

You Are Here

“Do whatever makes you happy.”

August 20, 2017

Grab a Bible and go to Isaiah 55. what we’re doing in this series is looking at common belief systems that are the current of our culture. Both the stated and unstated values and deeply held beliefs that show up in our media, our entertainment; the narrative we are absorbing and marinating in all the time whether we realize it or not.

Last week we looked at to build your identity, “You have to look inside to find yourself.”

Today we’ll be looking at: “Do whatever makes you happy.”

- “The most important thing in life is to pursue your happiness.”
- “Why can’t you just be happy for me?”
- Sheryl Crow said it like this, “If it makes you happy, it can’t be that bad.”

Search Amazon for books on happiness and you’ll get more than 40,000 results. The first page includes Minimalist approaches to happiness, scientific approaches to happiness, kids’ books on happiness. Get some religious approaches as well: the Buddhist way to happiness, the Jewish way to happiness, the secular humanist approach to happiness. Because we don’t care too much what your religious beliefs are... so long as they make you happy. I was surprised to find there was even a book about the Quaker way to happiness. That’s some smart marketing for Quakers. Found out minimalism was kinda stylish right now and they thought, “here’s our big break! You wanna be really minimalist? Have you considered Quaker minimalism?”

“God really wants me to be happy.” As much as any other we’ll look at in this series, this one gets thrown around in its Christianized form a ton. “Well I know God wants me to be happy...Obviously.” Huh. Maybe. Depending on your definitions...and your timeframe.

Because the weird thing here is that in some ways, what the Bible has to say about happiness is as confrontational to our culture as possible. And in other ways...the Bible would say, that in our pursuit of happiness, we’re chasing the right thing...in the wrong way.

Let me show you what I mean in Isaiah 55.

Isaiah 55:1

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

“Come everyone who thirsts.” Anyone who knows they’re thirsty loves this invitation.

Anybody ever run a race? It’s like volunteers putting water out. Thank you!

This verse actually brings up three drinks: water, milk, wine. Water is for replenishment, refreshment when dry, thirsty. Milk is for nourishment for strength. Wine is for joy and gladness. God invites us to find our holistic satisfaction in Him. To enjoy him in such a way that our souls are deeply refreshed, nourished and filled with joy.

And I love that He says this is without price. No money, no problem. Good news of grace.

Let's make sure we're clear on something: You are searching for contentment, joy, satisfaction, happiness, and wholeness. Everyone is. This is the driving force in all our lives. Every age, every stage of life. So, when we talk about happiness, we can all mean different things by the word. But biblically, we're talking about deep down, soul level, joy and satisfaction. Deeper than and independent of our circumstances. Not just a flicker of emotion because circumstances are good right now. And biblically speaking every one of us searching after it.

Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician and physicist, saved at age 30. You may have heard of Pascal's triangle, which if you think about it is really just a triangular array of binomial coefficients. Listen to what he had to say about happiness.

Blaise Pascal

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.

It's profound. He says the reason behind every single thing you and I do is that we think it will help us be happier. This is how we make all our decisions that drive our lives:

- Being driven or lazy.
- Pursuing community or running from community.
- Asking the girl out on a date or not asking the girl out. Does the potential happiness of her saying yes outweigh the potential unhappiness of her saying no?
- The reason you are honest or the reason you are a liar.
- This is why a person might drink too much or not drink at all.
- Happiness drives some people to stay with their spouse and others to leave.

And here in Isaiah, God doesn't say stop it. God doesn't say what's wrong with you? How dare you try to be happy on my watch? No, He invites us to come drink to our fill... but then He says there's a problem with how we're going about it:

Isaiah 55:2

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

The issue is not in our pursuit of happiness, joy, contentment, and satisfaction per se. The issue is in what we think will give it to us. Our sense of what can bring about soul-level, lasting contentment is off. It's like back before we all had GPS on our phones, there was a thing where you wrote down directions or just memorized maps in your head. And there would be times, where you would absolutely confidently think you knew where you were going... only to all of a sudden realize you had no idea where you were. That's what God says our search for joy looks like. Our happiness GPS is broken.

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

And this idea starts to get exposed early in us. We start thinking happiness is awaiting us in the next stage of life. As the youngest in my family, I couldn't wait to go to school like my older siblings. Then I couldn't wait to get to middle school. What was wrong with me? Then can't wait to get to high school. Can't wait to get a car. Then I got a garbage car and thought I can't wait to get a better car. Can't wait to get to college. Can't wait to be out in the real world. Can't wait to get married. Can't wait to have kids. Can't wait for the kids to

move out. We perpetually believe that we just need to get to the next level and that's where real joy and happiness will be. Yet we keep getting there and finding that it's not there. And keep thinking maybe it's just around the next corner.

Show of hands, have you ever had some life stage or some experience or some item that you really thought the main reason you weren't happy was because you didn't have it yet? Ok, now keep your hand up if you got that thing or experience or got to that life stage and all of your longing for happiness has been completely satisfied ever since?

We never notice that we remain discontent even when we get the exact thing we were hoping for. We can't see that it doesn't work, and that it often brings a lot of damage.

A 71 year old decided to leave his family to "do whatever made him happy." It took him 2 weeks to realize the new lady didn't change anything. She was very respectful and amazing towards him at the beginning of the 2 weeks because she didn't really know him. Once she got to know him...toward the end of the 2 weeks...she stopped being so great when she realized he wasn't that great. So, after 2 weeks he went back and tried to pick up the broken pieces of all the damage he'd caused. He said his wife "wasn't meeting his needs." Of course she wasn't! She's a sinner. Why are you spending yourself on something that isn't bread?

In one of Kid Cudi's songs, he says "I'm on the pursuit of happiness and I know, everything that shines ain't always gonna be gold...I'll be fine once I get it... I'll be good."

The music video for that song ends with Kid Cudi in a bathroom room spinning very somber and almost panicked, saying "why did I drink and smoke so much."

The World Health Organization says that by 2020, depression will be the second leading cause of workplace disability next to heart disease. It isn't working. According to the CDC, antidepressant usage has surged 400% over the last decade.

Can we all agree it isn't working? I just worked pretty hard to prove it isn't working...And now I want to give you what I believe is the most counter-cultural, crazy sounding idea for how to pursue your happiness that you've ever heard. Y'all ready?

Isaiah 55:6-9

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God's completely counter-cultural, crazy-sounding, radical new approach to pursuing your own happiness: It's not found in doing whatever you want. It's found in returning.

Look at verse 6 again. "Let the wicked forsake his way and return to the Lord."

The word "return" there is the Hebrew word *shuv*. One of the two Hebrew verbs translated repent. Teshuvah. Here's the key insight – happiness is a byproduct of repenting and returning to the Lord. We are always chasing after happiness and we're using anything and everything in life to try to deliver it to us. Never realizing that it doesn't work, because whatever we look toward to bring us ultimate happiness, we've turned into an idol that can't bear the weight of our eternal souls.

So, with that in mind, here are six steps to seeking your happiness through repentance:

Step 1: Agree with God about where true happiness is found.

Isaiah 55:9

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

To seek true happiness, at some point you've gotta stop and admit that God is smarter than you. "God you're right. I'm wrong. I've been chasing happiness in a thousand places and isn't working." Ok how do we do that? Step 2...

Step 2: Confess to God.

Confession is taking that general acceptance that God is smarter than you and getting specific with how you've been seeking happiness outside of Him. Here's where I've not trusted you. Here's where I've misjudged your motives and your goodness; thinking you're withholding from me. Here's where I've believed ultimate joy and happiness can be found outside of you." Returning to the Lord is laying out all your sins before God as specifically as you can.

Step 3: Confess to others.

Because we're a family, as we confess to God, we also go to the people God's given us and say, "Will you please help? I've got all this sin and all these ways I'm chasing happiness. Can you help me stop?" And other people become an avenue through which God ministers to you.

Step 4: Actually stop.

It's not gonna work if you just agree with God but keep drinking from the empty broken places you've been looking for satisfaction. You have to actually stop and turn to the Lord.

Step 5: Make it right.

As you repent, you're going to realize you've hurt some people and you need to go and make it right. Apologize. Own your sin. Own how your selfishness harmed them. Repay them if you've ripped them off. Attempt to repair harmed relationships.

At this point, and unlike just doing whatever you want to you happy, seeking your happiness through repentance actually contributes to the happiness of others as well.

Step 6: Keep returning to God by choosing to enjoy Him.

Isaiah 55:7

Let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Earlier in verse 3, God says, "Come to me and I will make with you an everlasting covenant; my steadfast love..." There's nothing more reviving, more refreshing, more life-giving, more joy and happiness creating than finding God's ultimate compassion and abundant pardon over and over and over. The desire under all of our other pursuits of happiness is that we're all looking for an eternal love; an eternal source of joy. We're all looking to be fully known and fully loved. And nothing confers that on the human soul like the gospel of Jesus that says, God loves to show compassion on broken sinners like us. God gladly pardons all our sinful searching for ultimate happiness outside of Him.

Returning to the Lord is not some mooney, woe is me. It often will begin with heart-level sorrow over your sinful rejection of God. But it quickly moves from there to realizing and basking in the unbelievable truth of His grace and love.

Returning to God includes celebrating that God's love for you, in Christ, doesn't change, despite how often you do. Repentance is brokenness that leads to celebrating Jesus! This is everyday life for the believer in Jesus. Christianity on the ground level is walking in repentance, always turning from sin to God, looking to Him for my joy.

Isaiah 55:1-3

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price? Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.

God promises replenishment, nourishment, and joy. He invites us to repent and come to Him to enjoy it. This is a blood bought gift. Jesus has won this for us and it is ours now.

So, God says EAT! COME ON! ENJOY! It's yours, through Jesus. Just doing whatever you want is not gonna get you where you wanna be. But returning will.