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**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Insanity, Slavery, and Following Jesus.

Monday, June 26, 2017

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results. -Albert Einstein.

No, it isn't.

And Einstein probably never said it.

In fact, if you search any online - or print - dictionary, you'll realize *that* definition appears in none of them.

While Einstein may not have provided an official definition of insanity, it is a good description of "[utterly foolish or unreasonable](#)" behavior.

What is it you do, that, according to this "definition," is insane?

It might be eating far too much ice cream, knowing you'll end up feeling ill. It could be saying yes to *one more episode* even though you know you'll regret it in the morning.

It could be any one of many silly behaviors, or it could be something more serious and far more damaging than occasionally overeating ice cream or watching too much television.

This past weekend, Andy Stanley talked about *happiness* and *pleasure*. He said that many times, our lack of happiness is due to our pursuit of pleasure.

While pleasure, in and of itself, is not bad (God designed certain things in a certain way to give us pleasure), our pursuit of pleasure at the expense of our happiness is bad. In fact, it is most likely sin.

As Andy said, it's not pleasure that's bad; it's the fact that we prioritize pleasure over our happiness. We say yes to certain things over and over again, even to the point where *we no longer have the ability to say no*. We are, in essence, enslaved to this pleasure.

In Romans 6:16 (NIV), the Apostle Paul wrote, "***Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?***"

We wouldn't say that we are slaves to anything. Those bad behaviors, those pleasures we pursue, might be difficult things with which we struggle, but we aren't enslaved to them, right?

According to Paul (Romans 6:16), we are.

Andy used a striking metaphor to explain our enslavement to these pleasures. He said that it's not that when the doorbell (the temptation for that pleasure) rings, you answer it. It's that you're staring at the window waiting for it to show up.

This is enslavement to pleasure.

This is what Paul was talking about in Romans 6:16.

Jesus, in John 10:10a, talks about this when he says,

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;

In the context of this passage, the thief is not Satan. Instead, the thief seems to be [false teachers](#). These false teachers led many people astray, ultimately destroying their lives. However, aren't we also thieves? Andy Stanley argues that often when it comes to our happiness, we are the thieves. We usually don't need someone to come in and destroy our happiness. Instead, we do it on our own by pursuing pleasure first, thinking it will ultimately make us happy.

The pursuit of pleasure does not ultimately provide happiness... it enslaves us and steals our joy. Jesus offers us something much better:

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:10b-11, NIV)

What is this "full" life? It is a life of following Jesus, or as the ESV Study Bible says, it is "a rich, full, joyful life, one overflowing with meaningful activities under the personal favor and blessing of God and in continual fellowship with his people."

Why don't we choose this?

Because we've confused pleasure with happiness.

Ultimately, our happiness can only come from this life with Jesus. When we pursue closeness with him, real pleasure follows. As Paul wrote, when we are slaves to obedience - to God, righteousness - a right relationship with God - follows.

Are you currently choosing a pleasure over your ultimate happiness?

If so, identify it.

What can you do today to turn to the good shepherd and find pure joy in him?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I know I've chosen the pleasures of this world over a good relationship with you. I've said yes so many times, that it has become impossible for me to say no. I need your mercy, and I need your help. Help me to break free from this enslavement and help me to follow you. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Shoes and Jesus.

Tuesday, June 27, 2017

I love shoes! I love the fact that Andy Stanley titled his message from last weekend, "Shoes." I have lots of shoes – certainly, more than my long-suffering husband thinks I need (but don't ask him about his golf shirts!). I have had to put a condition in place for my shoe purchasing. I must give away a pair to buy another (except for athletic shoes - I am a daily exerciser!) Now, I don't have as many shoes as Imelda Marcos, the wife of the deposed president of the Philippines, had. In a quote from the Christian Science Monitor dated September 24, 2012, Jim Gomez of the Associated Press wrote, "Imelda Marcos left behind at least 1,220 pairs of shoes, along with a vast collection of clothes and accessories, when she fled with her husband, Ferdinand Marcos, during a 1986 uprising." Gomez continues, "they left behind staggering amounts of personal belongings, clothes and art objects at the palace, including Imelda Marcos' shoes, which have come to symbolize her extravagance amid crushing poverty in the Southeast Asia country."

If you look at Imelda's history, you find that she didn't start out thinking that she needed 1,220 pairs of shoes; in fact, she experienced many hardships at a young age. Her mother died when she was 8, and her father's law practice tanked around the same time. She had five younger siblings as well as many half-siblings from her father's first marriage. She left that poverty and moved to Manila, where she met Ferdinand and married him after an 11-day courtship. In their rise to power, they took advantage of every move to improve their circumstances. Just as no one wants to believe that Imelda and Ferdinand set out to rob the people of the Philippines with their selfishly extravagant spending, it isn't difficult for any of us to talk ourselves into the thought that we are entitled to have whatever we think we want or need.

At what point does our desire for pleasure become an obsession or an addiction? These days, it seems most of us cannot stop thinking of the next purchase, the next drink, the next fix, the next meal, the next look at pornography. In his letter to the church in Rome, the Apostle Paul wrote, "***Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?*** (Romans 6:16 NIV)

When we repeatedly give in to pleasures, it becomes easier to give in to them, even to the point where we no longer have the power to say no. But the verse also indicates that if we choose to obey God, this obedience leads to righteousness.

If you are a Christ-follower, you have a power that lives in you to bring you victory when those pleasures become sin for you. Romans 6:2 says, *"We (Christ-followers) are those who have died to sin."* Romans 6:6-7 says, *"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been set free from sin."* Think about the significance of those statements. If someone dies, that person is no longer plagued by the sin they battled in life. Our sins' death -- and our spiritual life -- come through our identification with Jesus Christ, who died in our place on the cross to satisfy sins' judgment by a holy, righteous, and just God. In verse 11, Paul writes, ***"In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ."*** Our sinful appetites no longer master us; we lean into the power of the Holy Spirit, the power God used to raise Christ from the dead. In 2 Peter 1:3, Peter writes, ***"His divine power has given us everything we need to live a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."*** That means we have the Holy Spirit's power to live in a right relationship with God. We can choose obedience because we have died to sin, and live for Christ. And the verse indicates that the more we choose obedience, we desire to be more obedient because that righteousness brings life and joy and happiness. This is a daily decision: choose to die to self and selfish desires or choose obedience.

We find true happiness in our obedience to God because he loves us – he is good in a way that makes us want more of him, not the “good” stuff that brings us pleasure one minute, only to be tossed aside for the next new thing.

What, if anything, in your life has crossed over from pleasure to obsession?

In what ways can you choose to be obedient to God this very day, this week, in your finances, in your relationships, in your spending? See if it gets easier to say “yes” to God and “no” to self and excess.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, give me the courage and wisdom to acknowledge where I have substituted pleasure for the joy of knowing and obeying you. Give me the courage then to ask for help in finding the first steps I need to take to put you first. I know the plans you have for me are better than anything I have tried to substitute for the joy of your presence. Amen.

Ever Feel Like You're Hanging by a Thread?

Wednesday, June 28, 2017

The band "Rush" has a song entitled "Freewill." In this song, there is a lyric that says: ***"If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice."***

Profound. We all have a choice, and when we do nothing, we still make a choice. There is no way out of it, no tiptoeing around it. This is truth.

We learned yesterday that we can choose to obey or choose not to obey. If we choose neither, then **we have chosen not to obey.**

As Christians, we have the choice to follow God or follow our own path, and we should thank God for the ability that he gives us to obey. Without him, we would be stuck in our pattern of sin with no way of ever changing.

¹⁷But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Romans 6:17-18 NIV)

It's interesting that Paul chose to use the imagery of slavery.

In the movie "12 Years a Slave," a man named Solomon Northup is kidnapped and placed into the very real and very tragic slave trade. There is a moment in the movie where his neck is placed into a noose in preparation for hanging. However, when he is hung, he can touch the ground with his tiptoes and manages to stay alive for hours standing on them while his hands are tied behind his back.

Paul used the language of slavery to explain to us our predicament. The only difference is that slaves didn't have a choice, we do.

Metaphorically, the noose is our sin; it chokes us and has a death grip on us. We try and fight to get away from it, but it will not let go of us, and we struggle and struggle to break free, only to be dangling on our tippy-toes with our hands tied behind our backs. Hopeless.

We cannot provide our own righteousness. We are not capable.

Jesus offers us freedom and righteousness. Only he has the power to release that noose around our neck and the bindings around our hands.

We all have a master; it is either sin or Christ. Christ is the master of the righteous. When we choose sin more than we choose righteousness, we become enslaved to sin. **It becomes easier to sin.** On the contrary, when we seek God and follow him, it becomes simpler to live righteously.

What does it look like for someone to seek righteousness? How does that play out in the Christian's life?

- David hid God's word in his heart. We need to learn scripture and do the same. (Psalm 119:11)
- Seek God and his will daily. (Matthew 6:33)
- Live by the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22)

We can only have freedom through Christ. Without him, we are chained to our sins, with no hope of ever breaking free.

Only Christ has the power to defeat sin and death. When we became Christians, our sinful nature died, and it no longer has power over us. We, too, died with Christ, and it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us.

What pattern of living are you following – sin or righteousness?

Read Psalm 119. Highlight or write down all the ways David seeks righteousness.

Is there something in your life that is preventing you from living a righteous life?

Have you ever felt like a slave to your sin? Explain.

Prayer

Lord, you are the only one that can help me to lead a righteous life. I ask for your wisdom and guidance as I seek you in all I do. Give me a desire for you and the strength to live that out. Amen.

This post was written by Stephen Dull, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

We Were Enslaved, and We Still Are.

Thursday, June 29, 2017

You are free.

If you are a Christ-follower, if you call yourself a Christian, if Jesus' death and resurrection have covered your sins and saved you from an eternity separated from him, **you are free.**

Free to live as a slave to Christ.

Sounds paradoxical, right? How can you be a slave and free at the same time?

Over the past few days, we've been talking about what it's like to be enslaved to our pleasures and how we instead should be slaves to Christ. When we take a step back, however, and think about what we're saying – what Paul was saying – it sounds absurd!

Sure, we say this often. We know, as Christians, that we are "slaves to Christ," but have we thought about what it means to be a slave to Christ? Does this mean that he controls our every move? Does it mean that we can't physically do anything without his permission first?

Of course not. Our personal experiences prove this to be untrue. So, what does it mean?

Let's look at what Paul wrote to the church in Rome.

²²But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:22-23 NIV)

We have been **set free** from sin.

What are we set free **to** do?

We have been set free, by Jesus, to be slaves of God.

This enslavement to God is the deepest desire of our heart. It provides for us benefits unlike *anything* we've ever experienced through the pursuit of pleasure. The benefit is *holiness*, which results in *eternal life*.

The deepest desire of our heart – **the thing** we were created for – is relationship with God. As we know, our sins have fractured this relationship, and the only way to renew it is to be *perfect*, to be *holy*.

Jesus has done this for us. He has made us new again. He has made us holy.

We are slaves to the one true God in that we *rest* in his provision and we rest in the fact that we have nothing to prove. We are free to prove nothing to God.

Now, we are set free to live like we are holy, because we are!

We follow the commands of God – the two most important being loving him and loving others – not because we need to prove something to God, but because we have been set free to do so!

Why is it so difficult for us to understand the concept of being “slaves to God”?

How have you experienced the freedom of being a slave to God?

What can you do today to live as a slave to God?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your mercy and your grace. I know that I was once a slave to my former desires and pleasures, but I also know that you've freed me from that enslavement through the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus. Help me to live a holy life, as you've already declared me. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Joy is Staring You in the Face, Don't Miss It.

Friday, June 30, 2017

What makes you happy? At this point in the series, you've probably had plenty of time to think through some answers to that question. We all have those things that bring pleasure into our life for a short stint. The thing that brings me deep, soul-satisfying joy and pleasure, at least for a moment, is the smell of new running shoes. There is nothing, *nothing*, like cracking open that shoebox, pulling out a brand-new shoe, and just immersing your nose in the smell of perfect newness. Unfortunately, as all my fellow athletic shoe connoisseurs know, after a few wears, the smell of those shoes no longer brings pleasure. In fact, they become repulsive. The only way to get that smell back is to buy new shoes... or spend extended periods of time at the shoe store.

Andy Stanley pointed this principle out in the message this past weekend. He stated, "when we prioritize any pleasure over the principles of happiness... as Jesus lays out in the Sermon on the Mount, at the end of the day, all pleasure loses its pleasure." Just as a shoe will lose its smell, any earthly pleasure will eventually lose its ability to produce the soul-satisfying pleasure we try to find in it. This idea is why Andy pointed out that we must prioritize the pursuit of true, lasting happiness over the quest for pleasure. Then, as we discussed on Tuesday, obedience to God leads us into a right relationship with God. If we follow this idea to its end - God wants a relationship with you; a relationship comes from obedience; obedience results in happiness; therefore, God wants you to be happy.

What an amazing truth! Unfortunately, for many who grew up in very strict religious circles, or who grew up with a stereotypical view of the church, this doesn't sit well at first. The reason is that some very well-intentioned church people have turned an unbelievable truth – obedience to God – into what feels like a constricting, soul-sucking, anti-fun, command from God. This "legalistic" view of God is that God says "no" to all earthly "pleasures." Obedience is ultimate, and obedience feels like having to shut oneself in a closet to avoid anything that could be "fun." The reason this has become a common stereotype of Christian obedience is that we have a misconstrued view of God's love. If following God is nothing but a bunch of rules, then we begin to follow in begrudging submission, lacking passion and heart. If, though, following God is partaking in a life-giving, soul-satisfying, open-handed relationship, then obedience becomes freedom. (Romans 6:22)

King David in the Old Testament certainly understood the idea of God's wanting him to be happy. The Psalms ring true with this idea. In Psalm 16:11, David

rejoices, saying, "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

Earlier in the book of Psalm, David writes, "You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine." (Psalm 4:7 NLT)

The thing I love about David saying all this is that Jesus hadn't even come and died on the cross yet. He sees something bigger and greater through God's words in the Old Testament than most of us see while having the words of Jesus right in front of us! The call to a relationship with Christ through obedience is not a life-sucking call, but a beckoning to the "abundant life" of John 10:10. In obeying Christ, we are being aligned with the way things are created to work. Jesus is the Creator, so he knows how this life is meant to be experienced. When we obey him, we are stepping into the fullness of life now and ever-expanding joy into eternity. Christ loves us so much that he asks us to submit our life to him in a relationship that will ultimately lead to our happiness and his glory in this world.

Pursuing nothing but earthly pleasures will lead to disaster and regret. Pursuing Jesus brings us to the ultimate pleasure, a relationship with God. In the book, "The Weight of Glory," C.S. Lewis sums up the amazing truth that the pleasures of this world are a horrible trade for the happiness that can be found in Christ as he writes, "We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased."

In what pleasures have you been hoping to find happiness?

Do you believe true happiness is found in a relationship with God?

Is there something you need to give up so you can more fully pursue the happiness found in a relationship with Jesus?

Prayer

Dear God, you know me better than I know myself. You created this world and everything in it. You know how this life is supposed to operate. Forgive me for trying to find pleasure in things and areas other than you. Thank you for wanting my happiness. Help me realize you are enough. Help me to obey you and find the happiness that can only be found in a living, breathing relationship with you. I need you; my happiness is dependent upon it. Amen.

This post was written by Alex Woody, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.