

LIVING
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**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Nothing Will Make You Happy.

Monday, May 29, 2017

Do you remember that one toy that you begged your parents for as a kid? If you're an '80s baby, it may have been Mr. Potato Head, a Cabbage Patch doll, or Star Wars. To the '90s kids, maybe it was adding to your collection of Beanie Babies, a GameBoy, or a Nerf Gun. Most children these days are asking for cell phones, iPads, or iPods. Even as adults, we think our perfect house, the dream job, or a car can keep us happy. If we're honest with ourselves though, after a week or two of receiving the toy we've been longing for, or after two months into our "dream job," our excitement and happiness fade, and we're once again looking for more updated and "in-style" things. But what "thing" can make us happy long-term? Nothing. We will always be on the run for happiness if we are looking at "things" to fill the emptiness in our hearts.

Andy Stanley points out in one of his messages that we have forgotten what makes us happy. It's not about *what* makes us happy, but *who* makes us happy. All through school, it was never about what made us happy, as long as we were included in the right group of friends. **Happy "what" always leads to happy "what else."** An example of this is what Andy Stanley explains as the GlobalX Syndrome. If you've been on a mission trip or have experienced a poverty-stricken area, you've probably wondered at some point or another how people are so happy with nothing. How can someone be so happy without a T.V.? How can children be so happy playing with items found in the trash, or how can people be so happy eating the same meal every single day? It's not about "what" they have but "who" they are spending life with. It's about the relationships.

Stanley goes on to explain that people who are happy are at peace with themselves. They are not trying to pretend to be someone else. They are at peace with others, not angry or bitter toward someone, and are forgiving. Happy people are at peace with God. They have trust in him that in the end, everything will work out, and that he is forever Sovereign. "Anything that undermines your peace ultimately undermines your happiness." If we are at peace, we are happy. The greatest command that Jesus tells us in Matthew 22:37-39 is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: love your neighbor as yourself." God desires peace with us and desires us to be at peace with our neighbors. Without peace, we cannot live happy, fulfilling lives.

Not only do we have the choice to be at peace with God and with others, but we also have the choice to be isolated from God and others. Our sin separates us from the relationships in our life. Peace is eroded when we bring sin into our relationships, and it also breaks the peace we have with God. We all have sinned

and will continue to sin, intentionally and unintentionally, but we have the power to believe that we are and can be released from captivity and enjoy restored relationships. Romans 3:23-24 says, "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty of our sins."

What are you pursuing that you think will bring you happiness?

Rather than seeking a "thing" to make you happy, with whom can you build and strengthen relationships?

What separates us from God and others, and erodes our happiness?

Prayer:

God, thank you so much for the happiness that you desire for us and for the capability you have given us to grasp that happiness. I pray that if there is any "thing" in my life that I have been chasing for my happiness, that you would reveal it to me and give me the wisdom, grace, and boldness to instead find peace in you and others in my life. Amen.

Being Happy is a Choice.

Tuesday, May 30, 2017

Think about a time when you were happy, so happy that you walked around with a big goofy grin on your face! What were the circumstances? Did your team win a sporting event? Did you take a family vacation? Did your children do something to make you proud? Now think about your life. How happy are you with yourself – your health, your career, your relationships, your hobbies? Do you find yourself wishing you were someone else, or are you happy with yourself just the way you are?

Being happy with yourself does not make you a selfish person. It does not mean you put yourself above everyone as a higher priority. Instead, as Andy Stanley says, you can't be at peace with yourself until you're at peace with God and with others.

Numerous studies have attempted to determine what makes people happy. Psychologists have evaluated material wealth, stress levels, physical health, employment status, relationships, and so on. They have determined that happiness is partly emotional – intensely positive feelings – but true happiness lasts longer than a burst of dopamine. Your sense of happiness also includes cognitive reflections, your expectations, your ideals, your acceptance of what you can't change, and countless other factors.

So, if psychology doesn't have a magic formula for happiness, where does that leave us? Dr. Robert Biswas-Diener and Todd Kashdan in their article, ["What Happy People Do Differently,"](#) write, "regardless of your emotional set point, your everyday habits and choices – from the way you operate in a friendship to how you reflect on your life decisions – can push the needle on your well-being." Let's look at what this means from a biblical perspective.

Romans 8:1-2 gives us insight into how to find happiness and ultimate peace. It says there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. God looks at us, and because of Jesus, he does not condemn us. When our eternity is secure, and we know God values us as we are, that is when we can find ultimate peace with ourselves. Nothing else can give us this peace. We cannot be at peace with ourselves until we know that God loves us.

Romans 8:1-2

¹So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ²And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

What does it mean to belong to Christ Jesus?

How do you know whether you belong?

Who is the life-giving Spirit? What power does he have?

If being happy is a choice, what is one thing that is preventing you from being at peace with yourself?

What thought or behavior can you change to overcome this obstacle?

Prayer:

God, thank you for the saving grace offered through your Son, Jesus Christ. Help me to remember your goodness. Help me to see myself as you see me, as valuable and worthy of happiness. Amen.

This post was written by Kaye Althaus, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Do You Have Peace with Everyone?

Wednesday, May 31, 2017

In the first installment of the new series, “What Makes You Happy?” Pastor Andy Stanley outlined three essential ingredients to happiness: Being at peace with ourselves, being at peace with others, and being at peace with God.

Stanley derives this recipe for happiness from Matthew 22, in which Jesus was asked by a lawyer,

³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus replied, ³⁷“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbors as yourself.’”

The value of – and connection between – these three aspects of a happy life is evident. “Peace with God paves the way to peace with ourselves and equips us to make peace with others,” Stanley said in this weekend’s video sermon.

Yesterday’s edition of *LivingItOut* examined what it means to be at peace with ourselves. Today, we dig into the second element of this triad: What it means to be at peace with others.

So, just what does it mean to be at peace with others?

First and foremost, it is clear that God desires us to follow his example. God loves us the way he loves Jesus. Therefore, we can be assured that he desires us to demonstrate a similar approach to caring for and about our fellow man. To this end, he desires that we love, forgive, serve, and pray for others.

But as we know, this is often easier said than done.

If you attended or watched the first installment of the “What Makes You Happy?” series, you may recall hearing “C’mon Get Happy,” the upbeat theme song from the seventies television show, *The Partridge Family*, during the video introduction. Actor and musician David Cassidy, best known for his role as Keith Partridge on the show, sang lead vocals on the song. As a teen idol in the early seventies, Cassidy once said, “I read in one fan magazine that I was very self-centered,” before adding, “And I am.”

We all know people whom we would consider to be self-centered (though most are not as forthcoming about it as Cassidy!). But have you ever considered how much of our earthly experience *is* centered on ourselves? Or, by extension, how this aligns with God’s commandment that we love our neighbors as ourselves?

From the moment we awaken each day, we live life in the first person. If you're like me, your thoughts all-too-quickly turn to your obligations and plans for the day ahead. Even as we're still rubbing the sleep from our eyes, we begin taking stock of the day ahead through our unique lens. (In my case, this usually involves determining (a) What day it is, and (b) Whether I can afford to engage the snooze alarm on my iPhone to grant me another precious nine minutes of rest.)

No matter how sincerely we may desire to be more selfless in our thoughts and actions, the fact is that we each experience life through a unique lens. We process life through our own eyes, ears, and hearts. Within our minds, our thoughts are voiced by an internal narrative that, at least in my case, too often turns to a focus on "what does this all mean to me?"

If this all sounds a little, well, self-centered, I'm afraid that's because we are. To some degree, we are inherently always thinking about ourselves. And perhaps this is at least part of the reason why Jesus exhorts us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

What if we were able to transform and leverage our personal thoughts and experiences as a means of being at peace with others? What if we used the things we think about all day – *our* hunger, *our* pain, *our* worries, *our* desires, and so on – as triggers to help us better understand and be at peace with *others* who may be enduring these same issues?

Poet Walt Whitman spoke to this empathetic approach in his epic poem, *Song of Myself*. "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels," Whitman writes. "I myself become the wounded person."

We all know how easy it is to get agitated with another person, particularly those we do not know. As an example, most of us who drive can recall a time (or many) when another driver irritated us by cutting in front of us, tailgating, or otherwise driving unsafely. But my guess is that we can also recall a time when we failed to see another vehicle when switching lanes or became exasperated by a slower driver and followed too closely. When we remember that we all make mistakes, we realize why we are called to extend grace to others as God does to us. Even when someone is intentionally rude, we know that God would not stop loving them for making a poor choice. And we know that he desires the same of us.

Being at peace with others works in both directions; it benefits us as well. To be certain, we are influenced by the actions, expectations, and perspectives of our fellow man. And thank goodness for this! What an insular and hollow life this would be if we experienced it in isolation.

A beautiful dynamic is set into motion when we are in community and at peace with others. Corporate worship, or gathering with fellow believers to worship,

presents a vivid example of the benefits of community. "One of the most important ways the community helps us is by embodying Christ's continuing presence on earth," says Howard Macy, professor emeritus of Religion and Biblical Studies at George Fox University. "When my brothers and sisters love and accept me, I feel Christ's love, too. When I confess my sin and they forgive me, I know that God forgives me, too. When they pray for my brokenness, I know that they are sharing in the healing work of Jesus."

Being at peace with others also requires that we not limit our care for others to only selected people. Dr. Charles Stanley, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Atlanta (and Andy Stanley's father), says,

Jesus doesn't discriminate with regard to whose burdens he will carry.

"We are often tempted to be selective in choosing which acquaintances to help," the elder Stanley writes. "According to Jesus' example, we cannot bear someone else's burdens based upon whether that person has lived up to some standard we have set. Some people will never dress like us, hold opinions similar to ours, or share our interests. But those same individuals might be hurting and in need of somebody to help carry their difficulties. A genuine expression of godly love can transform the life of a person weighed down by struggles."

One of God's greatest gifts is the joy we receive from serving others. It's no accident, I believe, that when we care about and help others, we often walk away feeling as though we derived even more fulfillment from the experience than those we served. It's no surprise then that Jesus considers the capacity to love our neighbors as we do ourselves to be such a vital component of our walk with him.

To what extent do you wrestle with God's commandment to love our neighbors as we do ourselves?

Do you find it harder to extend grace to others or to keep others in your thoughts consistently?

What steps can you take this week to be more purposeful in being at peace with others?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I thank you for the unconditional love and grace you always extend to me. Help me to more genuinely appreciate the value and importance

of loving, forgiving, serving, and praying for my fellow man, and being resolute in my ongoing quest to be at peace with others. Amen.

This post was written by Todd Romain, a regular editor, and contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

What Makes You Happy?

Thursday, June 1, 2017

Founding documents of the U.S. government state that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

So, what is this thing called happiness that we are supposed to pursue? What does it mean to be happy? What does it mean to be a happy person?

Andy Stanley preaches that nothing - or *no thing* - makes us happy. If that is true, then why do we pursue or purchase the newest phone? The fastest car? The biggest house in the best neighborhood? More and more stuff? If none of these things truly make us happy, then what does? We can find this answer in God's word.

Some people might believe the Bible is nothing but a book of don'ts.

Old Testament Hebrews had over 600 laws to follow. God gave clear standards for living a holy life to the Israelites. They were to be separate and distinct from the pagan nations around them.

The lyrics of Little Big Town's country music song, *Happy People*, relates to the many Old Testament laws listed in Leviticus 19.

*Happy people don't cheat
Happy people don't lie
They don't judge, or hold a grudge, don't criticize*

*Happy people don't hate
Happy people don't steal
'Cause all the hurt sure ain't worth all the guilt they feel*

*Happy people don't fail
Happy people just learn
Don't think that you're above the push and shove
They just wait their turn,*

The song goes on to tell us that:

*If you wanna know the secret
Can't buy it, gotta make it
You ain't ever going to be it by taking someone else's away*

Never take it for granted

*You don't have to understand it
Here's to whatever puts a smile on your face
Whatever makes you happy people*

These are the things that make me happy:

Kisses from my husband, spending time talking with my children and their families, kisses, and hugs, and blowing bubbles with the little boys that call me Grammy! The smell of lilacs, the feel of the dirt while planting tomatoes and peppers, following a fluttering butterfly around the backyard, remembering family while making an old family recipe, catching up with a dear friend over lunch, and being a little sore after a good workout in the pool. These things make me happy! Realizing that God has blessed me. And being at peace.

What makes you happy?

When we look at our text in Matthew, Jesus tells us what all the laws mean. He answers a question we - even if we don't know it - are all asking. We want to be happy, and ultimately, our happiness can only come from being at peace with God. Jesus, in this text, tells us how to be at peace with God.

Matthew 22:35-40

³⁴But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees with his reply, they met together to question him again. ³⁵One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: ³⁶“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?”

³⁷Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

The *entire* law depends on these commands.

What does it look like to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind?

How can you turn your heart, soul, and mind toward God?

How can doing this bring you happiness?

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me and guiding me to peace! Help me to love you with all my heart, soul, and mind. Please help me to love everyone around me as much as I love myself. Amen.

You Can Be at Peace with God Right Now.

Friday, June 2, 2017

He stood there before the crowd, a condemned man. He knew just how he was going to die long before this moment. Standing there willingly and having denied himself several opportunities to escape the terrifying fate he faced, he looked at all the witnesses present for the horrifying spectacle not once denying the God whom he knew cared for him even in the midst of a nightmare.

What does the word *peace* mean to you?

You might think about making peace with someone, how sweet peace and quiet sounds, or maybe the utopian idea of world peace. There probably aren't any situations in which peace carries negative connotations.

Peace is desirable. Everyone wants it.

But, what is it? How do we know we have "peace?"

What kind of peace should we be pursuing?

The truth is, there is no real peace if there is no peace with God.

No matter how at peace you are with others, with your current work, home, or social situations, you have not truly experienced peace unless you are at peace with God.

All of us - every human being - was created by and for God. As author and Christian Apologist C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Weight of Glory*, "You have never talked to a mere mortal... it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit."

God creates us as immortal souls awaiting our eternal home. If we are not at peace with God, we cannot experience true peace anywhere else in our life.

How do we know we are at peace with God?

Some think it's self-evident that when you're at peace with God; you just know it. Others claim that because we will struggle with sin until we die, we can never be at peace with God.

Fortunately for us, the Apostle Paul provides clues for the answer to this question. In his letter to the church in Colossae, he wrote:

¹⁹For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, ²⁰and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

²¹This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. ²²Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. (Colossians 1:19-22).

The peace we should be striving for, the peace that surpasses all peace, and the peace needed to be at peace is... the presence of God.

Notice that Paul writes, "He has brought you into his own presence," not, "he will bring you into his own presence." He is saying that now -- right now -- you have the presence of God. To further prove the point, he writes, "you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault." Again, he doesn't write, "and you *will be* holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault." No, he writes, "you **are** holy and blameless." That is, you are holy and blameless **right now**.

Any lack of peace with God is due to our sin. However, if we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, we no longer suffer from this lack of peace; we are, as Paul tells us, holy and blameless. We are, as Paul tells us, brought into the presence of God.

"He has brought you into his own presence." What could possibly be more peaceful than this? As Christ-followers, this is the longing of our hearts. It is the deepest desire of our souls - to be united in the presence of the one who created us. It is not *peace* that we pursue; it is the direct result of seeking Jesus. Peace is a necessary and guaranteed byproduct in the pursuit of Jesus.

The problem is, many of us have convinced ourselves that we can't experience this here on earth. We really believe that we can't experience peace with God because of our sin, or we're so excited for heaven and the full peace we will experience there, that it is something we merely await.

Of course, we cannot experience the fullness of the presence of God and the absence of sin until we stand in his presence that glorious day in heaven; however, he has given us the opportunity to experience this peace here on earth.

What can we do to experience this peace with God now? It is promised to us, so how do we access it?

It starts with living as if the promises made in Colossians 1:21-22 are true. Yes, we might say they're true, but until we live that out, we won't experience the peace that God wants us to experience.

We live as if the blood of Christ has made us clean, and therefore, we are holy and blameless and in the presence of God (the Holy Spirit *does* live in us).

This means we live boldly for Jesus, we confess humbly because of Jesus, and we die to ourselves willingly for Jesus.

The condemned man stood before the crowd, ready and willing to die. Though his story is strikingly similar to that of our Lord and Savior Jesus', he was but a servant of Jesus. His name was Polycarp, and he was burned at the stake around 160 AD. He had multiple opportunities to escape his fate, to spew angry words at his persecutors, or to recant his faith. Instead, as the men ready to torch him alive asked him only to deny Christ to escape the awful death awaiting him, his reply was, "86 years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?" This wasn't the last time his enemies would implore him to recant his faith. He never gave in. Instead, he was burned at the stake and pierced with a dagger. He did all this willingly and joyfully.

This is peace with God.

No matter the circumstances.

No matter the outcome.

Peace with God is trusting that Christ's death is sufficient and that he is with you.

How do the promises of holiness and blamelessness encourage you to trust God more fully?

What can you do to practice living in the peace of God today?

Prayer:

Gracious and Heavenly Father, you are all I need. Peace with you is all I need. I want to live in your presence. I want to experience your peace. Thank you for your Spirit, which I know lives within me. Help me to live like those promises are true because I know they are. I ask this in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

To read the account of Polycarp's last days, [click here](#).

This post was written by Andy Rectenwald, the Director of the LivingItOut Bible Study.