

Do you want to know joy? Do you want to be free from the sins that bind you? If this is you, All you need to do is ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior.

Romans 10:9 tells us; “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” So, if you want to experience joy, you can pray to God and confess this very thing. There is no reason to wait for your search is over. Joy is waiting for you.

So, today, we are going to do things a little differently. After the benediction, and after I greet everyone at the door, I will come back up to the front here to talk with anyone who wants to talk about joy in their life, freedom from sin, and a relationship with God. Amen.