

LIVING
IT OUT

DAILY BIBLE STUDY

CEDARCREEKCHURCH

It's Not About You, and That's the Best News.

Monday, July 3, 2017

This past weekend was possibly the most controversial week of our "Happy" series.

There is an especially defining statement to which we need to tune our attention:

"As long as you are all about you, you will never be happy."

There are three key points from Ben's message:

- **You cannot fulfill you**
- **You are not enough for yourself**
- **If we make it all about us, we will be unhappy**

You cannot fulfill you

We certainly live in a "Me, Me, Me" culture. Just drop into Facebook or Instagram for a few minutes, and you will see that people take pictures of their food, themselves, their bodies, their cars, their houses, their new gadgets, etc.

Want to know what's crazy though? We eat it up. Why? Because we want to know what others are doing. We tend to get a little envious when we see them doing or having things that we would like to do or have. We think to ourselves, "I wish I could do that." or "It must be nice."

- We want what others have: food, money, cars, spouses, houses, bodies, etc.
- We want it, but it doesn't make us happy.
- The people we see and want to be like are probably trying to be like someone else too.

There are things such as self-improvement, which are often good. Don't confuse that with selfishness. Selfishness is when we only look out for our interests. Everything that we do is a means to an end for us. We want to know "What's in it for me?"

Those desires come naturally, but that is not how God designed us. We weren't made to be self-focused. We were made to be selfless and to live with our hands wide open.

Key Passage: Galatians 5:19-23

¹⁹*When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures,* ²⁰*idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division,* ²¹*envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.* ²²*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³*gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*

It comes naturally to be selfish; it doesn't have to be taught. A child gets upset when he sees another kid playing with a toy. Sometimes they don't even want to play with it; they just don't want anyone else playing with it.

We are the same way, just on a larger scale. We want what others have because we think it will make us happy.

It doesn't.

You are not enough for yourself

In Luke Rhinehart's iconic novel, "The Dice Man," there is a psychiatrist who decides to give his life over to the rolling of dice. In other words, if he rolled certain numbers, he would do one thing, and if he rolled others, he would do something different. Either way, they were both things that he wanted, and it was his pursuit of pleasure.

Similar to him, I think we roll the dice every day, too, with our own desires. Maybe not a literal set of dice, but we act on our selfish desires, looking for ways to benefit ourselves. No wonder we feel unsatisfied.

"You cannot acquire, consume, or exercise your way to happiness."

We do not have the capacity to be everything for ourselves. We think if we just get in great shape, we will be happy. Not true.

Well, if I just had as much money as that person, I would be happy. Also, not true.

If I could just get that promotion at work, I would be happy. Again, not true.

We will never be enough, and there is nothing that will *ever* be enough, except Jesus.

If we make it all about us, we will be unhappy

In the song, "Message in a Bottle," by The Police, a man feels alone, like a castaway, an island lost at sea. He decides to put a note in a bottle and throws it out into the ocean.

A year goes by, and then one day, he discovers something:

***"Walked out this morning
Don't believe what I saw
A hundred billion bottles
Washed up on the shore
Seems I'm not alone at being alone
A hundred billion castaways
Looking for a home."***

No man or woman is an island. Everyone needs other people, and if we make it all about us, then we will miss the greatest opportunity in this lifetime: loving, and serving others.

When I was in boot camp, I had what we called a "rack mate." We did everything together, and if he got in trouble, I got in trouble. However, we had this thing where we would help each other make our beds, fold and launder our clothes, and every night he would spray my feet so that I didn't get athlete's foot.

We enjoyed serving each other. For me, it was always about him, and for him, it was all about me.

When we have a close relationship with our Heavenly Father, it becomes easier to take the focus off ourselves. Jesus promises us that he will take care of our every need. If we really believe that, then we can focus on serving others.

Do you find it easier to serve others or do something for yourself? Give an example.

Read Psalm 139:23. Ask God to help you see areas in your life that you might be blind to.

List three ways that you can serve, care, or teach others this week. Pick one, and do it.

Prayer

Lord, make my heart more like yours. Make your desires my desires. Ignite your spirit within me, and lead me into your righteousness. Amen.

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

Frankenstein's Monster

Tuesday, July 4, 2017

Michael Scott, from the television show "The Office," once pondered the existence of fictional animals like "a giant buffalo or some sort of monster like something like the body of a walrus with the head of a sea lion. Or something with the body of an egret with the head of a meerkat. Or just the head of a monkey with the antlers of a reindeer with the body of a... porcupine."

We do this with our own lives, looking around at seemingly happy people and create a "composite person" - our own Frankenstein's monster - out of whatever parts of other people's lives we find attractive. We want their house, his car, her beauty, their kids, his income, thinking that we can create a happy life for ourselves, but this requires us to create a fictional character that will never exist. As great as it would be to see an egret-kat or a monk-upine, they are as likely to exist as the perfect, happy person we create in our minds. Creating your "Frankenstein" makes it all about you, which won't make you happy. And remember, as Ben said, "As long as you are all about you, you will never be happy."

Even if you could choose to be someone else, you would have to take all of the good *and* all of the bad. When athletes want to be recruited to play sports in college, they assemble a highlight reel of their best plays to make themselves look as good as they possibly can. They don't include the game when they struck out four times or threw an interception to lose the game. When you go to a job interview, you talk about awards you've won or significant accomplishments. You neglect to mention the time you were fired for repeatedly being late.

The Lord told Samuel in **1 Samuel 16:7**, *"Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."*

When you look at someone else's life, it may appear to be something you want, but you have no idea what is going on inside their home or their heart. The same applies when we look at our own lives. We put our best foot forward because we want other people to think we are happy, or smart, or rich, or healthy. We live our lives like a movie preview, showing just enough to entice people to want to see more. (How often have you watched a movie only to remark that they showed all the good parts in the previews?)

I seem to be writing about comparison a lot lately, as it is something I have struggled with for a long time. I spent a lot of time constructing my monster, only to be left empty and unsatisfied with the person I had become. I was the person described in James 1:23-24: "Anyone who listens to the word but does not

do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.” I was deceiving myself by not listening to the words of God about how much he loves me for me, instead, falling into a trap I made, building a monster I didn’t even like.

James continues: “But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.” (James 1:25) God looks at your heart. He created you just the way you are. He knows what is on the inside, and he loves you anyway. Don’t forget what you look like in God’s sight.

What does your highlight reel look like? What parts of your life, or qualities, do you allow others to see, and which ones do you leave out?

Prayer

God, I don’t want to forget what I look like. I don’t want to use other people as my mirror anymore. Let me rest in your love, knowing that you created me just the way you want me to be. Amen.

You Can Serve Your Way to Happiness.

Wednesday, July 5, 2017

“Love Jesus, serve others, and tell the world about Christ.”

Sound familiar? That’s CedarCreek’s basic mission statement.

Most Christians will agree that loving Jesus and telling the world about Christ are both central to what the Bible teaches. Serving others, however, sometimes seems to fall between the cracks.

It’s a shame really, considering that serving others is a great way to show your love of Jesus and to start conversations with others about Christ. But do you know what else serving is great for?

Improving your overall health and happiness.

Sure, it sounds counterintuitive. Many of us feel like we don’t have enough time or energy for ourselves -- how is investing these things in other people supposed to help us? This is what the Bible teaches. As Paul writes in **Philippians 2:4**, *Don’t look out for your own interests, but take an interest in others as well*. Even Jesus, our Lord, and Savior, came to earth to be a servant.

The Bible is not the only source saying we’re designed to serve others; studies have also proven it.

Yep. Research into over 40 different studies on the relationship between helping others and happiness lead to this conclusion: serving others improves one’s physical, mental, and emotional health. More specifically, volunteering regularly was shown to decrease depression, stress, and even heart disease.

You might be thinking, “Well, I don’t really feel like serving. What if my heart’s not into it?”

While I hope you can find a way to serve others that you enjoy, but either way, it doesn’t matter. Studies show that even volunteering with a “bad attitude” positively affects your health.

Not convinced? According to studies on job satisfaction, it’s not how much you make that determines how happy you are; it’s what you’re doing. Want to know what this study determined were the “most fulfilling” careers?

Jobs that involved **caring for others, teaching others, protecting others**, and creative pursuits.

Noticing a trend? And beyond being able to provide for basic needs, this study found no correlation between increased income and greater job satisfaction. In other words, "Money can't buy you love..." or happiness.

Obviously, you sometimes need to take time for yourself. Rest is important. But if you're having plenty of "me time," yet still find yourself wrapped up in your own problems, try taking the time to help someone else with their problems instead. Believe me, it helps.

As Ben said, "One of the best things you can do for yourself is to not focus so much on yourself."

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Prayer

Lord, give me a heart of service, and a passion for the things that bring you glory. Show me the opportunities to serve and volunteer, and allow me to use my gifts to help others. Amen.

To Live a Happy Life, Give it Away.

Thursday, July 6, 2017

The extent and consequences of mankind's selfish nature are well-documented in scripture – and abundantly evident in our own life experience.

We've all encountered people who place their wants and needs before those of others. And when we dare to look inward, we are quickly reminded that we, too, fall prey to these behaviors.

It can be downright daunting when we consider the pervasiveness and permanence of this condition. In her novel, "Mansfield Park," author Jane Austen famously wrote, "selfishness must always be forgiven you know, because there is no hope of a cure."

But while there may indeed be no hope of a cure for selfishness, this should not suggest that we must merely surrender to it.

In the final week of the "What Makes You Happy" series, lead pastor Ben Snyder dug into a counterintuitive reality: **As long as we are all about ourselves, we will never be happy.** In doing so, he also shared God's desire (and design) that we take conscious steps to move from selfishness to selflessness.

On its surface, the idea that focusing on ourselves *reduces* our happiness appears laudable but illogical. After all, if we spend our lives tending first to our own needs and wants (albeit not something many of us would openly advocate), shouldn't we move closer to the sense of comfort, satisfaction, and happiness that we all desire?

God's answer is an emphatic "no!"

As is so often the case with his glorious truths, God offers a solution that is rooted in love. God's divine design for us is to live with open hands.

On a personal level, the most dramatic illustration of my capacity for selflessness occurred when I became a father for the first time. As virtually any parent will attest, the first moment you hold your newborn child lays to rest the last moment of life as you previously knew it. And this is a beautiful thing. Looking back, I now know that this was God transforming me – giving me the ability to genuinely cherish caring more for another being than myself; to be willing to forego, give, and do anything for the betterment of someone else, my child.

As God's children, we are the beneficiaries of similar love and devotion – *from him.*

While we are perpetually tempted to live in the flesh (our sinful nature), God created us to live in the Spirit.

As we learn from the Apostle Paul in **Galatians 5:19-21**, ¹⁹*When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

In **Galatians 5:22-23**, Paul continues, ²²*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*

God's desire is that we live in the Spirit. He yearns for us to be happy and flourish by giving our lives away.

Imagine, for a moment, a world in which mankind was truly selfless – a world in which we extended love, kindness, grace, and mercy, and genuinely loved our neighbors as ourselves.

Imagination aside, there are illustrations of the inarguable benefits of selflessness in our world today. Subverting our selfish consumption and desire for convenience contributes to a more sustainable planet. Foregoing material wants supports a healthier financial condition, which enables us to support our family and give more generously to others in need. And there are countless examples of the value of occupational selflessness. Men and women in the armed forces, firefighters, police officers, social workers, educators, and members of the clergy all contribute to the greater good of our world by putting the needs of others before themselves.

Selflessness also generates invaluable relational benefits. As Pastor Billy Graham once said, “True love is an act of the will – a conscious decision to do what is best for the other person instead of ourselves.”

One of the most impactful messages I've experienced at CedarCreek was delivered during the “Meant to Be” series in early 2015. In a message titled, “Go First,” former CedarCreek staff member and now Lead Pastor of NorthRock Church in Ann Arbor, Jason Tucker, spoke of going first and giving the better half in our relationships. “Giving the better half means considering the needs of my spouse above my needs,” he said. “If you think of something nice to do, do it... if you have something nice to say, say it,” he added. It's so remarkably obvious, and simple, but the “go first” mindset has served as a relational mantra for me. (I even carry a small card in my wallet with the words “go first” written on it to remind me of its importance!)

As Ben said last weekend, we were designed by the giver of life to give our life away. “The value of a life is always measured by how much of it was given away,” Ben said. “Giving your life away is what makes you great.”

If you aspire to be great, give your life away.

Are you living more in the flesh, or in the Spirit?

In what ways can living more selflessly make you happier?

What can you do today to “give your life away?”

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I thank you for the divine design of this earthly life you have granted me. I ask that you help me to be mindful of my selfish impulses and to understand and act upon your desire that I give my life away for the betterment of others – and your kingdom. Amen.

The Value of Life

Friday, July 7, 2017

Interesting fact: The Dead Sea has fresh water flowing into it and none running out, and yet, it is shrinking. On the other hand, the Sea of Galilee has many rivers flowing out of it, including the Jordan River, and it is thriving. The analogy is that to thrive, we have to give ourselves away. If we constantly take and consume without giving back, we will live small lives and shrink away to nothing.

For example, you never go to a funeral and hear about how great it was that this guy sat in front of the television for 8 hours a day, right? Usually people that lead that kind of life have a very small and short funeral. In contrast, the person who spent his life pouring into others has a well-attended funeral with lots of tears, but a whole lot of laughter, too. That person lived a life full of the fruit of the Spirit and touched many people, and it shows. The way to measure the value of life is by measuring how much of it was given away.

When Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians, he is giving us the secret to a well-lived life. These fruits -- Love; Patience - your pace, not mine; Kindness - thinking of others before yourself; Goodness - doing the right thing, even if it costs; Gentleness - leveraging my power for your benefit, and Self Control - are the keys to happiness. Although it may not be natural for us to behave this way, this is how God designed us. Selfishness is natural, but it is not by design. God made us to live in the fruit of the Spirit. It may not be intuitive, but the more we choose to live in this way, the happier we will be. When we finally realize that it's not all about me - it's about God and others, we will become happier. Jesus tells us just that when he says the law can be summed up this way: Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. In Matthew 22:40, Jesus continues to say that all the laws and demands of the prophets hinge on these. He is saying that when we love, we will automatically do what is right and follow the laws and demands of the prophets.

In essence, Paul is saying the same thing in Galatians 5:23. This is the real kicker, and it is often overlooked. He says, "against such things there is no law." What does he mean? If we live in the fruit of the Spirit, there would be no need for laws.

We were made for this. Here is where we flourish. We were designed to live in a community characterized by these traits. There would be no need for any law because when I'm committed to your best interest, and you're committed to mine, we can all live without fear. Imagine how happy we would all be.

So, what does this look like? It's more than a couple of hours at the animal shelter. It's more than an outreach organized by your work that you feel

obligated to attend. It is a conscious effort to put other people first in your life. It is the choice to get out of your comfort zone and give your time and energy to make the world a better place. There are so many ways to get involved, so many things that you can do! Make the decision to open your hands and let God show you what he wants you to do. Take a step. And remember, nothing is written in stone. You may try something that isn't a good fit for you. That's okay! Try something else. But try. I promise it will be worth it!

Galatians 5:22-23

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Have you ever thought about your funeral? What would you like people to say about your life?

Look at the fruit of the Spirit. Are these words that people would use to describe you?

What is the next step you need to take to start giving your life away?

Prayer

Father, thank you for designing me to live for more than myself. Help me to choose to think of others and give my life to others. Help me to be like the Sea of Galilee, where you flow in and through me and then out of me to everyone I come into contact with. Amen.

This post was written by Kelda Strasbourg, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.