

**HAPPINESS IS...  
DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE  
PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26; 4:10-13  
JULY 15, 2012**

Are you happy?

In this recession economy, with people unemployed, underemployed, employed but worried,  
there's a lot of unhappiness around.

Add to that the usual dynamics of major political campaigns,  
and unhappiness abounds.

Don't we want to be happy?

The Declaration of Independence states that we have "certain unalienable rights,  
that among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

And I think we'd all vote in favor of happiness, wouldn't we?

Most people spend an awful lot of time and treasure in the pursuit of happiness.

Where and how do you try to find happiness?

Tell the person next to you:

What would make you happy?

Sometimes all the things we'd pursue make up a bucket list,  
a list of things we want to do before we kick the bucket.

And sometimes all those things make up a song.

There was a song when I was a kid called, "Happiness Is," by Ray Coniff.

Happiness is  
Different things to different people

That's what happiness is

To the preacher

It's a prayer, prayer, prayer

To the Beatles

It's a "Yeah, Yeah, Yeah"

To the golfer

It's a hole in one

To the father

It's a brand new son

To the beatnik

It's his beard, beard, beard

To the monster

Something weird, weird, weird

To a night owl

It's a good days sleep

To the Yankee's

It's a four game sweep

On the desert

It's a drink, drink, drink

To the show girl

It's a mink, mink, mink

To the banker

Lots and lots of dough

To a racer

It's a GTO

To a sailor

It's the sea, sea, sea

To my mother

Why, it's me, me, me  
 To the birdies  
 It's the sky above  
 But, to my mind  
It's the one I love  
 Happiness is  
 Different things to different people  
 That's what happiness is  
 So often we think we know what will make us happy.  
 And when we get that something, we're not happy.  
 So we may assume we need MORE of whatever it is.  
 This much money is nice, but I'm just not happy.  
 So maybe I need some more.  
 This much alcohol in my system.  
 This much achievement.  
 This much approval from others.  
 This many toys of whatever sort.  
 A newer car, a bigger house, designer clothing,  
 a better motorcycle, a different kind of rifle, the newest iPhone.  
 But it never seems to be enough.  
 Oh, it's fun for a while.  
 A laugh here, a thrill there, a moment of pleasure.  
 But it fades.  
 And when we try *more* of whatever,  
 in time it fades, too.  
 Could it be we're not coming up short on quantities,  
 but we're going after the wrong stuff altogether?  
 What is it, really, that brings happiness?  
 One way to learn to be happy is to find and learn from a happiness mentor.  
 Find someone who seems to be truly happy,  
 hang around with them,  
 and learn their secrets.  
 One happiness mentor I find helpful is the apostle Paul.  
 At one of his most "upbeat" moments the apostle Paul was sitting in prison.  
 This man who spent so much time and energy traveling from city to city,  
 telling people about Jesus, leading people into faith,  
 establishing and nurturing churches.  
 And now he's locked up.  
 It sounds to me like a great excuse for a pity party.  
 If it was me...  
 "I'm a prisoner. Behind bars.  
 Sleeping in a hard floor and eating cruddy food.  
 Why? Because I preached Jesus.  
 And where is God now?  
 Why did you let this happen to me?  
 Why aren't you getting me out of here?  
 This is not fair."  
 And I just hear God's answer,  
 "Would you like some cheese with that whine?"  
 Do you know what Paul did while sitting in prison?

He wrote a letter to the church in Philippi,  
 a letter known as the letter of joy.  
 In that short letter he used the word “joy” or “rejoice” 16 times!

He’s sitting in prison,  
 deprived of his freedom,  
 blocked from his usual work,  
 eating prison food,  
 and his very life could be in danger.

While he’s locked away,  
 some other preachers are going around to Paul’s churches  
 trying to make a name for themselves  
 and take in a little profit at the same time.

Paul had every reason to be angry, scared or depressed.

But here’s what he said.

**PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26**

This is a guy I want for a happiness mentor.  
 The rivals who were preaching Christ out of selfish ambition?

Paul says, “Christ is proclaimed in every way,  
 whether out of false motives or true;  
 and in that I rejoice.  
 Yes, and I will continue to rejoice.”

(1:18-19)

He’s been ordered to stop preaching Christ, or else.

He says, What’s the worst they can do to me?  
 Execute me?

Whether I live or die, it’s all good.

“For me to live Is Christ,”  
 that is, I can continue serving in his name,  
 “and to die is gain.”

I get to go to heaven!

(1:21)

If you let me live, I keep on following Christ and serving him.

If you kill me, I get to go be with him in heaven.

I win either way.

You choose the way.

It makes no difference to me.

What an attitude!

What are you going to do with a guy like that?

In chapter 4 he says,

“Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!”

(4:4)

**PHILIPPIANS 4:10-14**

Paul rejoices that the Christians of Philippi care about his well-being.

“It’s good to know you’re concerned that I’m in prison.”

“But,” he says, “I’m OK. No, more than OK, I’m content.

My external circumstances do not determine if I’m content or if I have joy.

I can be content in any and every situation,

hungry or well fed, having plenty or poor, free or in prison.

Because my contentment and my joy do not depend on anything outside of me...

except Christ.

But it’s still nice to know you care about my situation.

I appreciate it.”

What was his secret?

How could Paul have such peace, contentment, and even joy  
while looking through prison bars at an uncertain future?  
He entrusted his unknown future to a known God.

Paul found joy, I think, because he focused all his attention and energy on knowing Christ,  
on serving and obeying him,  
on growing closer to him,  
on living every moment for him.

In fact, he said compared with growing closer to Christ,  
everything else in life,  
even Paul's Jewish heritage and his greatest religious accomplishments,  
were rubbish. (3:7-14)

Well, his actual language was a bit more colorful than that,  
having to do with bodily elimination.  
He said all those other things besides Christ were just a pile of something.  
But most English translations say rubbish or refuse.  
His relationship with Jesus was that important to him.  
In comparison to Jesus, nothing else really mattered.  
So if everything else was missing from his life,  
he still had the one thing that mattered most... Christ.

It often seems that those who pursue happiness the hardest are the ones missing it the most.  
Their goal is to "make me happy, give me pleasure."  
But it always seems to be fleeting, never lasting  
It always just out of reach.

Ironically, those who die to self,  
those who give up seeking "what I want and what I like,"  
and focus on following Jesus  
are often the ones most satisfied with life.

Sadly, many people think of Christians in terms of solemnity, seriousness, and severity.

I heard a story about a country boy whose  
grandmother forbade him to engage in "worldly amusements" on Sunday.  
First you go to church.  
Then, once you're home,  
there would be no television, no going to the movies, no loud play, nothing.  
One Sunday afternoon he was feeling dejected and lonely,  
so he walked down to the barn and leaned against the fence.  
A mule came to the fence and put his head  
over the fence and onto the boy's shoulder.  
Patting the sad face of the mule, the boy said,  
"Poor fellow, you must be a Christian, too."

But Jesus did not come to publish a long list of "thou shalt nots."  
He did not die to take away your fun.  
He came to make life free from sin,  
full, meaningful, abundant, joyful.  
That's why, at a wedding, he turned water into wine.  
Let the party go on!  
Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (Jn.10:10)  
Have life to the full.

And, get this, if we'll learn how to do that,

how to live the full life he offers,  
     we'll find the joy and contentment of kingdom life.  
 And then we'll find temptation to sin much less tempting.  
     The whole idea of temptation to sin is that it is tempting.  
     Think through the areas of your life where you most struggle to be faithful to Christ,  
     the areas where you are most tempted to sin.  
     The Tempter does not come along and try to tempt us with the outrageous and outlandish.  
         He suggests something just a little over the line,  
             then a little further over the line, and a little further.  
         It's just one bite out of a piece of fruit.  
             How bad can that be, really?  
     And it's always a forbidden thought, word, or deed  
         where you think you can find happiness, joy, pleasure, fulfillment,  
         something positive, something you want,  
         something you think you need.

But if you're finding all that you need, all that you want, in Christ,  
     if you find joy, contentment, fulfillment, happiness in him,  
         then temptation is not nearly so tempting.  
 If we can find what the apostle Paul found,  
     living an increasingly Christ-like life will become more within reach.

One young man was often sick as a baby.

He was always small, puny some would say.  
 As a youth he was always frail and delicate.  
     He was not able to play sports with the other boys his age.  
 Eventually he entered the ministry.  
     But his health was so fragile, he was unable to serve his growing congregation.  
     Amazingly, he did not dwell on his troubles.  
     In fact, his spirit soared.  
         His only real complaint in life was the poor quality of the hymns of his day.  
         He felt they did not convey hope and joy.  
         Someone challenged him to write better ones.  
             So he did.  
             He wrote over 600 hymns, most of them hymns of praise.

When his health collapsed completely in 1748, and he died.

But he left a wonderful collection of hymns.

His name was Isaac Watts.

You know one of his most famous hymns,  
     "Joy to the World!"  
     "Joy to the world, the Lord is come,  
         let earth receive her king.  
         Let every heart prepare him room.  
         Let heaven and nature sing."

Isaac Watts discovered joy in his life because he knew that God was with him.

Even in his poor health and its restrictions,  
     he knew God was with him.

He had joy deep in his heart.

Christians have good reason to be the happiest people in the world.

Our happiness is not based upon external circumstances.

We can be happy because of God,

God who is with us,  
God who is for us,  
God who is constant and dependable,  
even when all the circumstances around us are a mess.  
There is the solid source for joy.