

HABITS OF HAPPINESS

HABIT 1. HAPPINESS IN GROWING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

INTRODUCTION:

This world is so broken and painful, sometimes experiencing happiness can seem like impossibility. A lot of people over the years have said in desperation; “I just want to be happy.” Is it too much to ask for in this life? Is happiness a dream we should abandon? Is this another expectation we need to adjust? Does God even care about my happiness? Often, our dilemma comes from the fact that we allow this world to define what happiness is and what the process is to experience it. Then, when we chase after these lies we find ourselves disillusioned once again wondering if God even cares. Does God care? Of course He does! But, we need to get on God’s agenda for happiness and fulfillment not this world’s.

Paul is writing the book of Philippians while in prison. If there was ever a guy who had reason to be unhappy it was him. Yet, his book is all about happiness. Philippians is a great book. It is the joyful book in the Bible. The word *joy*, *glad*, *enjoy*, *rejoice*, *joyful*, and *happiness* are words used in a variety of forms, seventeen times in this very short book. Therefore, if Paul can be filled with happiness and experience happiness being chained up 24 hours a day, I think we can learn some things about happiness from him. This reveals to us that our ‘*happiness*’ is not based on our *happenings* or our *circumstances*. If you wanted to be happy, where would you start? Would you start with Money? Worldly pleasures? Time? What would you start with? Paul starts the ‘joyful book’ in the Bible relating to relationships! You will battle to find happiness if your relationships are a mess! If your relationship is not unhappy, then your life is not going to be happy!!

In the first eleven verses of Philippians, Paul models four relational habits - habits that if you and I would endeavor to practice, and build into our lives, then our relationships could be more enjoyable and our happiness would therefore be greater. They are easy to explain and simple to understand. But they are incredibly hard to do. This passage reveals how Paul thinks about this group of people in the city of Philippi. He is modeling for us how to think correctly about others. If we think incorrectly about others and relationships, we will make ourselves miserable. It is just a fact that if we think negatively about others bitterly, maliciously, untrusting and unloving thoughts, it will make us not to be happy. Haven’t you ever been in a really good mood then something happened to remind you of someone you really struggle with. Now your mind is flooded with thoughts about this person and thoughts that are not very nice. What happens to your emotions? Do you feel happy? Hardly!

HOW TO GROW HEALTHY REALTIONSHPIS

1. Serve God by serving other people V.2

There is only one way you can serve God: by serving other people. Whenever you use your talents, time, energy, and resources to help other people, you are doing ministry to God. But God doesn't want you to minister alone! Philippians 2:2 says, "Make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose" (NLT, second edition). Why does God require this? Why can't you just serve God on your own?

- a. **Because we are family.** The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 3:9, "*We are co-workers in God's service*" (NIV). If you are in God's family, God wants you to get along with the other family members. In fact, God is more interested in the relationships you build during service together than he is in the service that you do. He wants you to learn to get along with the family of God.
- b. **Because we need each other.** We need each other to serve. Nobody has all the talents. Nobody has all the gifts. God did it that way intentionally so that you would need me and I would need you and we would need each other. "*Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of [Christ's] body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we?*" (Romans 12:5 MSG)
- c. **Because we get more done.** Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, "*Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively*" (GNT). Teamwork multiplies effectiveness.

God wants to use you in ways you have never expected. You may say, "What do I have to offer?" You have something, but you don't have enough on your own. That is why you need other people in your life. God wants to use you, but he also wants to use you in a team where you help each other out. God wired us so that we feel most alive when we are part of a team that is accomplishing something for God's Kingdom. Teams cause us to get closer to each other, to get more done, and to have more fun. The fastest way to get have your small group grow closer to each other is by serving together. When you get together for an eternal purpose, it builds an unstoppable team that can accomplish great things for God.

Have you ever felt isolated in ministry? How did serving or not serving on a team affect how you felt? _____

2. Express gratitude for the people in your life. V.3

Study after study has linked gratitude to happiness. Psychologists and sociologists have proven that the more grateful you are, the happier you are. If you want to have healthy relationships, then start with an attitude of gratitude. You will be far happier and enjoy your relationships more if you will develop the habit of being grateful for the people in your life.

Paul says in Philippians 1:3, “*Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God*” (NLT, second edition). This simple truth is the foundation of good relationships. When you think of the people in your life, is your first feeling gratitude? For too many of us, it can be, “What do they need to do for me? What problems have we got? What do we need to get done?” But Paul showed us a different way. His first thought for his friends was one of gratitude, and it is the model we should follow if we want relationships that last. Here is the challenge: The longer you know someone, the more likely you are to take that person for granted. Isn’t that true?

The longer you know someone, the easier it is to focus on that person’s faults and the bad times instead of the happy times. That is why it takes effort on our part to *choose* to have an attitude of gratitude for the people in our lives. When we develop the habit of thanking God for people in our lives, it will cultivate happiness and have a lasting and eternal impact on those relationships. Now let us be honest in this study; we probably all have people in our lives where our first thought of this person is not “thankfulness”. Can you take time to think and share with your group members? If you want to have good relationships you start with the attitude of gratitude. You will be far happier and you will enjoy your relationships more if you will develop the habit of being grateful for the people in your life. Paul in Philippi didn’t have a good time. In fact, it was one of his roughest and toughest times in getting a Church started! He was beaten, humiliated, falsely arrested, whipped, thrown into prison, and then he was politely asked by the city leaders to leave the city. Paul chose not to dwell on painful memories.

Let us consider this; what makes marriages to crumble? When you stop remembering why you got married in the first place; what attracted you to that person; when you stop remembering the good times and when you stop being grateful for your mate, your marriage is already on a long slide into oblivion. Paul had a lot of reasons to have painful memories in Philippi but he says, ‘every time I think of you, I thank God for you!’ He is choosing to be grateful for the people in his life. He chooses to remember the best and forget the rest! We must learn to do the same with our children, our spouses, friends and family as well as associates or workmates. Habitually expressing gratitude correctly about people is something that God wants us to do and it is something that helps foster happiness in us. So how do I choose to be thankful for people that I don’t feel thankful about? How can I be thankful for people who have wounded me?

- a. ***Reject the negative thinking.*** There comes a time when we must learn how to control our negative thinking patterns. In fact, unless we learn how to do this we will never be happy. *II Cor. 10:5 “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (NIV)* We either learn how to take our negative thoughts captive or we will be taken captive by them. When negative, critical and bitter thoughts about someone enter your mind, you immediately have a choice.
- b. ***Thank God that He has a plan for their lives .*** We must replace the negative thoughts with the right thoughts that honor God. God does have a plan for their lives. Thank God for that plan. Pray that they discover that plan. Just because they don’t know what it is and you don’t know what it is doesn’t mean this is not God desire for them.

- c. **Thank God for the good they do in this life.** Now, I know what you are thinking; “What good? They hurt me, wounded me and betrayed me. They are a horrible people. That is simply your experience. Very few people in this life are completely bad. Aren’t we all a mixture of the two? Don’t you ever have a bad day? What if the only exposure someone had with you was on one of your worst days?
- d. **We must stop demonizing people.** This gets back to taking thoughts captive. I have had people who have wounded me deeply but still do very gracious and loving things for others. People are not all bad. Choose to thank God for the good they do that you may have never seen.

We can either think about others and resent them or be thankful. One choice is guaranteed to make you unhappy while the other is a happiness increaser. What do you remember about people? Is it the good experiences or the bad experiences? The apostle Paul said, “I like to remember the good things about people, focus on the good times we have had, and remember the positive experiences.” When Paul said this, he had not had an easy time in Philippi. Acts 16 tells us that when he went to Philippi he was illegally arrested, whipped, humiliated, and thrown into prison before finally being asked to leave town. Yet he says, “*I thank my God every time I remember you*” (Philippians 1:3 NIV).

Paul could have dwelt on the negative. He could have remembered the painful memories. He chose not to remember the painful things; instead, he focused on the things he could be grateful for. Maybe you have been hurt in the past by a parent or a partner, and you are still holding on to that hurt. As a result, you can’t enjoy being around that person today. You are still focusing on the negative. Be grateful for the good in people. Pleasant memories are a choice. You can choose what you are going to remember about the past.

I’m not saying that you should deny the hurts you have had or excuse the weaknesses in other people. That is psychologically unhealthy. But focus on the good, and choose to emphasize the strengths. I hear wives say, “He is a good man, but ...” Anytime you hear “but,” it means the emphasis is on the negative and not the positive. Be grateful for what you have! Mr. Perfect does not exist! I have heard the same thing from husbands, but Mrs. Perfect does not exist either! If you want to enjoy others, you have to focus on their strengths and not their weaknesses. With some people, it takes a lot of creativity. But you can find something good in everybody.

In your daily life, how faithful are you in giving thanks to God for the people He has given you?

3. Pray with happiness for the people in your life. V.4-5

Think of somebody who irritates you. Maybe somebody you have a strained relationship with or they just rub you the wrong way. Do you pray for them? Or do you just complain, grumble, nag and nitpick? If you prayed more you will have a lot less to grumble, complain, nag and nitpick about. Does nagging work? No. Does prayer work? Yes. So why do we do more of the thing that doesn’t work than that which does? One of the best ways to begin changing your thoughts about

someone you are struggling with is to pray for them. It is just tough to keep hating someone you are praying for. Paul says I pray for you. And so we need to pray for the people in our lives! More than just pray, he prays with a heart full of happiness!! Positive praying is more effective than positive thinking. How can we pray with happiness for people?

- a. Let your thoughts prompt you to pray.* Often if we don't choose to pray, our thoughts will prompt us to remember and be resentful. This will certainly not make us feel better. Therefore, when you think about this person start praying for him or her. Personally, this is something that has helped me greatly over the years. I have had plenty of opportunity to either think very negatively or pray for people. Sometimes even as I drive and go by certain places that can have negative attachments I allow this to prompt me to pray.
- b. Pray that God blesses them.* Here is the quickest way to find out if you are hanging on to bitterness. If you can't pray blessing you are still bitter. If praying that God would bless them is a repulsive concept then you still have some issues to resolve.
- c. Pray for His will in their lives.* Wouldn't life be better for all of us if we all walked according to God's will? Here is another way to prayerfully think about people. Pray that God's will become their reality. Pray they discover God and His plan for their lives in a profound manner.

Instead of allowing our negative experiences with others to make us miserable, choose to pray for people happily. You will be amazed at how it impacts your emotions and your happiness. Developing an attitude of gratitude does not come naturally. We are not by nature grateful people. We are by nature discontented. We always want more or something different. What is Paul doing there? He is choosing selective memory. Philippi was not a happy place for Paul, and he endured a lot of persecution and suffering during his time in that city. But he chose not to dwell on painful memories and instead expressed his gratitude for the good things that God had done.

The longer you know someone, the more likely you are to take that person for granted and to look for faults and remember the bad things instead of the good things. Are you still reliving painful memories with some people in your life? You have never let them off the hook, and you cannot enjoy the relationship because you are still holding on to the past. You need to understand that memories are a choice. I heard a story one time about two friends. One of them asked the other, "Don't you remember that time when your husband did *this*?" Her friend replied, "I distinctly remember forgetting that." Your memories are a choice. If you want to hold on to your painful memories, go right ahead. But you are not going to be happy! Paul had a lot of reasons to have painful memories of Philippi. Instead, he made the choice to be grateful for the people in his life and the work God was doing in and through them. When you do the same, God will bless your relationships far beyond your expectations.

Think of people that have influence you either way in your life and take a minute to pray for them with happiness and thanksgiving before you continue in this study.

4. Expect the best from people in your life. V.6

This is a really tough one and especially for me. Working with people as a leader in the Body of Christ, I have primarily got to see the worst in people which cause me to continuously fight cynicism in my own heart! We don't normally expect the best from the people around us; we expect the worst. We expect them to let us down because we have a track record. We constantly focus on what is bad in people, and yet Paul, despite all he had been through from these people, chooses to believe that the best within them will come forth! He chooses the habit of bringing out the best in them. He does it in the following three ways within this one verse:

- a. ***He believed in them.*** He says I have confidence that you will make it and that you will ultimately fulfill your purpose and destiny. When a good parent watches her kid doing something and he stumble and fall flat on his face, the good parent doesn't run to the child and scream and yell at the child telling him how 'pathetic' is he, how 'embarrassed' he is, and shouts out 'you are a failure' No, a good parent encourages the child to get up, you can do it, don't worry, it is okay, get back up and keep on running, I am here; I am with you etc. That is what God does with you when you stumble. That is what God wants you to do with people in your life when they stumble. That is what it means to be like Jesus. Paul says I believe in people. I give them confidence. I help them grow. I am confident that what God has started in your life he is going to continue to do. We all need people to believe in us because it is how we change. You can't change unless somebody believes in you and you believe in yourself. Acceptance always precedes transformation. Nobody changes by nagging, by rebuking them all the time and showing them what they can't do by painting a picture this is what you could become, or what you could be.
- b. ***He gave them a vision.*** The vision he presented was that they would keep on growing; that God would be with them all the way; He will finish what He started in you; He is not going to abandon you halfway. He painted a picture of their future as Christians! Numerous studies have shown we tend to do better when people expect the best of us. We tend to become what we believe the most important people in our lives think about us. So Paul says I expect the best from people. I believe in people. I give people vision.
- c. ***He was patient with people's progress.*** Paul understood that people were a work in progress. What do I mean? It is so important that we think about people as unfinished projects. God is still working in people. This work is not finished until we see Jesus. Often we simply expect people to be more perfect than they really are. We expect them to be more mature than they really are. Thinking about people progressively helps me be much more gracious with their shortcomings.

This is very important for your happiness within the context of your relationships. If you insist on absolute perfection from people in your life, you are going to be very miserable for the rest of your life. If you expect your spouse, child, colleague etc. to be perfect before you can enjoy them, you will not be happy, because nobody is

perfect. Therefore, before you get upset and get critical of people remember the following:

- i. You have encountered an unfinished person.* Sometimes we experience the rough edges of people's personalities. We came face to face with the unfinished part of God's project. Don't assume their entire person is like this. This is our problem. We experience a piece and then we judge the whole! Someone was not friendly at Safeway or someone walked right by you at church and didn't say hi or even smile or someone was grumpy, critical or even rude to you. Before you begin to think critically of that person, remember they are unfinished project. God is still working on them just like He is still working on you.
- ii. We all have different issues.* Before you criticize another person for issues they struggle with, just remind yourself that we all struggle, but we all don't struggle with the same issues. Another person's weakness or growth area may be your strength. Thinking about people progressively is choosing to give grace for people and their areas of growth that may be different than yours.
- iii. We grow at a different pace.* Just because God is at work in all of us progressively making us more like Jesus does not mean we all grow at the same pace.

If you want to have happier, healthier relationships, celebrate how far people have come, rather than judging them for how far they still have to go! God understands that you still have a long way to go. He understands that there is a beginning and an end and He is patiently working it all out on your behalf, if you will not get discouraged and quit, but rather keep your eyes on Him, who is the author and the finisher of your faith! Patience comes from love. You must have the person in your heart. Many of the relationship problems that you have over and over and over are because we all tend to react with our head and not with our heart. And that is the wrong place to go in relationships.

God's Word will never change your life until you let it become personal. It is not about your neighbor, your friend, your spouse, or the stranger down the street. God's Word must be applied to *your life*. The Bible won't become dynamic until it becomes specific. How do you make God's Word personal? Try to personalize its method of Bible meditation. Anybody can do it. You don't need any special tools or advanced theological training. You simply put your name in the place of pronouns or nouns in Scripture. For example, if I were personalizing John 3:16, I would write something like this: "For God so loved Rick, he gave his one and only Son so that Rick would not perish but have everlasting life." Or, for Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in Rick Warren will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Put your name in the text, and you will strengthen your faith and encourage yourself. You can also re-write the verse as if God is talking directly to you.

For example, Philippians 1:6 would be: "I, who began a good work in you, Rick, will carry it on to completion." Do this, and many passages of Scripture will literally bring tears to your eyes.

You will start to read the Bible as God's love letter to you. It will be God's gift to you! Reading your Bible is not just about getting to know the content of the Word. It is about getting to know the author of the Word — personally!

Share with your group members how you have celebrated people in your life.

5. Love the people in your life. V.7-11

One of the greatest challenge for us not to love people is we are self-centered. We tend to look at our own needs and all of the things that have happened in our own lives. But we must strive to love people like Jesus does. You may not necessarily have to like them, agree with them, or even associate with them but you must strive to love like He loves! We can all quote John 3:16, but a parallel verse is found in 1 John 3:16. *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters"* (NIV) He gave his Life for us. And we must do the same thing. If we would do that we would not have any relational problems, because we would not be thinking about ourselves but we would be thinking about other people. The world says love is about how someone makes them feel or how they feel about someone else, but God says love is about how you behave and treat others.

I would much rather prefer someone treating me with kindness, respect, humility and patience rather than relating to me solely on our similarities, mutual benefit or attraction. This means that times will come when we don't feel like showing respect, patience, trust and honesty; but we must push past those feelings and show it anyway. Love is what we do according to the standard of God, not what we feel. It is easy for people to have a special place in our hearts when we mutually get along and love each other. BUT, what about the ones we struggle with? What about the people that rubs us the wrong way? Yeah, they have a special place in our hearts as well but it is not a nice place for sure! BUT, thinking about people like this only makes us miserable. How can I think about these people lovingly?

- a. *Think about others with forgiveness.*** When someone has wounded us, forgiveness is the most loving thing we can do. Forgiveness is the most loving relational response. It is also the choice that will impact our emotions in a positive way. Bitterness and unforgiveness always makes us miserable. Unforgiveness is like drinking emotional poison. It poisons our emotions and robs us of happiness. It will kill happiness in you! If you have someone in your life you are yet to forgive, this will be the most profound place for you to start when it comes to your happiness. Your future happiness depends on this.
- b. *Think about others with good will.*** In other words, we don't think ill-will on others. We don't have thoughts about people getting what is coming to them. Rather, we choose to think God's best for them. It is what I Cor. 13:7 say, *"Love...always hopes, always perseveres."* (NLT) In other words, we choose to hope for the best in others regardless. This choice protects us from hoping for the worst.
- c. *Think about others with God's help.*** Thinking about others correctly is one way we work hard at showing the results of our salvation. But, we can't do this alone in our

own strength. It is too hard. Notice that it is God who is giving us the desire and the power to do what please Him. This is something I pray for all the time in my relationship with God. “God, please give me the desire and power to do this.” We need to pray for both issues because sometimes I don’t have the desire to do the hard things. I need His power but I also need Him to change my desires. This helps me think about people lovingly.

Paul didn’t just pray for people in his life. He prayed with *joy*! Positive praying is more effective than positive thinking. All the positive thinking in the world isn’t going to change your husband or your wife or your child or your friend or your situation. Positive thinking can change you, but it won’t change somebody else. But positive prayer can *make a difference* in someone else. Do you want to know the quickest way to change a bad relationship to a good one? Start praying for the other person! It will change you, and it can change the other person. Paul even told us how to pray for others: “*And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God*” (Philippians 1:9-11 NIV). From these verses, we can learn to pray for the people in our lives in four ways:

- i. **Pray that they will grow in love:** “*This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.*”
- ii. **Pray that they will make wise choices:** “*... so that you may be able to discern what is best ...*”
- iii. **Pray that they will live with integrity:** “*... and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ ...*”
- iv. **Pray that they will become like Jesus:** “*... filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.*”

Pray these for yourself and anyone in your life, and watch how God turns around the relationship you thought were hopeless. Nothing is impossible with God!

Is it easy to think lovely about people who have wounded you in one or the other in your life?

CONCLUSION

It is just a fact that our happiness is connected to our relationships and how we think about others. If we view others as untrusting; if we hold on to bitterness; if we are filled with negativity towards others, this will rob us of happiness in this life. I am convinced that one of the greatest sources of happiness in this life is the relationships we get to experience. But the foundation for our relational experiences begins with how we think about them. If you have been consumed with thinking negatively about others I can guarantee that you are not a happy person. I realize it is easy to think your lack of happiness is because of others, but the truth is that your happiness begins and ends with you. Now, will you trust God enough to begin to make some changes in how you think? This is the first habit that will lead you to happiness.

TALK IT OVER

1. Happiness is not the goal but rather the result of developing Christ-like relational habits. Which habits are already parts of your daily routine? Which one is the most difficult for you to practice?

2. One of the happiness hints teaches to celebrate how far people have come rather than judging them for how far they still have to go. Why is this easier said than done? _____
3. Often when people are irritating, you want them to change. Instead of wishing they would change, you are called to pray for them. Have you ever tried doing this? If so, how did it help? _____
4. People need others to believe in them, because it is how everyone changes. Acceptance always precedes transformation. How will you apply this truth to one of your most important relationship this week? _____
5. Human beings are not grateful by nature. The longer you know someone, the more likely you are to take that person for granted. God's antidote for this is gratitude. Discuss ideas that will help you begin to develop a habit of expressing gratitude for the people in your life. If you already do this, share your experience with the group. _____

TALK IT OVER

Discuss how your group wants to approach prayer during this entire study. Encourage everyone to share ideas. Consider asking if anyone has a desire to be a prayer champion for the group. This could include summarizing and sending out prayer requests weekly, but you can openly talk about other ways to support each other in prayer.

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Philippians 1:9-10

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Teach me, Lord, full obedience, holy reverence, and true humility. Test my thoughts and my attitudes in the radiance of your purity. Cause my faith to rise, cause my eyes to see your majestic love and authority.

HABITS OF HAPPINESS

HABIT 2. HAPPINESS IN TRUSTING GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26

INTRODUCTION:

The ability to trust that someone is in control is a pre-requisite for happiness. If you fly, you have this experience every time you get on an airplane. You trust that the pilot is in control and knows what he is doing. This trust allows you to enjoy the flight especially if the flight gets rough. Trusting that God is in control is not always easy, especially when life doesn't make any sense and circumstances are turbulent. Yet it is this confidence that gives us a foundation for our happiness in this life. Why? Because the flight is not always smooth! The Apostle Paul is in prison, yet he is still trusting that God is in control even in his circumstances. Most people would have thought that locking up the greatest evangelist and church planter would be a tragedy.

If we do not learn to trust in the sovereignty of God we will live with constant fear based upon the circumstances. Our happiness will be driven by circumstances rather than by our relationship with God. We will experience a stressed out life rather than a life of peace. God's sovereignty and our happiness are connected. How do we make trusting God's sovereignty a habit of happiness? But let us first look at the four common barriers to happiness, the kill happiness in our lives, and how can we trust God's sovereignty that will enable us to overcome these kill happiness!

- a. **Pain** – When pain enters our lives it is very difficult to be happy. In this fallen world, everyone experiences some kind of pain. A wide variety of painful experiences – such as rejection, shattered dreams, betrayal, abuse, illness, job loss, and the deaths of loved ones – can cling to your soul, leaving hurt feelings there. If your pain remains unresolved, it will disrupt your mental, emotional, and spiritual health as you carry it around with you every day. It's vital to face your pain and resolve it, so you can let go of that burden and enjoy a happy life. The only effective way to do that is by taking your pain to God and inviting him to heal you.
- b. **Toxic people** – when these kinds of people enter our lives they can be real kill happiness; they are demanding, arrogant, rebellious, irritating, and often times uncooperative fits the description. Dealing with such an individual can be difficult and draining, to say the least. In fact, it may challenge what you know about yourself and push you to the limits. Here are some traits to familiarize yourself with, and to help you navigate these trying relationships:
 - i. **Toxic people are manipulative.** Their modus operandi is to get people to do what they want them to do. It's all about them. They use other people to accomplish whatever their goal happens to be.

Forget what you want; this is not about equality in a relationship—far from it.

- ii. **They are judgmental.** Keep your eyes and ears open for criticism—about you, what you've done, and what you didn't do. It's never about them, and they will lie if it serves them.
 - iii. **They take no responsibility for their own feelings.** Rather, their feelings are projected onto you. If you try to point this out to them, they will likely vehemently defend their perspective, and take no responsibility for almost anything they do.
 - iv. **They don't apologize.** They don't see any reason to, because things are always someone else's fault. In many instances, although they try to orchestrate relationships to serve their own ends, they try to gain sympathy and attention by claiming "victim" status.
 - v. **They are inconsistent.** It's hard to know who you're with at any given time because they are often not the same person. They may change their perspective, attitude, and behavior depending on what they feel they need to accomplish or what they want to have happen. (And they know how to be kind when they want something from you.
 - vi. **They make you prove yourself to them.** Toxic people make you choose them over someone else, or something they want over something you want. Often, this turns into a "divide and conquer" dynamic in which the *only* choice is them, even to the point of requiring you to cut off other meaningful relationships to satisfy them.
 - vii. **They make you defend yourself.** They have difficulty staying on point about certain issues, probably because they're not interested in your point of view or trying to reach an amicable conclusion. Remember, they are supreme manipulators: Their tactics may include being vague and arbitrary, as well as diverting the focus of the discussion to *how* you're discussing an issue—your tone, your words, etc. They focus on problems, not solutions.
 - viii. **They are not caring, supportive, or interested in what's important to you.** In fact, the good things that happen to you move the attention away from them and thwart them from focusing on their own goals. Beware of people who find fault with you and make you wrong. Loyalty is foreign to them.
- c. **Pressure** – We can experience pressure both internally and externally. Pressure can cause us to lose our happiness. Our lives are overrun with things that exert pressure. Our marriages can cause pressure, just as singleness can cause pressure. Managing work and family demands creates pressure. The effects of aging add additional pressure. And when not strained enough by these routine forms of pressure, here come those extraordinarily unpredictable forms of pressure, like health problems,

children in trouble, car breakdowns, and those seemingly random weeks when a string of household appliances goes out, one after the other.

- d. **Problems** – We have all experienced major problems in our lives and these too can rob us of our happiness. In this world we will face all kinds of obstacles, trials and tribulations. You are going to face problems, but GOD is greater than any problem you will face in this world! As problems present themselves, we should face them in the power of God and overcome them with Him — because every problem is an opportunity to exhibit the love and power of God in our lives. And it is often through these situations that the world gets our true testimony as believers in Him!

HOW CAN WE TRUST GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY?

It is easy to verbalize fear, anxiety, anger, and dread, many times when things get tough instead of us trusting in God’s ultimate control. What comes out of our mouths during stressful times reveal how we interpret the circumstances we are facing. What comes of your mouth when life gets tough? Fear, panic, anxiety, complaints, pessimism, or trust in God’s control? For some of you that are experiencing some life chaos, this would be a great place to start. “Lord, I trust in your control over my circumstances.” Can you verbalize this trust to others? Our greatest testimony is not in times of comfort, but in times of chaos. What do others hear you say? We can trust Gods sovereignty by observing the following:

1. Look at every problem from God’s perspective. V.12-13

Happy people develop the habit of seeing things from God’s perspective! There is no other way the Apostle Paul could be happy while in prison without this inner conviction. Without it, his imprisonment would be nothing but a tragedy. It is obvious by the way he writes that this is already a firm conviction in his mind and heart. He is not questioning God but he trusts Him. If we don’t believe God is in control, happiness will be pretty elusive. So where does this conviction of looking at every problem from Gods view point comes from?

- a. **Know God.** The problem with most people is they really don’t know who God is. They have a made up, make believe version of Him rather than the God who is revealed in the Bible. If you want to get to know God better, begin with the book that reveals to us who He is. One of the most life changing things you can do is study who God is. Trust is the result of knowing someone. How can you trust someone you don’t know?
- b. **Experience God in your life.** How good it is to be near God! This is experience. David had experiences of being close to God seeing His power and control. Often, we not only lack knowledge of God, we also lack experiences with God. It is tough to trust someone you have no experience with.

- c. ***Have a track record with God.*** There are some people I trust more than others. Why? Because some people I have an extensive track record with. They have proven to me over and over again that I can trust them. It works this way with God. When you have a track record with God, you can count your blessings and name them one by one. You will see God countless times.

Paul had always had a dream of preaching in Rome; the city at the center of the universe. He wanted to go there, had planned to go there, possibly in his mind was to have a massive crusade, but God had other plans on getting him there and how he would end up preaching the good news there! When you don't see things from God's point of view, you get discouraged, you get frustrated, and you will not be happy. The reason we are not happy is because we don't see what God is capable of doing and how He does it. The truth is no matter what is going on in your life be it good, the bad and the ugly, God is working out a plan.

Paul is a prisoner of Nero who was a wicked and evil man! And as a royal prisoner with a royal guard chained to him twenty-four hours a day, he gets to talk to all kinds of key people he would never otherwise talk to. While Paul was chained to those guards, over a two year period he witnessed to 4,380 guards. My question is who is the real prisoner here? Who has the captive audience? This is why Paul says, I want you to know dear brothers and sisters, that even though this happened to me, being in prison, it has helped spread the good news. He says I have my plan but God has a bigger plan. He says I can be happy because I can see what God is doing through my problem. Even members of the royal household got saved!

Share a recent situation where you applied your knowledge and not God perspective in dealing with it _____

2. Look at God's bigger agendaV14.

This again is what Paul is doing. He has been in prison long enough now to see parts of what God is doing and he is revealing to his readers the parts he is seeing. "Hey everyone, my imprisonment is actually a good thing!" The palace guards are hearing the gospel as well as others and because they see Paul's boldness, they in turn have boldness in sharing with others. Paul saw pieces of God's bigger agenda than simply being in prison. This perspective allowed him to have happiness. The Gospel has infiltrated Caesar's palace! How do we discover pieces of God's bigger agenda in our own problems?

- a. ***Always believe there is more going on than what you see.*** Our perspective is far too limited for us to interpret life events. God's plans are big, complex, multi-faceted and beyond what we can understand. We simply see a fraction of what God is doing. Often, what we see are a few puzzle pieces that make up an entire portrait. We must embrace the conviction that God is the artist and there is a picture of our lives He is creating.

- b. Choose to see the good even in the problems.** We get so caught up in the circumstances that we can miss the pieces of good that are going on in the midst of the storm. Rarely is everything all good. Sometimes things are mostly all bad, but there are pieces of good if we choose to see them. Paul was able to see some good by him being in prison. What do we choose to see? Ask God to let you see it. “God, please let me see some good in the midst of this pain.” “Let me see your hand in these problems.”
- c. Tell others what you see.** This is what Paul is doing. He knows that how he responds to hardship will impact the faith of others. We need to understand this as well. How we respond to hardship will impact others, especially our children and grandchildren. People are watching us. Seeing the pieces of God’s bigger agenda impacts our emotions when life gets hard.

God wants you to have courage and stand up for his ways when everyone else sits down. But it is not just for your own good. It is for the good of others, too. When you stand up publicly for what God wants, you will encourage other believers. When you stand up for God, other people will follow. *Courage is contagious.* You never know how many people will join you until you courageously step out in faith. Most people are waiting for a leader to show some courage. They are waiting for someone like you to demonstrate some faith. Paul writes about this in Philippians 1:14: “*Most of the brothers in the Lord have gained confidence from my imprisonment and dare even more to speak the message fearlessly*” (HCSB). Paul’s imprisonment for the Gospel led to others demonstrating more boldness. God will use your courage, too, to help others respond with courage.

Share a problem that you have gone through in life and whether you saw God purpose on it or not? _____

3. Never let others control your attitude. 15-19

Paul identifies four kinds of people in these verses that he has had to contend with one kind good, but the other three toxic. There were those who were jealous and wanted to be better than Paul, so they reviled, slandered, gossiped, judged and criticized his ministry. There were those who had befriended and loved him and his ministry, recognizing what God was doing through him. Others still competed with him because of wrong motives, always trying to outdo him. Others still trying to kick him while he is seemingly down and out! Some were preaching out of a heart of jealousy. They were rivals. The word ‘*rivalry*’ is the Greek word ‘*eris*’, which means to ‘*argue*’. It means that they were always arguing about Paul’s ministry with everybody. They were being contentious, divisive and critical of everything that was Paul. These peoples motive was jealousy! A critical spirit has the force to cause much pain, because everybody wants to be loved, accepted and liked. Just be subject to someone who criticizes you all the time and you will find they have the power to be really sick kill happiness, a real happiness thief.

Paul is letting us know that he also had these people to contend with, but he refused to allow their attitudes to determine his happiness. The way that Paul refused to let them rob him of his happiness was because he didn't need their approval to be happy! Others were operating out of a spirit of 'selfish ambition'. Everything about them was insincere and was self-ambitious. Such people have big egos and will always be competitive from self-serving ambition. One of the ways to identify such people is that they are always trying to be '*superior*' to you in a self-absorbed and competitive vibe. Being competitive is in itself not evil, but if the motive is '*selfish ambition*', they will always try and load it over you by putting you down. You will find these kill happiness in every area of your life. My grass is greener than yours, my children are thinner than yours, my style is better than yours, I drive a better car than you, I preach better than you, my son will beat up your son etc. There are people who are enemies, and conspirators and their weapon of mass destruction is gossip! Gossipers are emotional terrorists, sabotaging a person's life in a most destructive fashion!

When things are falling apart, don't try to work it out yourself. Just let God put the pieces back together. If you are facing a problem, you have two options: You can worship or you can worry. That is it! This is what I call the faith factor. Paul says in Philippians 1:18-19, "*I will continue to rejoice. For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance*" (NLT). In that one verse, Paul gives several sources of strength so you can stay positive and happy in tough times.

- a. **Keep God's perspective on your problems.** Paul says, "For I know." It's what you know that keeps you going. Paul knew God was working in the midst of his struggle, and he kept God's bigger perspective. Perspective is understanding something because you see things from a larger frame of reference. It is the ability to perceive how things are interrelated and then judge their comparative importance. In a spiritual sense, it means seeing life from God's point of view. In the Bible, the words "understanding," "wisdom," and "discernment" all have to do with perspective. The opposite of perspective is "hardness of heart," "blinded," and "dullness." There are many benefits of learning to see everything from God's perspective:
- i. **Perspective causes us to love God more.** The better we understand the nature and ways of God, the more we love him. Paul prayed "May you be able to feel and understand, as all God's children should, how long, how wide, how deep, and how high his love really is" (Ephesians 3:18 LB).
 - ii. **Perspective helps us resist temptation.** When we look at a situation from God's viewpoint, we realize the long-term consequences of sin are greater than any short-term pleasure sin might provide. Without perspective we follow our own natural inclinations. "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 14:12 NIV).
 - iii. **Perspective helps us handle trials.** When we have God's perspective on life we realize that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28) and that "the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (James 1:3). Perspective was one of the reasons Jesus was able to endure the cross (Hebrews 12:2). He looked past the pain to the joy that was set before him.

- iv. **Perspective protects us from error.** If there was ever a time that Christians need to be grounded in the truth, it is today. Pluralism has created a very confused culture. The problem is not that our culture believes nothing but that it believes everything. Perspective is the antidote
- .
- b. ***Have people praying for you.*** Paul had people praying for him, and it kept him going. Then he says, “The Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me.” The Holy Spirit also kept Paul going. Prayer is not always easy. We don’t always want to pray, or we feel our prayers are ignored, or that the answer we get is not what we asked for. Yet prayer is powerful; it is an opportunity to submit to God, to ask that truly God’s will be done (not our own), to hold one another in prayer – not for wish fulfillment but for the benefit of the blessing itself. This is the privilege of praying for one another, not to change them but to delight in the gift that they are; this is the honour of being asked to share that feeling of peace.
 - c. ***Have faith God will work on your behalf*** “This will lead to my deliverance.” Paul had faith that God would work his problem for good. If you want to remain free of bitterness or regret, begin to trust that God is actively working on your behalf, even in what appears to be the worst of circumstances. This is a matter of faith, where you choose to believe God is at work. With God working in your life and in faith:
 - i. **You can choose to accept the past.** No sin, no action, no choice on your part is too big for God to handle or too big to be worked for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).
 - ii. **You can choose to embrace the present.** There is no need to play the “what if” game. The past is forgiven and gone, and the future is in God’s omnipotent hands; you are free to focus on the present and your job to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Martyred missionary Jim Elliot once wrote, “Wherever you are, be all there.” God wants you in the present, because that is where his grace will flow.
 - iii. **You can choose to look expectantly toward the future.** Even if you make mistakes today, God still controls your future. Walking in the Spirit, you can live life to the fullest, without fear of making mistakes or stumbling into some terrible circumstance that takes you out of God’s control. Even when things appear to be terrible, you can trust that God is working out some divine plan through you. Trust God with your past and future and commit your present to his purpose. Then watch and see how God provides abundantly for you and through you so that you can express the joy of the Lord and his grace in your life.

Because he had God’s perspective, the prayer of friends, the Holy Spirit, and faith, Paul chose to “continue to rejoice.” It is your choice to rejoice. You can be happy no matter what happens in your life if you don’t let others control your attitude. Few things rob your happiness faster than being criticized or feeling like others are working against you. Why? Because we all want to be loved. We all want approval. We want everybody to like us.

Yet Paul says in Philippians 1:18, “It does not matter! I am happy about it — just so Christ is preached in every way possible, whether from wrong or right motives. And I will continue to be happy.” You don’t need other people’s approval to be happy. You are as happy as you choose to be! If others are unhappy with you, that’s their choice. If you haven’t got someone’s approval now, you are probably not going to get it. And you are going to be miserable if you try to live for the approval of everybody else. Paul later explains in verses 29 and 30 why you can be happy no matter what: *“For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it”* (NLT). Paul says it is a privilege to suffer when you are doing the right thing because you are most like Jesus when somebody’s nailing you to a cross and trying to get at you. You can be happy no matter what happens if you look at every problem from God’s viewpoint and never let what other people say or do control your happiness.

If you allow people to control your attitude what will happen?

4. Focus on your purpose, not your problem. V.20-26

When you stay focused on your purpose, not your problem, you can be happy even when life seems to be falling apart. Paul was an old man when he was in prison in Rome. He was a long way from home. He was awaiting execution. Everything has been taken from him — his friends, his freedom, his ministry, even his privacy, with a guard chained to him 24 hours a day. It was not exactly a happy time for Paul.

But there was one thing they could not take away from Paul: his purpose. Paul made the choice to stay focused on his purpose, even when he had lost everything else. What was his purpose? Serving God by serving others. Paul says in Philippians 1:22-25, *“If by continuing to live I can do more worthwhile work, then I am not sure which I should choose. I am pulled in two directions. I want very much to leave this life and be with Christ, which is a far better thing; but for your sake it is much more important that I remain alive. I am sure of this, and so I know that I will stay. I will stay on with you all, to add to your progress and your joy in the faith”* (TEV).

I will never forget reading Viktor Frankl’s book “Man’s Search for Meaning.” Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist who was taken to one of the death camps in Nazi Germany. All of his family and all of his friends were gassed and murdered. He talks in his book about one day when he stood in front of the Gestapo stark naked. They had taken away the prisoners’ clothes and even Frankl’s wedding ring. He stood there with nothing at all when he suddenly realized there was one thing the Nazis could not take away from him: his choice in how he would respond. You cannot control what other people do to you. You cannot control what other people do around you. But you can control how you respond.

What an amazing character. Paul doesn’t just have a purpose for living but he also has a purpose for dying. We talk about purpose in life. Do you have purpose in death? Paul says it doesn’t matter whether I live or I die; I have a purpose. I have a purpose either way. On earth my

purpose is to serve God by serving other people. When I die my purpose is to be with Christ. Either way I win. In my problems, I will serve God by serving people, but if I die I will be with Christ and serve Him directly where there is no kill happiness in heaven. I am happy either way!! Happiness comes from service and giving your life away. Until you understand this, you are not going to be happy for much of your life. Happiness does not come from self-gratification. It comes from self-sacrifice. Paul knew that to be happy, he had to stay focused on his purpose and not his problems. He summed up his purpose in Philippians 1:21: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (NIV).

If you were asked to fill in the blank, what word would you use? "For me to live is _____." Would it be entertainment? Sports? Clothes? Family? Friends? A career? There could be a lot of good things you could answer, but nothing deserves the place of the One who created you and gave you your life: Jesus Christ. How you fill in that blank will determine how happy you are in life. Because if you answer "money" or "success" or "pleasure" or "power," you are going to be unhappy for most of your life. There is nothing wrong with those things; they just don't deserve first place. You were not created to make a bunch of money, then die, and give it away. God has a far greater purpose for your life. There is only one answer that leads to happiness: to live is Christ. Give your life away. It is your purpose!

Have you ever focused on your problem? If yes what was the outcome?

CONCLUSION.

Paul makes some powerful statements here despite his circumstances giving us powerful sources of strength. I am just going to take one phrase - **I know how it's going to turn out – one way or another – so I choose to rejoice, to be happy!!** It is what you know that keeps you going. He says I know God is working in this. I have God's perspective on my problems. He also had the powerful prayers of the believers as well as the Holy Spirit at work in his life! He knew that no matter what he went through, the will of God would prevail! Begin to see problems from God's perspective, not your own. See it in faith, and not your own strength. Anytime you have a problem and it is starting to get you down to an extend you are starting to lose happiness, then you need to do what Paul does; learn to see it from God's point of view. What is God doing here? What is the bigger picture? What is the bigger perspective? Then you will be able to face the problem in faith. Some of you struggle with problems. You are convinced God only blesses perfect and you are unhappy about all the things in your life that are not perfect. You struggle finding happiness in your marriage, your kids, your job and even your church because none of it measures up to your definition of perfect. It is time to let go of this distorted view of God and reality. God wants you to find happiness in the imperfect and even messy pieces of your life. He is right in the middle of it all! He is accomplishing good even in the broken pieces of our lives! Expecting life to be without turbulence is not a reality. There will be times the fight is going to get rough. The difference maker when it comes to our happiness will be how much we trust the pilot? If we have an unshakable confidence in His control, we will have an enjoyable journey. If we doubt His control, our flight will be pretty stressful.

TALK IT OVER.

1. Paul begins by noting that despite his circumstances the gospel has been advanced. What are some of the specific ways that Paul believes the gospel has been advanced? _____

2. Have you ever experienced a difficult situation that actually turned out to be for your benefit? Describe it. _____

3. Paul repeats a few ideas throughout this passage: advancing the Gospel, suffering for Christ, and rejoicing in all situations. Which one of these impacts you the most today, and why? _____

4. How do you react in times of hardship, or when something is not going the way that you would like? _____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21(NIV)

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Dear Jesus, you know that I often let circumstances determine my happiness. You know that I often allow the kill happiness of pain, problems, pressures and picky people to rob my happiness. Starting today I want to practice these secrets that Paul modeled. Help me to look at every problem in my life from your viewpoint. I want to handle problems in a way that is a witness to nonbelievers and an encouragement to believers.

HABITS OF HAPPINESS.

HABIT 3. HAPPINESS IN LIVING LIKE CITIZENS OF HEAVEN.

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30.

INTRODUCTION:

Travelling and mixing with people of different cultures is awesome. One thing is true no matter where you travel; residents from the country you are visiting can easily identify where you come from. You can travel to USA, UK, Uganda and Tanzania to name just a few and it is obvious you are not from that country. Why? You don't look like, act like, or talk like the citizens of those countries. You couldn't blend in even if you wanted to. It is just obvious you are a citizen of another country. It is this imagery that we are left with from the world of God. As followers of Jesus, we are to identify more with being citizens of heaven rather than citizens of our earthly country. Conduct yourselves worthy of the gospel." the term translated "conduct yourselves" in the New American Standard Version means, literally, "behave as citizens." It is from the same Greek root used in chapter 3:20, where Paul says, " ...our citizenship is in heaven." In fact, learning to live like citizens of heaven is another habit of happiness.

Living like citizens of heaven would have a great deal of meaning to the people in Philippi because they held status as Roman citizens which very few cities enjoyed. It was the practice of the Roman authorities to establish centers of Roman military might, law, culture and learning throughout the empire. The people who lived there were Roman citizens and had all the attendant rights and privileges. They were expected therefore to live out their lives in this pagan society as Romans. They were not to deny their citizenship, nor were they to do anything which would conflict with it or contradict it, but they were to confirm it. So Paul takes this figure and applies it to their new lives in Christ. "Live out your life in the world as a citizen of the kingdom of God. Walk worthy of the gospel that is yours. Live out the name of Jesus Christ in the world. Make true in your experience what is true in your inner life. Conduct yourself as worthy of the gospel of Christ." Now, that is a message which was needed in the first century, and it is a message which is needed today. We too have the same commission to conduct ourselves as citizens of heaven, to act as we know the King would have us act.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ACT LIKE A CITIZEN OF HEAVEN?

1. Daily identify with the proper country. V.27

We will never live like citizens of heaven until we identify more with our heavenly country more than our earthly one. If I am a Kenyan citizen who happens to be a believer, then I will act like it. But, if I know I am a citizen of heaven who happens to be temporarily stationed in the Kenya, I will live like this. Most followers of Jesus need a radically different mindset when it comes to this issue. Our problem so often is we identify with the wrong country. This transfer of citizenship is another major theme of the New Testament. *I Peter 2:9-11 "But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the*

darkness into his wonderful light. Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy. Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners..." (NLT) Notice this: We are God's people of His Kingdom. We are temporary residents and foreigners in this life. What country we identify with will be connected to our happiness. It is tough to be truly happy if we are having an identity crisis. It is tough to experience happiness if we are trying to blend in to a country we don't belong in! So how do I identify with being a citizen of heaven makes me happy?

- a. ***Choose to value your heavenly citizenship more than your earthly one.*** Do you value being a Kenyan citizen more than a citizen of heaven? Which influences your identity more; being a Kenyan or being a believer in Jesus? Are you a Kenyan believer or a believer who happens to be living in Kenya? Every day we need to remind ourselves who we are and where we belong. We are to live together as citizens of heaven. We secondarily live within another nation and culture, but we are not to be under the influence of the world's cultures or values when they conflict with the culture and values of the kingdom of heaven. The ways of the world are often not the ways of Christians. As citizens of heaven we no longer belong to ourselves. We belong to God. And that should be what we want. Birthrights of heaven are far more extensive than rights of citizenship in any country of this world, no matter how good they may be.
- b. ***Embrace the values of your heavenly country more than your earthly one.*** The values of heaven are radically different than of this world. Which values do you live more? We might be able to describe the values of being a Kenyan especially things like freedom and liberty, and the rights of each individual. But, do you know the values of the heavenly Kingdom you are a part of? They are radically different. Constitution is a very important document for our country. It forms the foundation of our values as a nation. God's word is the document for the citizens of heaven that forms the foundation of the values in God's Kingdom. For you not to not know God's word is do not know the values of the country you belong to. Are you reading God's word daily?

What steps can you take today to do fewer things that won't matter in eternity and more things that make an eternal difference? _____

2. Daily practice unity in your relationships V.27

One of the most distinguishing qualities of being a citizen of heaven is the relationships we experience. We practice something the world cannot do and that is relational unity. For us not to get along with one another is to act just like this world. Too many believers today identify with the wrong country when it comes to their relationships. Walking in unity with one another is probably one of the most happiness producing experiences of this life. We all experience the stress and discomfort when relationships are not right; when there is conflict; when there is mistrust and heartache. Wrong country! Unity is one of the major themes of the New Testament. Failing to make it a habit to walk together in unity is to ignore what Jesus taught and deny what

country we are from completely. Unity is our testimony. Unity evokes God's blessing. Unity results in tremendous power for the Kingdom of God. Unity = Happiness. How do we make unity a habit of happiness?

- a. ***Choose to celebrate what you agree on.*** The simple truth is we should look at more what unite us than what divides us. It is our choice what we decide to focus on that will create unity or not. Our happiness comes when we celebrate what we agree. We belong together. We need each other. We are connected, joined together as parts of one body. We are family! Jesus prayed that all believers would be one and love another in the same way He loves us. When we avoid, criticize, or argue with each other, we hurt Jesus as well as ourselves. But when we rely on the power of His Spirit working through us, we can achieve the unity He desires. Here's how you can pursue unity with other believers:
 - i. ***Make no distinctions among believers.*** Remember that, in God's eyes, there are no distinctions between His children who are in Christ – neither male nor female, young nor old, rich nor poor, etc. Don't let other believers' backgrounds discourage you from reaching out to them in love to build genuine relationships.
 - ii. ***Surrender your agenda to God's agenda.*** Instead of letting your personal agenda guide you; make a habit of seeking God's will and fulfilling His purposes as you face decisions each day. Understand that God's plans for you involve working within the body of Christ rather than just on your own. Ask God to give you the ability to build close, trusting relationships with other believers and learn how to work together to achieve common goals.
- b. ***Stop magnifying what you don't agree on.*** You have to stop magnifying minor issues. You have to stop getting worked up over different methods, different practices and even different opinions. We can all find reason not to get along, not to work together, and to avoid each other. But how does this bring God glory and how does it make us happy? The more we focus on what divides us relationally the unhappy we become. Divisive people are unhappy people I have ever encountered. Choose never to be one of them!
- c. ***Stand together with others who are different than you.*** If you refuse to stand together, work together and participate together with people that have differences than you then you are rejecting unity. If someone has to agree 100% with your opinions and your beliefs before you will "stand together" with them then you will be standing alone most of your life! And you will be unhappy most of your life as well! The Romans where by far had one of the most efficient and successful military machines of ancient history. They rarely lost a battle. Why? Because they knew how to fight together. They knew how to stand together. They understood that if they didn't lock their shields with the person next to them, the wall collapses, and they die. The reason the Romans were so successful was their unity as a fighting unity was simply better than everyone else's. Great lesson for us. Who are you standing together with? Who are you locking your shield with? If you can't lock your life with others, you will die emotionally and your happiness will die.

Are you daily practicing unity in relationships? _____

3. Daily practice unity in our purpose V. 27

God not only has an individual purpose for our lives, He also has a corporate purpose for His church that He expects His followers to stand together in. God calls His followers to practice unity of purpose. When churches do not rally people around Godly purpose there is chaos. Unity of purpose is essential to experiencing happiness together as a church. Living like a citizen of heaven is not only coming to church to grow, be fed, be challenged, be encouraged, enjoy the worship and eat the food. It is choosing to stand together with one another in one purpose. This is the purpose God has given us as a church. Remember the following:

- a.* Everything we do as a church is connected to this purpose. Our building project is not about the building but it is about our purpose. It is about the transformation of our town. It is about following Jesus fully so that a community can be transformed completely. Get personally involved with this purpose
- b.* There is so much power, blessing and happiness when we stand together in one purpose.
- c.* When God's people stand together in unity for one purpose they are an unstoppable force for the Kingdom of God.
- d.* Financially accept purpose. Give towards the needs of the purpose. Purpose is not free. Stop expecting it to be free.
- e.* Relationally accept purpose. Choose to walk in unity with each other. Personally accept responsibility to keep Immanuel or your church a relationally sweet place.
- f.* Personally accept purpose. Time: I serve it with my time / I use my gifts / abilities / talents – I personally get involved.

Why is it important for people outside the Body of Christ to see its members serving together with joy and unity? _____

4. Daily practice unity in our battle for the faith V.27

To live like a citizen of heaven is to daily practice unity of purpose. It is to understand that it is more than just Jesus and me but it is also Jesus and us! This is what produces happiness. Too many followers of Jesus are fighting each other instead of fighting together for the Faith! People seem to be oblivious to the fact that we are engaged in a spiritual conflict with a spiritual enemy. If Satan can get us distracted and divided, how effective can we be for the Kingdom of God in this life? Not very! The Bible is very clear about this battle. *Eph. 6:10-12. "A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places."* (NLT) So how do we practice unity in this spiritual battle?

- a. ***See divisiveness as demonic.*** We must understand that divisiveness is one of the greatest strategies of the devil. If we view it as no big deal, then we are playing right into the hands of the enemy. If we all understand that anything divisive is evidence Satan is attacking us, we will respond differently. The Christian community has failed in this area for years. Divisiveness is one of the characteristics of our community God wants to transform. The power of divisiveness can be extremely destructive and overwhelming, however; this type of behavior can be controlled. The ability to control this kind of behavior is a spiritual matter.
- b. ***Pray together for unity.*** Can I ask every one of you to include this in your daily prayers? Will you pray for your church and will you help defend your church by praying for unity? With all that we have before us, we will never accomplish it without supernatural unity. Many of us miss out on so much because we only pray by ourselves. Yet, when Jesus gave us an outline for prayer, he spoke about praying together. There is power in group prayer. Paul once again stresses the importance of unity in the church. He prays for what the Lord wants, namely, a people united in gospel essentials and tolerant of diversity when it comes to matters that do not touch the heart of the Christian faith. Since this is what God desires, it is what we should desire as well. Thus, we should always be working toward Christian unity that is grounded in the truth and promotes peace based on the Lord's revelation without compromising gospel essentials.
- c. ***When things are difficult, pull together rather than pull apart.*** What do we do when things get tough? What do we do when things get turbulent? Some of you are on the brink of pulling apart. You are on the brink of pulling apart something good. Maybe your marriage, a friendship, a ministry, a dream and your church. Yes, things are tough right now, but do pulling apart what God wants you to do? NO! To get through what you are going through, you need to recruit other people to pray for you. This is very easy when you are in a small group. When you are going through a tough time and you are not in a small group, you are unprotected. You don't have the strength that people in a small group do because you don't have people praying for you. The Bible says in Galatians 6:2, "*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ*" (NIV). What is the law of Christ? "Love your neighbor as yourself." When you pray for other people, you are loving your neighbor as yourself. When they pray for you, they are loving you as themselves.

Because the enemy is not flesh and blood then it is not the person you can't get along with, the need is to come together, link the shields and fight the real enemy. Citizens of heaven come together, they pull together, they withstand the hardships together, and they fight the battles together for the faith. This is what will produce the most happiness in your life.

- a. *How do you deal with divisiveness in your business, organization or church?*
-

b. *How have you seen God provide for you through the prayers of a group of people?*

5. Speak without Fear V.28

I love the sober realism of these words. Paul doesn't sugar-coat the truth. You are going to be opposed ... Speak up anyway. Some people won't like your message ... Don't let that stop you. Sooner or later, you will run into strong opposition ... So what? *Just keep preaching Jesus*. As our Lord reminded us, if they hated him, they will hate us too (John 15:18). They crucified him. Can we expect anything better? This verse contains a truth you may never have considered before. *Opposition to the gospel reveals spiritual reality*. Genuine believers are proved genuine by the quality of their opposition. If no one ever criticizes or opposes you, if you never "make waves" because of your faith, if everyone is happy with your Christian faith all the time, well then, something is wrong with your faith. Let me state the principle this way: *True believers annoy the world because they stand as a rebuke to everything the world stands for*. When we say "Jesus is the only way," they call us arrogant. If we declare, "You must be born again," someone is sure to call us fanatics. If you say the Bible is the Word of God, someone else will think you are an ignorant hick. If you say, "I know I'm going to heaven," you will be accused of thinking you are better than everyone else. Finally, if you dare to call adultery wrong and homosexuality sinful, someone is bound to call you a narrow-minded, judgmental bigot. And so it goes. We annoy the world precisely because we are citizens of heaven and live by different principles.

We too must commit to boldness in our faith. We have nothing to fear from man. They may possess the ability to take our lives, but we are the recipients of eternal life. Settle your stand today, before the intense opposition comes. Mankind has never been able to explain or ignore the boldness of the faithful while facing intense persecution. Many have been saved through the witness of the faithful while suffering. I pray we too will have the courage to stand faithful if we face persecution for our faith. With God on your side, you don't need anything else. God plus one equals a majority. What is your greatest fear? Is it embarrassment? Losing your mind? Failure? Rejection? Disappointing others? Not fitting in? Satan uses all of these fears to rob you of joy. He knows what will make you happy, so he creates a fear to oppose it. For instance, Satan knows doing what is right will always bring you joy. So he makes you afraid of what other people will think if you do the right thing. He makes you worry more about your popularity than pleasing God. Satan also knows that one of the greatest sources of happiness in life is when you share the love of Christ with an unbeliever. So he makes you afraid to tell people about Jesus. You don't need the approval of others to find happiness.

How have you seen fear impact the lives of those you love?

6. Suffering for Christ V.29 - 30

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake. Here Paul shared a truth they probably didn't enjoy, but it was true nonetheless. While there were many great and precious promises for those in Christ, there was also the expectation of a willingness to suffer for Him. This was not to be considered strange or unusual. While they may never see the end result, they could rest knowing the Lord would be glorified through their faithfulness, even in suffering. Much teaching today focuses solely on the blessings associated with salvation. Many would have us believe suffering is due to a lack of faith or rebellion. They see no benefit in suffering for the cause of Christ. I wonder how they explain this particular passage. While I don't enjoy suffering or adversity, I do rest in the sovereignty of my Lord. Everything that comes my way has been allowed by Him, and He has a purpose for it. If my struggles bring glory to Christ my Lord, then they will be worth the difficulty they bring.

Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me (V.30.) Paul was not being arrogant: just honest. He reminded them of the great agony he suffered while in Philippi and the bonds he then endured in Rome. He had suffered greatly for the Lord, and he wanted them to know they were no better. God is not a respecter of persons, and suffering was not an immediate indication of his displeasure or punishment. Facing opposition was natural for the believer. He had suffered, and they likely would as well if they remained committed to Christ. I know our flesh doesn't like that, but this truth remains. As we consider those in Scripture and historical accounts of others who were faithful to the Lord, we discover the suffering of many of these. Our generation is not the first to face opposition. We don't enjoy it, but we know it comes with being a believer in Christ. I would rather suffer for Him in this life than to suffer without Him in the life to come. If we can maintain our faith, and a proper perspective, we can overcome in Christ.

Sometimes suffering is God's will for your life. Why? Because it makes you more like Jesus. It deepens your faith. It brings you rewards in Heaven. It builds your character. It teaches you to worship instead of worry. There are three kinds of suffering in the world. Common suffering is suffering that is common to everybody. It doesn't matter if you are Baptist or Buddhist or Muslim or atheist or whatever. Everybody suffers certain things. There is suffering in the world that we all share in common. The second kind of suffering is carnal suffering. That is suffering you bring on yourself from your own sin. If I go out and live a very loose immoral life and get a sexually transmitted disease, that is my fault. It is not God's fault. It is not anybody else's fault. It is my fault. If I spend more money than I make and now I'm in debt and going bankrupt, that's not anyone's fault but mine. That is suffering because of my sin and bad decisions. Not all suffering is from sin. The Bible says sometimes suffering is according to the will of God, because God is more interested in your character than your comfort. No matter what arrows are thrown at you, no matter what you suffer in this life because of your faith, God wants you to remain faithful to him and keep on doing good to others. Is that easy to do? Not always. Does it take faith? Definitely. Is it worth it? Absolutely.

In what situations in your life do you need to stand up for Christ even in the face of opposition

CONCLUSION.

So which country do you identify with more? The one you temporarily live in now, or the one you will be spending eternity in? Paul says; *Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven.* Are we? These have been simple truths to consider, and yet they reveal profound truth. Are we faithful citizens of the heavenly land to which we belong? Do we possess the courage to stand for Christ and proclaim the Gospel? He was faithful to the sufferings of the cross for us. The least we can do is stand for Him while striving to present a positive witness. If there are needs, particularly regarding salvation, I urge you to respond to the call of Christ. This is what it looks like to live as a citizen of heaven. This is a habit that will produce happiness in your life. We don't belong here. The more you try to identify with this broken and evil world the more lost you are going to feel. You were made for more. You were born into a heavenly Kingdom because of what Jesus did for you. It is time to behave where you belong. It is time to show the world what citizens of heaven look like.

TALK IT OVER

1. How is God asking you to grow in your heavenly citizenship? _____

2. What does it look like to live a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ?

3. What's the hardest part about placing another person's needs above your own? _____

4. Take a moment and reflect over the life you have lived. Are you living a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ? Where have you done well? Where might you need some work? ____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.
Philippians 1:27

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Thank you my heavenly Father for bringing me into your family. May I never disappoint you in the way I treat others. May they see in me the qualities of character that can only be attributed to your presence in my life. To you be the glory and the honor, forever and ever, through Jesus my Lord. Amen

HABITS OF HAPPINESS

HABIT 4. HAPPINESS IN PRACTICING THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS"

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

INTRODUCTION:

Let us face it; practicing a good attitude at all times is just tough. One moment you are doing good and making progress with your attitude and then the next moment, something happens that just seems to destroy all that work. Isn't it amazing how fast we can lose that feeling of being happy? Most people if we had to ask them to tell us the attitude to happiness would probably say something like the following ; get an education; get a job; get married; have a family; make a lot of money, retire etc. And yet there are many who have all these things, but happiness has eluded them! Paul reveals to us that the right attitude to happiness is probably the most unimaginable habit of them all and that is humility! One of the greatest sources of not being happy is 'conflict'! It can be conflict with your spouse, children, friends, parents, partners and business associations! The root cause for all conflict is pride! If you experience conflicts in your relationships, happiness goes out of the window! Everything could be going great in your life and just have an argument with somebody you love and all of a sudden that happiness just flies out of the window. If you are ever going to learn to be happy on a long-term basis you have to learn how to reduce and eliminate conflict in your life. And that is where humility comes in.

The habit of humility is the key to reducing conflict in your life because pride is the thing that causes conflict. Proverbs 13:10a Only by pride cometh contentions ... (KJV) Proverbs 13:10a Pride only leads to arguments ... (NCV). Our above text from Philippians reveals that *humility leads to harmony and harmony leads to happiness!* In this passage we find four kinds of intimate unity within any relationship that will produce happiness. Paul tells us that we can have a complete happiness and joy in our relationships! He gives us four clues *i) have the same mind.* – That is mental harmony, united in thinking. *ii) He says I want you to share the same love.* – That is emotional harmony. *iii) He says I want you to be united in spirit* – That is spiritual harmony. *iv) And then he says, I want you to be intent on one purpose.* – That is directional harmony; we are headed in the same direction together. This stuff is simply not always easy. We need to practice the same qualities that made up Jesus' attitude. The more we live like Jesus, the more happiness we are going to experience. So let us go to work together on our next area of happiness.

PRACTICING THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

1. Practice Being Unselfish V.3

Paul tells us not to do anything from selfish ambition or vain conceit. Paul says that there are two conflict-creating kinds of pride. One of them is selfish ambition and the other is vain conceit. Let me explain them a different way. **Selfish ambition is saying, it is all about me. And vain conceit means, I'm always right.** So when you have those two attitudes, it is all about me and I'm always right, then you have selfish ambition and vain conceit. James 3:16 says; whenever

there is jealousy or selfish ambition, you will find confusion and every other kind of evil. When you find confusion at your workplace, confusion in the office, then you can know that selfish ambition and jealousy are causing it. When you find confusion in your home you can know that selfishness is causing that. This causes confusion everywhere. It causes it in marriages, it causes it in politics, it causes it in church, and it causes it in businesses' associations. It causes it in the governments! It is all about me is selfish ambition. Paul says if you are going to have happiness, you have to have harmony. And if you are going to have harmony, you have to have humility.

Selfish is “Having or showing concern only for yourself and not for the needs or feelings of other people.” Therefore, to be selfish is to disregard the needs and feelings of others. It is to be relationally calloused. It is to have your heart closed to others hurts, needs and struggles. It is to be a “self-absorbed” person. All your energy and efforts in this life goes into yourself. Selfishness is the fast track to be unhappy. People that are consumed with themselves are some of the unhappy people. God just never designed us to find our happiness in ourselves. Before we all excuse ourselves from this issue, let us just all admit we all struggle with this problem to some degree. Every person here has made selfish choices and decisions rather than being concerned about the needs, desires, and feelings of another. We all have a selfish streak in us. So how do you practice being unselfish? How do you grow in this?

- a. ***Admit your struggle.*** None of us can grow in areas where we don't admit we need to grow. All changes in our lives begin by admitting we have an issue. Where there is relational conflict there is selfishness. Since none of us have complete harmony every day in all our relationships, my guess is you need to grow. In order to get through what you're going through, focus on who God is — his unchanging nature. Regardless of circumstances and how you feel, hang on to God's unchanging character. Your circumstances cannot change the character of God. God's grace is still in full force; he is still for you, even when you don't feel it. Remind yourself what you know to be eternally true about God: He is good, he loves you, he is with you, he knows what you are going through, he cares, and he has a good plan for your life.
- b. ***Daily depend on God.*** Gal. 5:16-17 “So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other...” (NLT) Nobody can conquer their fleshly desires in their own strength. This is why God put the Holy Spirit inside every follower of Jesus. We now have a choice on whom we rely on. We have a choice on which will dictate our attitude and behavior. Will it be my old fleshly desires or will it be the Holy Spirit in me? I need to daily ask to be filled with His Spirit. If I don't lean to depending on God's Spirit in me I will fail miserably. The Holy Spirit will transform our selfishness.
- c. ***Get involved serving the needs of others.*** We have to stop insulating ourselves so much from the needs and hurts of others that we never feel their pain. If we choose to get involved, we now come face to face with brokenness. My selfishness is

confronted by those who have life harder than me! The Bible says in John 19:28-29, *“After this, Jesus knew that everything had been done. So that the Scripture would come true, he said, ‘I am thirsty.’ There was a jar full of vinegar there, so the soldiers soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a branch of a hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ mouth”* (NCV).

The phrase “I thirst” was the life verse and the theme of Mother Teresa, who founded the Order of the Missionaries of Charity and Mother Teresa’s Home for the Dying. In every Home for the Dying around the world, where they take in the poorest of the poor, there is a picture of Jesus hanging on the cross and underneath the words “I thirst,” because Mother Teresa said that is our duty — to quench the thirst of Christ by helping those in need. We cannot help Jesus on the cross. That is long past. Can you imagine being that soldier who gave Jesus the drink? What a privilege! We can’t do that. But we can help those around us.

The aim of our existence is to satiate the thirst of Jesus on the cross for every soul, and it is shown by our love in action. Love in action is when we meet the needs of other people in their thirst — physical, emotional, or spiritual — out of love for Christ, who was thirsty for us. There are people all around you who are spiritually thirsty, but nobody ever uses that term. Here are some synonyms for spiritual thirst: boredom, unhappiness, dissatisfaction, stress, and desperation. People who are spiritually thirsty have a need for meaning, purpose, and significance. They want to hear a word from God. They want to know what to do with their lives.

People look good on the outside, but they are empty on the inside. They are depressed, discouraged, defeated, in despair, unsatisfied, hopping from thing to thing, looking for what is going to give them fulfillment and quench their thirst. What is your responsibility as a believer to these people, to the world? The only way you can serve God is by serving people and helping others in his name. Help quench their thirst by sharing with them what God has done to make them whole.

Every conflict that you go through in a relationship has an element of pride mixed into it. What is the middle letter of the word “pride”? I. What is the middle letter of the word “crime”? I. What is the middle letter of the word “sin”? I. We have an “I” problem! “I” want what “I” want and “I” want it now, and that causes all kinds of problems. In any relationship, never let pride be your guide, because pride is the root of every other sin. The Bible says in Philippians 2:3 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (NIV). The Living Bible translation of Philippians 2:3 say, “Don’t live to make a good impression on others.” We do this in every area of our lives, but especially on social media. It is a great temptation to make yourself look better on the Internet than you are. In Galatians, Paul lists about 17 effects of living with pride. He says when we live a self-centered life; it shows up in all kinds of ways. He starts off by saying things like self-indulgence shows up in sexual immorality and wild partying and getting drunk. You would expect those things.

But most of the things on the list are actually relational sins. Galatians 5:19-21 says, “When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear ... quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy.... Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (NLT). If you want to be happy in your relationships, you need harmony. And if you are going to have harmony, you need humility. Never let pride be your guide

Share with your group about a time in your life when you had a choice to be selfish and how did you handle it.

2. Practice to be humble. V.3

Again, this is the opposite of what our culture teaches. Our culture teaches you have to do what is best for you. I have to look out for number one. I have to think about me. I have to live for myself. I have to do what makes me happy. If it feels good do it. All these selfish, self-centered, and narcissistic are rules that we have been taught throughout life. And Paul comes along and says, no, be humble and give more honor to others than yourself. A lot of people think humility means going around saying, I’m no good. I’m nothing. I’m a zero. I’m zip. I can’t do anything right. That is just degrading yourself and is called false humility! ***Humility is not thinking less of yourself. Humility is thinking of yourself less.*** Humility is you just don’t think about yourself only. If you walk into this room and you think, what does everybody else think about me? How do I look? Then you are being prideful. If you walk into this room and you think, how could I help the people in this room? Then you are being humble. ***The focus is not on you. The focus is on the other people.*** Humility has nothing to do with what you think of yourself. Humility is what you think about other people. In other words, humility is not putting myself down. Humility is building other people up. Humble people build other people up. Great people make people feel great. Little people belittle people. Humility is not denying your strengths; it is being honest about your weaknesses.

If I am not humble, my relationships will crumble! **James 4:6 God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.** Grace is the ability to forgive when I don’t feel like forgiving. Grace is the ability to resolve a conflict with my husband or wife when I don’t feel like it. Grace is the ability to compromise. Grace is the ability to get along. Grace is the ability to build a strong relationship when everything wants to tear your marriage, your friendship, whatever, that relationship is, apart. We all need grace. Let me give you one example that leads people to self-promotion and that is Facebook. Facebook is a magnet for self-promotion / “selfies” / “look at me!” Do you know that Facebook actually depresses most people? Studies have shown that all this self-promotion is depressing. Why? Because it is not reality. People compare their own lives to a post and conclude their life sucks.

Do you post things trying to impress others? Let us think about our behavior. How much is your behavior motivated by what others think about you? How much are you trying to influence what they think about you? Let us think about how we talk. Do we talk in a way that self-promotes? Do we lie to make our story better? Do we always elevate ourselves first instead of our teammates at work? Do we personally take credit for team success? Does most of my

communication use “I” and me” instead of “We” and “Us”? Do you have to “one up” someone’s story? Are we afraid of what people think of us so that it influences our behavior and choices? Do we fear losing the approval of others? How do we practice not take pride in ourselves?

- a. **Live to impress Jesus not others.** For a follower of Jesus, living to please and promote Jesus has to be more important than living to please others and promote yourself. You can’t do both! Therefore, whose opinion means more to you? Who do you really want to impress? You cannot be used by God if you are trying to impress others and promote yourself. In order to work this out of your character, God can put you through a series of painful life situations where you have a choice to either please people or please Him. In fact, if you chose to please Him you would actually lose approval. *John 12:42-43 “Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God.” (NIV)* If you want freedom from this issue, you have to decide who you want to live to impress. Is it Jesus or people?

Impressing Jesus changes everything about how you live today. If you are headed to Heaven, then that reality should impact how you live here on earth. So how do you live to impress Jesus?

- i. **Don’t be distracted by temptation.** *“Dear brothers, you are only visitors here. Since your real home is in heaven, I beg you to keep away from the evil pleasures of this world; they are not for you, for they fight against your very souls” (1 Peter 2:11 TLB).* You can be distracted by lots of things — both good and bad. Stay focused on what is of eternal significance. Delay gratification, even though everything in society tries to get you to do just the opposite. Stay focused on what is ahead.
- ii. **Don’t be discouraged by trouble.** The Bible says, *“So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever” (2 Corinthians 4:18 NLT, second edition).* When you live in light of eternity, trouble just doesn’t bother you as much anymore. You know troubles won’t last forever, so you simply don’t give up.
- iii. **Focus your energy on what will last.** *“Let heaven fill your thoughts; don’t spend your time worrying about things down here” (Colossians 3:2 TLB).* Fulfill the purposes of God in your life. Live a life of worship. Build relationships with God’s people. Invest your time in becoming more like Jesus through discipleship. Serve others with abandon. Tell people about Jesus. Those activities last forever.

- b. **Let Jesus lift you up.** Living to impress others and self-promotion are driven by our pride and insecurities. Pride makes us elevate ourselves over others. Our insecurities make us live to please others. But choosing to live for Jesus, you can relax and let Him promote you in His perfect timing. *1 Peter 5:6 “So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.” (NLT)* Proverbs 19:2b says, *“Impatience will get you into trouble” (GNT).* It is frustrating

when you are in a hurry and God isn't. God is never in a hurry! The Bible says a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day to God. One of the most useless things to try to do is to speed up God. When we try to take matters into our own hands and help God out, we get in trouble.

Resting can be an act of faith. It means you are waiting on God. When Jesus and the disciples were in a boat that was caught in a big storm, Jesus just kept sleeping through the entire ruckus while the disciples freaked out. When they woke him up to ask, "Why are you sleeping?!" he responded, "Do you think God is going to let the boat sink with me in it?" By sleeping through the storm, Jesus was saying that we can trust God even in the middle of a storm. When we get into a storm, we tend to lie awake all night and fret about it. But that means we are not living by faith. We can't get any sleep because we don't really trust God to work it out. God says, "Don't fret. Remember that I'm always with you, and you can trust my timing."

Do you want a life of honor? Do you want people to admire the way you live your life? Would you like to be used in significant ways and have influence? Would you like to know that your contribution made a difference? Then you must understand God's pathway for honor. It is humility! It's the opposite of living to impress people. One of the ways God can teach you is by allowing you to work under a leader who has less skill sets than you. Have you ever been in this situation where your boss isn't a good leader? You need to humble yourself before God and embrace the situation and work well with your boss. Why? It was not your time yet. Humility always precedes Honor

In what area are you likely to struggle with humility?

3. Practice paying attention to others V.3

Humility dictates that we take note of others around us! This has become a lost art in our technological world that feeds our egotism and drags us into the abyss of 'not paying attention! We sit with a friend while tweeting. We focus on how many re-tweets, and how many likes in Facebook. We are so busy with our own little worlds that we have lost the art of a great love language of taking the time to pay attention to those around us. We have developed ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder). We are so busy playing our video games, listening to our iPods, tweeting and posting photos on instagram, that we don't notice the 90 year old lady sitting alone in her wheelchair, the broken lonely teenager sitting with tears in her eyes, the child craving our affection, and our spouses feeling neglected under the same roof!!

It is difficult to walk up to someone and say hi, how are you doing today and when you do, it is so abnormal to them they just ignore you thinking you have ulterior motives. Learn the lost art of paying attention. Don't be interested in just your own life but be interested in others, what others care about too. Notice the phrase; 'thinking of others'. Humility in our relationships begins with how we think about others.

Now, when it says to think of others as better than yourself it is not meaning I think of myself as a loser and everyone else is better than me. He is not telling us to have a lousy self-esteem. I like to think we should think correctly about ourselves. What does this look like?

- a. ***Resist any form of superiority in your thinking.*** Before we excuse ourselves from this one, let us take a closer look. It is so subtle how superiority creeps into our thinking. Do you think you are better than someone else? How about a different race, skin color and religion? Are you better than the person who wounded you? The person who disagrees with you? And the loud horrible neighbor? This is such an important hindrance to humility to keep in check. Any form of thinking that makes me feel superior to someone else will eventually make you miserable.

When you are successful, it is much easier to fall hard than it is to maintain your success. We tend to get proud and forget about God and success crumbles when we do that. If you have found yourself in that situation, the first step to take is absolutely critical.

- b. ***Acknowledge many people are better at many things.*** It is just a fact that many people in this life are better than you are at a host of things. I know I am stating the obvious, but it is an important part of humility. When I recognize this simple fact, it means that I need you. I can't do everything well therefore I need you to help me. This is not self-deprecation, it is relational reality. You and I can never be the kind of people God wants us to be on our own. We were never intended to be. We all need people who are teaching us, sharing their lives with us, investing in us, and encouraging us to grow. The Bible tells us, "*Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm*" (Proverbs 13:20 NIV). In fact, to be all that God calls you to be, you need to learn from at least four different kinds of people.

- i. **Mentors** – These are your coaches. No one can teach you everything you need to know. One person will teach you in one area. Another person will teach you about something else. Mentors can bring out the best in you and help you achieve God's unique mission for your life. They help you keep growing—in your roles, your goals, and your soul. To be mentored, you must learn to listen and receive feedback. I have had eight different mentors in my life. I also have a whole list of advisors—they are like my brain trust. I bounce ideas off them and get their feedback. The Bible teaches the importance of accepting feedback: "It's better to be criticized by a wise man than praised by a fool" (Ecclesiastes 7:5). Feedback is absolutely essential in order to fulfill God's mission for your life. If you don't get feedback, you are going to get off course. Did you know that in all the Apollo flights to the moon the shuttles had to do course corrections literally every second? The earth was turning, the moon was turning, and in order to get the rocket to the spot on the moon where it was supposed to be at a specific time, the astronauts had to continually correct their course. And that means they had to get feedback. If you are not open to feedback, you are not going to learn, you are not going to grow, and you are not going to develop. Go out and find someone you trust,

someone with skills and experiences you can learn from and ask that person to be your mentor.

- ii. **Role models** – These are people who are already doing or have already done what you want to do. Many of the skills you have learned in your life, you have learned by watching others. Team up with people who are good at what you are not good at. Team up with people who complement you. Everybody has something to contribute. Nobody has it all together. We need each other
- iii. **Partners** – You need co-workers and colleagues who are in your profession, people to support and challenge you on what God wants to do through your life. Nobody is good at everything. You need me, and I need you. Nobody has every talent. There are no perfect people who can say to the world, “I don’t need anybody else.” We need each other. We were made to work in teams! That is why you need a small group and a church family. We are better together. This, by the way, is one of the purposes of marriage. In marriage we are put together to complement each other’s strengths and to compensate for each other’s weaknesses. What happens when we don’t compensate for each other’s weaknesses? We criticize each other. That’s not what marriage is for. Marriage puts two sinners together, so there can be no perfect relationships. But in a marriage, you know the other’s weaknesses, so you can help compensate for them.
- iv. **Friends** – Friends don’t necessarily help you with your goals. They are just friends. They love you no matter what you do. You can mess up, and they still love you. A friend walks into your life when everyone else walks out. That is when you know who your friends are. But you need to be careful what type of friends you need to have. *“Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character’”* (1 Corinthians 15:33 NIV). Let us agree upfront that God wants you to have non-believers as friends. God wants you to love everyone, show kindness to everyone, and be able to help everyone. If you don’t have any non-Christian friends, you won’t be around anyone who needs to hear the Good News. But your best friends should be Christians. They should be strong believers.

It is always easier to pull people down than to pull them up. That is why you must make sure the people you hang out with the most are moving you in the right direction. They should be building you up rather than tearing you down. Where do you want to be in 10 years? What kind of person do you want to be? Tell me two things about you and I can tell you where you will be without even knowing you. Tell me the people you are spending your time with and what you are reading. Those two factors will determine your future. Your friends are too important to pick by chance. You must be intentional. That is why you need a church home. Get to know people at church. Build relationships. Join a small group. Or start a group! Gather some Christian

friends from your office or your neighborhood to study the Bible together during lunch. You need Christian friends. Do what it takes to build those relationships.

- c. ***Recognizing your strengths values you.*** I am choosing to value what you bring, what you offer your contribution to the whole. I see you as essential not optional. If you don't use your strengths here we can't be all God wants us to be! Recognizing your strengths values God's design. This is how He created the church to function and operate. I'm actually agreeing with His will. When I value your strengths, I am acknowledging God in you! Choose to be who God wants you to be.

Pride destroys relationships. It shows up in a lot of different ways, like criticism, competition, stubbornness, and superficiality. The problem with pride is it is self-deceiving. Everybody else can see it in us but us. When you have a problem with pride, you don't see it in your life. Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride leads to destruction; a proud attitude brings ruin" (NCV). I love this verse in the Message paraphrase: "First pride, then the crash — the bigger the ego, the harder the fall." Pride destroys relationships, but humility is the antidote to pride. Humility builds relationships. The Bible says in 1 Peter 3:8, "Live in harmony, be sympathetic, love each other, have compassion, and be humble" (GWT).

How are you and I going to grow in humility? It happens by letting Jesus Christ begin to control our thoughts and hearts and attitudes and reactions. He has to be a part of this. Ephesians 4:23-24 says, "Let the Spirit change your way of thinking and make you into a new person" (CEV). How do you become a new person? How do you start to think in a different way? The basic law of relationships is this: You tend to become like the people you spend time with. If you spend time with grumpy people, you get grumpier. If you spend time with happy people, you get happier. If you want to have more humility, spend time with Jesus Christ. He is humble. He wants a relationship with you. He wants you to spend time with him in prayer and reading his Word and talking to him. He is humble, and as you get to know him, you will become more like him.

"Be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves ... You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to" (Philippians 2:3b, 5-6 NCV/NLT, second edition). No one has done anything more humble than Jesus, coming from Heaven to Earth to become a man, live for us, give his life for us, and be resurrected for us. When you spend time with him, it makes you more humble, and that builds your relationships. There is possible way for us to experience consistent happiness in this life without humility in our relationships. How are you practicing humility in relationships? Relational humility = relational happiness.

Is there someone in your life you need to actively consider more important than yourself? How can you seek to humbly show preference to that person over your desires and wants?

4. Practice to be a peace maker V.4-5

Peacemaking isn't a well-developed skill in our world today, but it's a skill that can be learned. In fact, Jesus calls all believers to be peacemakers. You are never going to make peace with others until you make peace with God, and the only way you are going to make peace with God is surrender. You were made to live with him as the manager, CEO, and chairman of the board of your life. Let me share keys to biblical peacemaking:

- a. **Listen to the other person's pain and perspective.** You will always find hurt in a conflict. How many times have you heard me say, "Hurt people hurt people"? In other words, the more I'm hurting, the more I lash out at everybody else. People who aren't hurting don't hurt others. That is why peacemakers listen to the other person's hurt and gets that person's perspective. As Francis of Assisi once said, "Seek to understand before you seek to be understood." The Bible says, "*Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had*" (Philippians 2:4-5 NLT, second edition). That means you are most like Jesus when you are focusing on the hurts of somebody else rather than your own hurts.
- b. **Speak the truth tactfully.** The truth sets you free, but you have to say it with love. The Bible says, "*Speak the truth in love*" (Ephesians 4:15a NLT). The truth is not enough. It is not just what you say, but how you say it. If you speak offensively, it will be received defensively. God is very specific about the kinds of words that are out of bounds. I call them WMDs — Words of Mass Destruction. These are words that raise the conflict to a whole new level. Angry, hurtful, blaming words are useless. They only stir up more trouble. Colossians 3:8 says, "*You must no longer say insulting or cruel things about others*" (CEV).
- c. **Fix the problem, not the blame.** You need to learn to attack the issue, not each other. The blame game is a waste of time. Any time you are busy fixing blame, you are wasting energy and not fixing the problem. You only have a certain amount of emotional energy. In a conversation where you are trying to resolve conflict, you can either use that energy to fix the blame or you can use that energy to fix the problem. You don't have enough energy to do both. So you have to ask yourself what is more important, to blame the other person or to resolve the conflict. Every married couple needs some ground rules for fighting fair and words you are just not going to use. There are some things you should never, ever say in a marriage — they are "weapons of mass destruction".

During the Cold War, when the Soviet Union and the United States were opposed to each other, the U.S. had thousands of intercontinental missiles aimed at the Soviets. We could destroy the entire Union. At the same time, Soviet Russia had thousands of intercontinental missiles aimed at us, too. They could destroy the United States. Even when we were at the worst point in the Cold War and there was enormous tension, both sides still had enough sanity to say, some weapons we just aren't going to use because they are "MAD" — mutually assured destruction.

If you use yours, we are going to use ours, and we are going to destroy each other. So even when we were on opposite sides of an issue, we could at least agree not to use those weapons. In the same way, you should never resort to relational “weapons of mass destruction” your marriage, such as threatening divorce or threatening to walk out or bringing up somebody’s parents. You have to agree that no matter how upset you are with each other, those words are off limits, because they destroy the relationship by tearing down trust.

The Bible is very specific about what’s out of bounds. Colossians 3:8 says, “*Now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips*” (NIV). Those are like *weapons of mass destruction*. The reason we fix the problem and not the blame is because blaming is a form of judging, and only God has the right to judge. You are not the judge. You can’t figure out anybody else’s motivation. You don’t know your own motivation most of the time! Only God knows. Let him be the judge, so you can focus on fixing the problem.

- d. Focus on reconciliation, not resolution.** Reconciliation means re-establishing the relationship. You have buried the hatchet. Resolution, on the other hand, means you resolve every single disagreement. That won’t happen. We are all different. We won’t agree on everything. But peacemakers can disagree without being disagreeable. That is called maturity. When you have conflict in your life, focus on reconciliation, not resolution. There is a big difference in those two words. Reconciliation means re-establishing the relationship. It means you are not holding onto any hurt. Resolution means resolving every issue. Resolution probably isn’t going to happen, because you are never going to agree on some things.

Nobody on this planet agrees with you about everything, so you are never going to have resolution on all your issues. Can you have a loving relationship without agreeing on everything? Of course you can. If you learn to disagree without being disagreeable, that is called wisdom. If you learn to walk hand in hand without having to see eye to eye, that is called wisdom. One of the greatest things you can do with your life is being a bridge builder, not a wall builder. You are most like Jesus Christ when you are reconciling people. You are most like Jesus when you are building bridges, not walls. That is exactly what Jesus came to do! He is the great reconciler. God sent Jesus to Earth to reconcile us because we are in conflict with God.

Our world is filled with conflict. Just pick up a newspaper. It is everywhere: wars, divisions, arguments, stress between people, prejudices and racism, violence, tribalism, and terrorism. Our civilization is no longer civil. And as a result we have broken relationships, broken lives, and broken hearts. My challenge to you is that you will commit to becoming an agent of reconciliation in a world filled with conflict.

Discuss this statement in your small group: The blame game is a waste of time. Anytime you’re busy fixing blame, you are wasting energy and not fixing the problem.

5. Practice Harmony and Humility V.6-8

Happiness comes from harmony, and harmony comes from humility. If you want to be a humble person, you have to learn to ask yourself a question: “What would Jesus do?” What would Jesus do in this problem? What would Jesus do for that person who is hurting? What would Jesus do at the office? On the golf course? What would Jesus do in your marriage? Ask this question, and you will always come up with a humble answer that builds harmony and happiness rather than difficulty, defeat, bitterness, and resentment. So, what does it mean to act like Jesus? Philippians 2 gives us three examples: Don’t demand what you think you deserve. Philippians 2:6 says, “Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to” (NLT).

Do you realize how counter cultural it is to give up your right to something? Yes, you have rights, but there is a better way to get your needs met than demanding your rights. You can be tender without surrender, and you can understand without demanding. Look for ways that you can serve. Philippians 2:7 says, “Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.” If you want to be like Jesus, you are going to have to learn to serve. Do what’s right even when it’s painful. Philippians 2:8 says, “He humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.” Jesus is the ultimate model of humility, and God gave him the greatest honor in the universe. God honors your humility, too, when you follow Jesus’ example and do these three things

CONCLUSION

So how do we practice an attitude of Jesus? This is going to require certain things from us:

- a. Initiative.* It begins with you taking the initiative. The needs are all around you. Choose to look! Are you actively looking for ways to serve, get involved, and meet some needs? How many people have never even gone to the church office and looked at how many opportunities there are to serve? Have you ever visited a ministry? Have you ever talked to a ministry leader? Have you ever really listened to the announcements? It all takes initiative! Are you taking any? Are you choosing to see the needs right in front of you?
- b. Sincerity.* You must care about what is happening. Let God burden your heart. Allow your emotions to be impacted. Choose to feel! Our passion for serving comes from our emotions being impacted deeply. If your emotions are never touched, then you will never have any passion to serve others. There is no sincerity. There is no authenticity to how you serve. Are you willing to feel what Jesus feels? Sincerity is a heart issue. Will you allow the needs of others to touch your heart?
- c. Time.* If my life is so full I have no time to invest in others then I am only looking out for my own interests. My life is consumed with me; my needs, my desires, my responsibilities, my stresses, and my life. In order to embrace the attitude of Jesus, many of us may need to rethink our time priorities. How do I need to look at my time differently so I can take an interest in others?

Practicing an attitude of Jesus requires Sacrifice. You may set aside your agenda for a while, your comfort, your needs, and your finances in order to meet the needs of others. If you are looking for a serving opportunity that doesn't require sacrifice you will never serve. Remember, this is about the attitude of Jesus. Embracing sacrifice was His life! We also need to stop looking at the word "sacrifice" as negative. Sacrifice leads to great happiness. You have to lay aside something personal for the sake of others. Begin to model the attitude of Jesus.

TALK IT OVER.

1. Why do you think being like-minded, having the same love, and being one in spirit would make Paul's happiness complete? _____

2. As a follower of Jesus, what does it mean to be like-minded, having the same love, and being one in spirit? _____

3. Why does Paul give the instructions in verses 3-4 in this passage about being like-minded? How do verses 3-4 help us to understand the nature of humility? _____

4. Is it possible for followers of Jesus to disagree and still be like-minded and one in spirit? Why or why not? Have you faced a situation where you disagreed with another Christian? What did you do? _____

5. Why is it important as followers of Jesus to humble ourselves and see others' interests above our own? What are some practical ways you can learn to place others' interests above your own? _____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER.

"Because of this God exalted Jesus to the highest honor, and made his name greater than every other name. That at the name of Jesus every knee will one day bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and give glory to God the Father." Phil. 2:9-11

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Dear God, I want to be what you want me to be. I want to live a happy life and I want to live with harmony in my relationships and I certainly don't want to live with conflict. Help me to do it your way instead of the world's way. Help me to remember to never let my pride be my guide, do not let the attitude of it is all about me or I'm always right get in the way of what You want to do. Help me to think more about others and more about you.

HABITS OF HAPPINESS

HABIT 5. KEEPING YOUR HEART HAPPY”

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

INTRODUCTION:

Maybe you have had a week of ups and downs. Like the little boy who jumped into his dad’s lap and said: “Daddy, my heart is full of happiness!” Then, he jumped down and went to play with his friend. An hour later he came back to his dad with a long face. Dad said, “What happened to you happy heart?” He said, “Brian made it all.” When you work out at a gym I can tell what you do every day. Who created the muscle you are going to work out? It is God. What happens if you regularly work out that muscle? It gets stronger. Some of us are saved but we have weak spiritual muscles. Of course, God always does the saving but God wants us to work out what He has worked into us and that is our salvation! In our study today, Paul gives us 5 ways, to strengthen a happy heart. The first deals with fear. When fear comes to the front door, happiness goes out the back door.

WAYS TO KEEP A HAPPY HEART.

1. Remember God will not abandon you. V. 12-13

God is with you, He is in you and He is for you. Fear is one of the primary reasons we lose our happiness. You cannot be afraid and be happy at the same time. One of the biggest fears people have is the fear of being abandoned; the fear of being alone; to feel like I’m facing life all by myself. We have all felt that. We need to remind ourselves daily that God is working in us! “*God is working*”; the word “working” in the Greek is the word *energōs*, from which we get the word “energy.” God is the energy driver in your life. You are not just going on will power. You are not just going on your own power. God says I will give you the power and energy to get through whatever you are facing and I am working in you.

No matter what you are facing, I am in you. John 14:18–20 18 “*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.*” (NIV) That is quite a promise! The Bible says Christ is in you; the Bible says you are hid with Christ in God; and the Bible says you are sealed with the Holy Spirit. That means for the devil to get to you, he has to get through the Trinity! That is a pretty good protection. That is a great fear reliever. Not only is God with you and in you; God is also for you. Romans 8:31 says, “If God is for us, no one can defeat us” (NCV).

When a shepherd leads the sheep, there are always guard dogs at the back, nipping at the sheep to keep them moving in the right direction. The Bible says that the guard dogs in your life are goodness and mercy. God gives you the things you don’t deserve and these translate to his goodness. And, he doesn’t give you the things you do deserve — that are his mercies. Do you ever feel the smile of God in your life? If you don’t, you don’t really know God.

Some people think God is like the angry parent who is mad at them all the time. No. God is for you! If you want to be happy, you need to get up every morning and say, “God, thank you that you are going to be with me today, you are going to be in me today, and you are going to be for me today.” Isn’t that great news? If God is with you, and God is in you, and God is for you, what in the world are you doing being depressed? To maintain a happy heart, we must cultivate the habit of constantly reminding ourselves that God is *in us, with us, but also for us!* Romans 8:31 If God is for us, who can be against us? When we want God’s direction for our lives, we should get our desires out of the way so that we can honestly say, “God, I’m willing to go either way — whatever you want is what I want.” Then we say, “God, help me to know what you want by giving me a desire one way or the other.”

Some people don’t want to do that, because they think if they desire something, then God must be against it. That is not true. God can use our *Spirit-controlled* desires to direct us. Psalm 37:4 says, “*Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart*” (NIV). If you’re really trying to do what’s right in God’s eyes, then your desires are going to be in line. How do you know when you have the right desires? “*If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously . . . and it will be given to you*” (James 1:5 NIV). You say, “Lord, give me the right kind of desire to do the right thing.” When you are facing a difficult decision, first, you confess your sins and get right with God. Then you commit the decision to the Lord and keep praying until you “get in neutral” about it.

The third step is to ask God to reveal his will by giving you a desire: “Lord, give me the desire to do the right thing.” Remember: “*It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose*” (Philippians 2:13 NIV). How do you know if the desire is from God? One good test is time. You can tell if a desire is from God by sitting on it for a while and praying, “God, if this desire is from you, make it stronger. If this desire is not from you, please take it away.” It’s a legitimate request — just asks God to do that for you!

Tell of a time when you felt forgotten by God. What did you learn? _____

2. Resist grumbling. V.14-15a.

So many of us are always complaining and grumbling about life. When we focus on the negative and always find ourselves fussing and fighting over all the things that go wrong in our lives, we lose our happiness and our hearts will be unhappy. You need to cultivate the habit of thanksgiving as opposed to complaining, grumbling and arguing over everything. When we do this, then people will find us ‘blameless’, in other words they won’t find anything to say about you, but if they do, God will judge them. This is very hard, I know because we are negative by nature. Ever since Adam and Eve we go around excusing and accusing. We excuse ourselves for all the mistakes we have made and then we accuse everybody else for all the things that go wrong in our lives. We say if I just had a different husband then I would be happy. If I had just never gotten married, then I would be happy. If I just had children I would be happy. If my children would leave home I would be happy. Here is a short list of the types of grumblers I come into contact with often, including myself!

- a. **Whiners** – *One who produces a sustained, high-pitched, plaintive sound, as in pain, fear, or complaint. To complain or protest in a childish or annoying fashion: fans who are always **whining** about the poor officiating. To produce a sustained noise of high pitch.* “When problems arise, you will usually find two types of people: whiners and winners. Whiners obstruct progress; they spend hours complaining about this point or that, without offering positive solutions. Winners acknowledge the existence of the problem, but they try to offer practical ideas that can help resolve the matter in a manner that is satisfactory to both parties.” – George Foreman. Yes, your back may hurt, the bills are not paid, your kids have not called, or you got a call from the school about your kids. You have to deal with the negative, but don’t make a deal with the negative that sours your disposition! Our family and friends are not our trash cans!
- b. **Martyrs** - Their favorite expression is “*Nobody appreciates me!*” They are pros at throwing pity parties. Everybody hates me, nobody loves me, and I am going to go eat worms! How do you react when you don’t get your way? Do you pout? Do you mount a campaign of complaining? Do you moan and groan?
- c. **Cynics** – A cynics attitude causes them to always complain by uttering phrases like “what’s the use? Why bother? Why try? It isn’t going to make any difference”. Cynics just kind of poison everything.
- d. **Perfectionists** - Nothing is ever good enough for these complainers. Everything is just not quite the way it ought to be. They are unpleasable. Their favorite phrase is, “is that the best you can do?”

To me, the scariest verse in the Bible is Matthew 12:36: “Everyone will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every empty word they have spoken” (NIV). That ought to send shivers up your spine. How many times have you complained, whined, or argued about something when you shouldn’t have been sweating the small stuff? Don’t sweat the small stuff. To overcome complaining learn to be grateful. Develop an attitude of gratitude! 1Thessalonians 5:16–18 16 Be happy always; pray continually; *give thanks in all circumstances*, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. (NIV) It does not say *for* everything gives thanks. It says *in* everything give thanks. There are a lot of things I shouldn’t be thankful for. I’m not thankful for war. I’m not thankful for leukemia and cancer. I’m not thankful for racial injustice. There is a lot of evil in the world.

To be thankful for evil is a perversion of what God teaches in his Word. The Bible doesn’t say you are to be thankful *for* everything. It says you are to be thankful *in* everything. I can be thankful in a situation because I know *Romans 8:28 “In all things God works for the good...”* Not everything is good but in all things God works for the good. So in everything I can give thanks because I know if I respond correctly God can turn crucifixions into resurrections. He loves to change ashes into beauty. We must be grateful and not grumble because we will be judged for every idle word we utter. This scripture is very scary indeed! Matthew 12:36 I tell you this, that you will give an account on judgment day of every careless word you have spoken. (NLT)

Why do we like to complain? What can we do about it? _____

3. Keep your Conscience Clear. V.15b

You need to release guilt and shame daily. Guilt will rob you of a happy heart! One of the primary things that cause us to lose our happiness is feeling guilty or feeling ashamed. The Bible says if you want to be happy you have to get rid of guilt. You cannot be guilty and happy at the same time. So you have to maintain a clear conscience. You might say, “I would like to be happy, but how do I keep my conscience clear when it is not clear right now?” You need to do what Psalm 32:1-2 says: “What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record” (LB). Happiness, joy, and relief are three things everybody is looking for in life. We all want to be happy. We all want to enjoy life. We all want relief from our pain. The Bible says it comes from purity, and purity comes from forgiveness through God’s grace.

Psalms 119:1–2, blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. To maintain a happy heart is to maintain a clear conscience. This means at the beginning and at the end of every day doing a spiritual inventory, where you talk to God about anything that is standing between you and him, and you deal with the junk from your day. This means I keep short accounts with God. It means at the beginning and at the end of every day I do a spiritual inventory and I say, God, is there anything between you and me? I’m not going to bed tonight with junk. I had some garbage today that I picked up from bad attitudes, from bad reactions, things I said, things I did, and I’m not going to climb into bed tonight with this sack of garbage and get up in the morning and carry it off again. No! I’m going to deal with it. You practice what is called spiritual breathing. You breathe out your sins in confession and you breathe in God’s power and cleansing. 1 John 1:9, “*If we confess our sins He’s faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” *This is an awesome promise from God!*

How do we go about the kind of reflection that will show us where we have failed and how we need to keep our conscience clear in order to grow? _____

4. Read God’s Word and Live It! V.16

There is not enough we could say about this spiritual truth. Worry, depression, unhappiness, negativity etc. can, in most cases be cured with a healthy dose of God’s Word daily in one’s life. Truth has the power over our circumstances and can transform us mightily! We must renew our way of thinking if we are to be different and change. *Romans 12:2, do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (NIV).* The way we hold tightly, firmly, and get a good grip on God’s Word so that it cannot be snatched from us is to practice the following habits - hearing it, reading it, studying it, memorizing it, and meditating on it. Then it can’t be pulled out. Hold tightly, the Bible says, to the Word of Life. Happiness is found by studying the Word of God! God has promised many wonderful benefits in your life if you will meditate on the Word of God and then do it. Surprisingly, if you know how to worry, you already know how to meditate on the Word of God. Worry is when you take a negative thought and you think on it over and over and over. When you take a passage of Scripture and you think

on it over and over and over, that is called meditation. There are six ways you can get a grasp on God's Word.

- i. *You can hear it.*** Let us say you are a gardener. You have learned that you can take the exact same seed and plant it in three different locations and get three different results. In one spot, you will get giant tomatoes. In another, you will get small tomatoes. And in a third, you will get nothing. What is the difference? It is not the seed; it is the soil. The soil must be prepared for the seed. The same is true when you hear God's Word. Your heart has to be prepared for the Word. If you get up late, have trouble finding a parking spot, and are irritated as you rush into church, you are probably not going to hear God's voice! You are not in a receptive mood. That is why you can take two people to church, set them side-by-side, and one will walk out thinking God really spoke to him and the other won't get anything out of the service. The heart of one person was prepared; the other's heart was not. The Bible says, *"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you"* (James 1:19b-21 NIV).
- ii. *You can read it.*** This means you want to be actively involved in what you are reading; looking for what God may want to teach you through your reading time. To this end, try to structure your devotional Bible study time in a quiet area as free from distractions as possible. If you have a cell phone around, turn it off. The same goes for other possible distractions such as radio, television, the Internet, etc. If you are feeling active, you may wish to incorporate your personal Bible study time with a brisk walk or a visit to a park.
- iii. *You can study it.*** Studying the Bible in a way that changes your life doesn't take a bunch of expensive tools. You don't need commentaries or Bible study software. The people Paul encountered in Berea are a great example. They willingly opened their Old Testaments, looked up the places Paul pointed them to, and seriously considered their need for a suffering and resurrected Savior. How do we study God's Word? It's important to research the setting, purpose, themes, and outline of each book of the Bible. We need to seek clarity about revealed truth as we compare Scripture to Scripture through cross-references. Excellent study Bibles with these features are great tools for understanding how every part of God's Word centers in Christ and his redemption of our lost world. Studying God's Word takes time and work. The Bereans made the effort and were blessed. What about you?
- iv. *You can memorize it.*** If you are serious about being spiritually strong and mature, the greatest habit you can develop is memorizing Scripture. You don't want to be a spiritual baby anymore. It's time to grow up and live the blessed life you are meant to live. Hiding God's Word in your heart is an important way to start. You may not think you have a good memory, but you remember what's important to you. You remember the phone numbers and dates that you care about. I have heard people say they can't memorize anything, but they can quote songs from the 1960s and rattle off the statistics of their favorite baseball players. Memory is a skill you can learn. It is a muscle you can strengthen. In fact, memorizing Scripture will cause your brain to have a stronger

memory in other areas. I guarantee it. Study after study has shown this. Why is it important to memorize Scripture?

- a. **You will always have God's Word with you.** When you need the Bible, it is never around. When you are tempted, you don't have a Bible open or by your side. When you are witnessing to someone who doesn't know Jesus, is under stress, needs comfort, or is in a crisis, there is usually not a Bible around. You need God's Word in your mind so you can remember it and review it right when you need it.
- b. **You can meditate on Scripture wherever you go.** You can't review God's Word unless you remember it. If you have memorized Scripture, you can think about it when you get into bed at night or as you drive to an appointment. You can think about the Bible because you have memorized it. That is called meditation. The only promise of prosperity and success that God gives us in the Bible (Joshua 1:8) says that meditating on his Word is the key.

Start memorizing Scripture today. Pick a verse a week. In a year, you will have memorized 52 verses. In two years, you will have memorized more than 100 verses

- v. ***You can meditate on it.*** God says that if we meditate on his Word, we will be successful. Here is a method you can use to meditate on God's Word in a way that will please God. The "pronounce it" method of biblical meditation is an easy method for meditating on Scripture and getting every ounce of spiritual nutrition you can out of it. You start with a verse and read it over and over again. Each time you read the verse, you emphasize a different word. It is the simplest way to start unlocking Scripture. You can do it even if it is the first time you have ever opened up a Bible. It is simple but amazingly powerful! Each time you emphasize a different word, you get a different perspective.

Take the first part of Colossians 3:16 for example. The verse says, "*Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives*" (NLT). The first time you read the verse, emphasize the word "let." What does it mean to *let*? It means "give permission." *You* open the door; it's your choice. You have to choose to let the Word of God dwell in you richly. Secondly, read the verse again and emphasize "message." It stresses that you need to get God's Word in your mind. Thirdly, emphasize the word "Christ." You are not filling your life with what some philosopher, guru, or talk show host has to say. You are dwelling on the words of Christ! You may not want to let the word of the world fill you, but you do just that when you spend your time watching TV instead of reading God's Word. Fourthly you focus on the word "richness." "Richness" means lavishness, extravagance, and abundance. God doesn't want his Word to be a poor substitute in your life. He wants it to create beauty in your life.

Fifthly, emphasize the word "fill." Don't rush through God's Word so you can get on with the rest of your day. To let the Word of Christ fill you is to let it live within you. Finally, focus on the words "your lives." The Bible is not just God's Word for your pastor, a seminary professor, or your Sunday school teacher; it is God's Word for *you*!

The Bible is instruction for every single believer. See all the great jewels you discovered in this passage just by focusing on one word at a time? You didn't need a seminary degree or a great library of reference tools. You can do this!

vi. **You can apply it.** God intended for us to apply the Bible to our lives, not just read it. The Bible is about transformation, not just information. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, *"Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock"* (Matthew 7:24 NIV). Applying God's Word is vitally important. So why is it important that we apply God's Word to our lives?

- a. **Knowledge produces pride if we don't apply truth to our lives.** The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 8:1b, *"Knowledge puffs up while love builds up"* (NIV). We have all seen people who know the Bible backward and forward, but they have never let it seep into their lives. They use the Bible as a hammer to pound on other people. We can be the most cantankerous, evil, mean-spirited, cranky, critical, judgmental people anyone will ever meet — if we never take the extra step and apply the Bible to our lives. Knowledge without application produces pride. It will "puff" you up without a love-based application. It will cause harm, not help.
- b. **Knowledge requires action.** James 1:22 says, *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says"* (NIV). What a person knows should find expression in what he or she does. We are deceiving ourselves if we think we are growing simply by taking notes on a Bible study. God's commands are not optional.
- c. **Knowledge increases responsibility.** *"Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it"* (James 4:17 NLT). With a deeper knowledge of Scripture comes a stronger judgment if we fail to apply what God shows us. When we start studying the Bible, God begins to show us areas of our lives that need to be changed, and he calls us to greater and greater responsibility as he does that.

But if all you do is hear the Word of God when you go to church, you have no grip on the Word of God, and it can be pulled out of your mind very easily. The Bible says in Philippians 2:16, *"Hold firmly to the Word of Life"* (NLT). You don't have a good grip on the Bible unless you are doing all six habits: hearing it, reading it, studying it, memorizing it, meditating on it, and applying it. Psalm 119:16 says, *"Your laws make me happy. I never forget your word"* (GW). Do you want to be happy? God's principles will make you happy, and you remember those principles by memorizing them, meditating on them, and then applying them. Psalm 119:35 says, *"Make me walk along the path of your commands, for that is where my happiness is found"* (NLT). Usually we're looking for happiness in all the wrong places. God says happiness is found in the path of his commands

How often do you spend your time daily in reading God's word? _____

5. Use your life to serve God by serving others! V.17-18

God wired the universe so that happiness does not come from status, salary, sex, or success. Happiness comes from service. God designed you to be happiest when you are giving your life away. Why? Because he wants you to become like him. It is all about love! “If you insist on saving your life, you will lose it. Only those who throw away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it means to really live” (Mark 8:35 LB). To have a happy heart, you have to practice service and generosity every day. Matthew 20:28 says, “Even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many” (NLT). Jesus came to serve and give. Those are the two things that will bring more happiness in your life than anything else, and they define what it means to follow Jesus. If you are not serving, if you are not giving, then you are not following Jesus. It is very simple.

God also wired the universe in such a way that the more you give yourself away, the more God gives to you and the more blessed and happier you are. In Philippians 2:17-18, Paul says, “Your faith makes you offer your lives as a sacrifice in serving God. If I have to offer my own blood with your sacrifice, I will be happy and full of joy with all of you. You also should be happy and full of joy with me” (NCV). Your faith makes you offer your life as a sacrifice and serve God by serving others. Sacrifice and serving are two of the keys to lifelong happiness — generously giving your life away for the sake of the Gospel.

If we are serious about being happy, we need to use our lives to serve God by serving others. The only way you can serve God is by serving others. You can’t see God here on earth. He is invisible. So how do you serve God when you can’t even see him? You serve God by serving others. Paul says lifelong happiness comes from generosity and service in giving my life and giving my resources. Where do you sacrificially volunteer to serve others on a regular basis? Where do the majority of your financial resources go? Is it to the things of this world, or to building the Kingdom of God? Would you like to be happier? You need to reveal God’s grace in your life.

In what ways do you usually find yourself serving God by serving others?

CONCLUSION.

Our hearts have a sickness called sin. We are self-centered and in our selfishness. We try to fill our emptiness with things that give us a temporary lift or diversion but can never satisfy our soul. We have fallen into patterns of grumbling –whiners, martyrs, cynics, and perfectionists. Our consciences are dark with guilt and shame. We resist reading God’s Word. Where do you sacrificially volunteer to serve others on a regular basis? Would you like to be happier? Would you like more happiness in your life? You need to add sacrifice and serving in your life somehow. It is an essential exercise for a happy heart and if you don’t you won’t, it will always be leaking out.

Observe the following about serving: first, serving other people actually extends your physical life. You will live longer if part of your life you give it away in unselfishly serving and

sacrificing for others in some way. Studies have shown this. That is an amazing fact. But it again only proves God word. Secondly serving is one of the quickest ways to pull yourself out of depression. It is obviously not the only way but it is one way to pull yourself out of depression. We need to understand that God has wired the universe that through sacrifice and through serving my happiness goes up and my sorrow goes down. So where do you sacrificially volunteer to serve others on a regular basis? Let me ask you another one: Is your heart growing more generous every year? Are you more generous with your resources this year giving to the work of the Lord? Jesus says your giving reveals the condition of your heart and then he goes on to say, *“Where your treasure is your heart will be.”* So your serving reveals how happy your heart is, and your giving also increases the happiness in your heart. It is an attitude. It is an exercise, and this exercise causes you to have a happy heart.

TALK OVER IT

1. What does it mean to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling?” _____

2. In Philippians 2:17-18 Paul states that his sacrifice in serving God will make him happy and full of happiness. If we believe that sacrifice in serving others makes us happy, why don’t we do it? _____

3. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:18. What is the difference between giving thanks in everything versus giving thanks for everything? _____

4. What are you currently doing to “**work out your salvation??**” Describe a way that you will choose to act this week, knowing that God will empower you to accomplish that work. _____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky. Philippians 2:14-15

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Give me, O Lord, the royalty of inward happiness, and the stillness which comes from living close to you. Renew in me the sense of happiness, and let your Holy Spirit dwell in my soul and bodies, filling every corner of our hearts with light and grace. Help me to take in the beauty of others happiness, and to touch the souls of those I meet with thankfulness.

HABITS OF HAPPINESS

HABIT 6. QUALITIES OF HAPPINESS!

PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30

INTRODUCTION:

Many people believe it is their circumstances that determine happiness, but this couldn't be further from the truth! We are looking at Paul's attitude and learning certain habits he applied to be happy, despite his circumstances. ***Happiness can be learned.*** It is a quality that you can learn. There are certain qualities that if you learn them, your happiness in life is going to go up exponentially. If you don't have these qualities in your life, your unhappiness will go up exponentially. If we had to make two columns the happiness column and the unhappiness column, and I said which column would impatience go in? Definitely it will be unhappiness. Impatient people tend to be unhappy people. And the more patient you are, if you learn patience, you are going to be happier in life.

If I said; for instance, cruelty that would go in the unhappiness column. Kindness would go in the happiness column. We could make an entire list. If I said if I am arrogant, I'm going to tend to be happy. And if I am humble I am going to tend to be happier. So what we are going to do today, as we go through the book of Philippians, is to look at four very important qualities that we need to build within our lives if we want to be happier! In the above portion of scripture, although extremely personal and seemingly just a simple recommendation and discussion about two guys in Paul's life, there are some powerful qualities we can learn that will produce happiness all round! Paul mentions he has no one like Timothy; we need to take note about this guy. Paul endorses Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Church and its members at Philippi, and says he is going to send these two guys back to them for three reasons! He says in **verse 19**, "***So that I may be cheered,***" (So that I can be happy). Then in **verse 28** he says "***So that you may be glad,***" (So that you may be happy). Then he says further on in **verse 28** "***so that I may have less anxiety.***" So whatever these guys are doing, however they are living, it is a way that is going to make you glad, it is going to make me glad and it is going to make us all have less anxiety.

QUALITIES TO HAPPINESS.

1. Shift The Focus Away From Self! V.19-21.

That is the starting point for all happiness. I must shift the focus away from myself. I have to care about more than just me. I have to care about the needs of those around me. If all I think about is me, me, me, myself and I am going to be a pretty miserable person. If I truly want to be happy in life, I have to shift the focus off myself. Would you say that is true today about most people? Everybody looks out for his or her own interests? Not that many people are looking after your interests. ***Could you name the people who are looking after your interests?*** Paul says I have *nobody like this guy*, because he actually takes a genuine interest in you, not simply in himself. *Everybody else looks out for his own interests.* Notice in that phrase, he says, "*No one else is like him.*" In other words, ***unselfish people are very, very rare.*** Nobody else is like him.

He says, “... *who takes a genuine interest.*” There may be people who fake interest in you. Others care only about themselves. ***The first key to happiness is you have to change your focus. You have to shift your focus away from yourself onto other people.*** You have to look out for others. When you walk into a room full of people, most naturally tend to think of themselves, how do I look; who are the most important people in the room that I can talk to; or do they think, I wonder who in this room needs my help, who can I encourage, who feels insignificant, who can I touch today? Most of us are too ‘*wrapped up in our own affairs*’ to even care.

In today’s society, we are becoming more and more ‘self-centered’. Even in advertising there are mostly subliminal messages that it is all about ‘*me, myself and I*’. There is a ***Coca-Cola*** ad that says that happiness is something you drink. - “***Open happiness.***” So if you would just buy that product and you drink it then you will be happy. Happiness is something you drink. ***Audi*** came out with one that says not only that “***Happiness is something you drive.***” It says, “***Happiness finally has meaning.***” That is good to know. And what is it? It is an Audi. ***Pepsi*** tells us is this: “***All that matters is today.***” It is live for now. In other words, don’t plan about tomorrow. Don’t care about other people. Just live your life for now. ***Sprite*** tells us this: “***Obey your thirst.***” In other words, give in to any urge you have. ***Burger King*** says, “***Have it your way.***” That is not bad advice when you are ordering a hamburger, but that is terrible advice for relationships. You can’t have it your way all the time in relationships. There is a ***perfume product*** and it says, “***It’s all about me.***” The bottom line is that most everything in culture teaches us to think about you, you, you, you, me, me, me, me, I, I, I, I. So I have to intentionally shift the focus away from self if I want to be happy.

Most people are worrying about their own plans and are not looking out for the interests of others. Most people don’t get up in the morning and give their first thought to how someone else is doing. Most people are concerned with their own problems. And, that is why most people are unhappy with their lives! If you want to be one of those rare, unselfish people, you have to change your focus. You have to shift your focus away from yourself to other people. That is not something that comes naturally, so it is something you have to learn to do.

I have to admit that it saddens me how many times I have missed the needs of people around me that I love because I was not paying attention. I was not taking an interest in them. I had not shifted the focus from me to the others in the room. Because I was not looking out for their needs, I missed their needs. And that grieves me a lot. Instead of grieving missed opportunities, be intentional about looking away from yourself and to the needs of others, where you will find happiness in serving God through serving others. “Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand” (Philippians 2:4 MSG).

What does it mean to “forget yourself”? _____

2. Become Someone That People Can Trust.V.22

Here is another quality you can learn. If you learn to be trustworthy, you learn to be reliable, you learn to be consistent, you learn to be dependable and if you develop that quality in life you are going to be a whole lot happier than people who are not worthy of trust. If you want to be happy you have to become somebody that people trust. Paul is saying I have watched this guy in action. I have seen Timothy. I have seen him in all kinds of circumstances. And he says, this guy Timothy, he is the real deal. He is authentic. He is genuine. He is trustworthy. He is dependable. He is reliable. You can count on this guy. Any time you go to a bank for a loan, they are going to do a credit check. They want to know if you are worthy of being trusted with credit. Do you pay your bills on time? Do you have a track record of keeping your word? Can you be depended on to pay this money back? Are you creditable? Everybody around us is doing a credit check on our lives every moment of our life. Not just the banks. Are you what you say you are? Are you the real deal? Or are you just some phony baloney, you wear a mask here and you wear a mask over there?

That is what they used to do in Greek theater. One actor would play many parts. He would come out and He would wear a mask and he would play a part then he would go back behind the stage, this was in the days of Plato, and he would get another mask and he would come out and wear that mask and he would play a part and go back. He is being different roles to different groups of people, playing different parts. The word for that guy in the Greek is called hypocrites – that is where we get the word hypocrite. Hypocrite means somebody who acts this way on the golf course and this way with his kids and this way at church and that way with his wife. You don't really know because *is* what you see what you get. To develop a reputation of being trustworthy and dependable we must cultivate a lifestyle of:

- a. **Integrity.** What you see is what you get! Integrity doesn't mean you are perfect. If perfection were required for integrity, none of us would have integrity; because nobody is perfect. Integrity means what you see is what you get. It is the real deal. Integrity demands that every area of your life is treated with the same intensity. You have the same commitment to excellence in your marriage as you do in your career. You have the same commitment to excellence in ministry as you do in your parenting. A common saying today is that "what you do in your private life is nobody's business." Well, it actually is. What you do in your private life — behind closed doors or out of view of other people — builds and reveals your true character. And God sees it just as clearly as the things you do in public. In fact, the small things you do that are unseen are the seeds to God's public blessing on your life. You cannot compartmentalize your life and say, "I have integrity in my public life, just not in my private life."

I bet you could make a list right now of public figures who have tried to live their lives this way only to have their private indiscretions become this week's public scandal and their personal downfall. No matter what they say, any leader who is not faithful in small matters will not be faithful in large matters. Jesus says, "*If you have not been faithful with that which belongs to someone else, who will give you what belongs to you?*" (Luke 16:12 TEV). For centuries, everybody who learned a skill,

trade, or vocation learned it through an apprenticeship. If you were going to be a mechanic, you apprenticed to another mechanic and served in his or her business before you started your own. This principle of apprenticeship applies to every area of your life. It applies to how you handle other people's money, how you handle other people's possessions, and even how you handle other people's ministry before God gives you your own. God is watching and testing your integrity. And he will reward you accordingly.

- b. **Keeping Promises.** I'm going to keep my promise no matter how much it costs. This simply means I keep a promise even though I find out it is going to cost me more than I thought it was going to cost me but I still keep my promise. Making promises is easy, but keeping them? That is more of a challenge – especially when we make promises carelessly. Have you ever made some promises like these, but not actually kept them? "I'll call you." "I can finish that project by next week." "I'll meet you this weekend for lunch." "I'm sending you the check today." "I'll pray for you about that."

Many people struggle with keeping promises like those and others we make in our daily lives. If we are not careful, we may end up with a broken string of promises in our lives. Broken promises can lead to broken relationships. Chipping away at our credibility damages our relationships with our fellow believers. But it is especially harmful to relationships with the people we know who don't yet have relationships with Jesus – but who are watching our lives to see if they can trust us when we urge them to trust the God we represent. While changing your mind from time to time when circumstances prevent you from keeping a promise is just part of being flexible in life, breaking promises to other people on a regular basis isn't healthy. Here's how to really keep your promises:

- i. **Realize what happens spiritually when you make a promise.** Biblically, making a promise (also called a "vow" or an "oath") involves making a commitment that God takes seriously. Deuteronomy 23:21-23 warns: "If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. But if you refrain from making a vow, you will not be guilty. Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the Lord your God with your own mouth." Just as you shouldn't promise to give God a certain amount of money through your church but not follow through, you shouldn't promise something to another person that you won't do your best to deliver, because God wants you to be like he is: trustworthy. God is careful to keep every promise he has ever made. When you make a promise as one of God's children, you are saying that you agree with your heavenly Father that truth is an essential spiritual value.
- ii. **Pay close attention to your words.** Every word you communicate (through speaking or writing) matters to God. The God who created the universe by saying words pays close attention to how you use your words. Words actually

carry spiritual power within them that can either help or harm others. Jesus himself promises that when it comes time to judge people for the choices they have made in their lives, "...by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:37). So don't speak, text, email, or otherwise use your words to make promises that you don't really mean.

- iii. **Study your patterns of making promises.** Figure out when you tend to make careless promises, and study the situations in which you do so you can understand why you are promising what you don't really intend to do. Keep a journal for a week to record the details of what happened when you noticed yourself promising something to someone. Did you feel pressured to make a promise? Were you in a rush and just saying what you thought people wanted to hear so you could move on from a situation? Did you make a promise simply because it seemed like the polite thing to do? Were you trying to get someone to like you by promising them something? Pray about whatever patterns you notice, asking the Holy Spirit to help you change unhealthy habits.
- iv. **Take time for careful consideration before making a promise to someone.** Don't rush yourself into a promise that you won't truly be able to keep. Even when you are in a hurry, you usually don't have an immediate sense of urgency about promising to do something. Stop yourself before you make a vow, delaying your decision long enough to carefully think it through. Count the cost of following through on potential plans, as Jesus urges people to do before making an important decision in Luke 14:28: "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?" If your promise is not impulsive, it is likely to be genuine.
- v. **Think through what it really means to be nice to other people.** In an effort to be nice to others, you may promise something they want – or something you think they want – without actually considering whether or not you want to keep that promise. But think it through. Is it nicer to say, "I'll call you" and then not do so, or simply to refrain from saying anything? Is it nicer to volunteer for something just because someone asks you to do so and then fail to keep your commitment, or simply say "no" to their request? It is more considerate to avoid disappointing others – which is what happens when you tell them to expect something but then break that promise. A truly nice person is a careful person.
- vi. **Keep it simple when you communicate about promises.** You don't need to puff up your promises with elaborate efforts to present a certain image to others; you simply need to make sure that you do whatever it is that you promise to do. Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5 that it is not necessary to dramatically swear to keep your promises. "All you need to say," he says in verse 37, "is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil

one.” The emphasis is not on how convincingly you make a promise – it is on how much integrity you have about keeping one.

- vii. **Check in with God regularly to keep you accountable to your promises and receive his help to keep them.** Make a habit of praying regularly about the promises you have made to other people, asking God to empower you to keep those promises. If you encounter a change of circumstances that truly prevents you from keeping a promise you have already made, do your best to fulfill your vow in another way at another time, following God’s guidance. Seek God’s help every day to live with integrity in all of life’s little details. The more careful you become about making promises, the easier it will be to keep them. In the process, you will become more like our promise-keeping God and draw other people closer to him as they seek spiritual truth!

How would you change the way you act and perform at work if God was sitting in your boss’ office and checking up on your work? _____

3. Learn How To Work Well With Others.V.25 -26.

Paul is the second greatest Christian since Jesus to ever live, he wrote almost two thirds of the New Testament, yet he values, understands and appreciates ‘Team Work’. He knows he can’t do it alone! If you don’t learn to work with other people, who are different from you, you will never be happy. What do you need to learn in order to work with other people? Paul says that Epaphroditus is a team player. He came alongside Paul in his time of need almost dying while doing so. Paul says he is my brother, my fellow worker and my fellow soldier. He has worked and fought by my side. This guy knows how to be a team member. This guy knows how to work in a group. He is not a lone ranger. This is a guy who knows how to work with other people. Paul uses three relational metaphors in this passage. They are teamwork terms. He is saying that *life and ministry, is a family, it is a fellowship and it is a fight.*

- a. ***It is a family.*** The church of God is a family! He calls him my brother. That means every one of us is related to each other; you are my brother and my sister! We are also in the same fight together against Satan, and we need to support each other. We need to defend and encourage each other. The best place to learn how to cooperate with others is in the church.
- b. ***It is a fellowship.*** Paul says he is a fellow worker. We are to work together and to serve together. We have been given the same tasks. We have the same Great Commission. We have the same common goal.
- c. ***It is a war.*** He calls him my fellow soldier. I think we can all agree that life is a battle? Would you agree that sometimes you feel like you are at war, and that forces of darkness are against you? He says it is a battle and we all have the same enemy, Satan, and we need to support each other.

We need to learn to be considerate. Paul is speaking of Epaphroditus again in Philippians 2:26 when he says, “He has been longing to see all of you and is troubled because you heard that he was sick.” Notice there are two examples of consideration. Paul is considerate of his co-worker’s homesickness, and Epaphroditus is considerate about the Philippians’ concern. This is a key to happiness! The more considerate you learn to be of other people’s needs, doubts, and fears, the happier you will be. If you are inconsiderate you are going to have an unhappy marriage. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 13:1, “You must get along with each other. You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common” (MSG).

None of us is by nature a considerate person, because we tend to think of ourselves first and not the needs of others. “Cultivating a life in common” takes work, and learning to get along and work well with others takes practice. Like a garden that requires cultivation to bear fruit, you will see how your effort bears the fruit of happiness and strong relationships. We need to defend each other. We need to encourage each other. And there is a word for that. It is called small groups/cells groups or care groups. It is here we learn to be considerate and to co-operate with one another. As you walk through life, remember that you are not supposed to do everything on your own. You need other people to walk alongside you, but you also need other people to work alongside you. As you share the burden of your work with fellow Christians, you will find that you actually accomplish more for the glory of God.

In your small group, identify a need and agree on four or five people you want to work together to address that need.

4. Live For Something Worth Dying For.V.26-30.

Most people are giving first class allegiance to second-class causes and those causes are betraying them. Somebody once said – “*I climbed the ladder of success but when I got to the top I found it was leaning against the wrong wall*”. A lot of times we give big-time commitment to smalltime causes that are not going to last. Epaphroditus was committed not only to Paul, but to Christ and His cause. What are we willing to die for? The Philippian church decided to send an offering to Paul in prison. There are no planes, there are no trains, and there are no cars. And it is about 1200 kilometers away. And there is only one way you can get to Rome – walk. Epaphroditus, a member of that church, raises his hand and says, “I will do it!” I will walk 1200km through thick and thin, through robbers and thieves, battling armies and all kinds of things. I will walk just to take a gift from our church to a guy who is in prison eight hundred miles away. It says he risked his life. In Greek it literally says he ‘hazarded’ his life. It is a gambling term. Epaphroditus is God’s godly gambler. He gambled his life for Jesus Christ. He gets so sick and he nearly dies on the journey, yet in spite of persistent pain he completes his mission and he finishes what he starts. What incredible commitment!! He risked his life for Paul and Christ! The cause for the advancement of His Kingdom was worth sacrificing for, and if needs be, to die for!

Martin Luther was such a man. In the 16th century the Catholic Church emphasized that men had to work out their salvation by adhering to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Luther challenged this teaching by adhering to the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone. His actions forced him to eventually be confronted by those who had the power to

ultimately take his life. They asked him to recant his teachings. What was his response? His response was to tell them “Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other, my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe, God help me.”

What was he doing? He was for the sake of Christ rolling the dice. His decision could very well have been very costly to his life but that risk did not dissuade him. Are there any loving gamblers in our congregation? Are there people here who are willing to risk experiencing exhaustion and sleepless nights in taking on additional spiritual responsibilities? Are there people here who are willing to sacrifice personal comforts and earthly ambitions in advancing the cause of Christ in this world? Are there people here who are willing to risk experiencing disappointment, heartache, criticism and even personal attack while following in the footsteps of Jesus? Are there people here that would be even willing to risk their very life? Here is something that I want you to think about. Happiness comes from putting service before security. God blesses those who serve Him, especially when it’s inconvenient and uncomfortable.

What is something God told you to do that you did not believe was possible because it could cost you? _____

CONCLUSION

The church is a family, that is called to live out the reality of Christ within, and the fact is, it will be messy, and we will be inconvenienced, but as the gospel is working in us, it is tearing out the stones left in our hearts, and turning us upward instead of inward, which the latter unfortunately is the direction most churches pulpits take. We must measure the cross as an opportunity for God’s glory, and not an opportunity to make much of ourselves. This should drive us to be servants to one another as Christ both taught us, and demonstrated through His cross for our sakes

TALK IT OVER

1. Has there been a particular situation in your life where you have found it very difficult to trust in the Lord? Are you able to share about that? _____

2. What are some practical ways we can show others that we sincerely care for them? _____

3. How do you think it made Paul feel knowing that he had someone to help work with him? _____

4. Paul uses the word soldier. What kind of things pop into your mind when you think of a soldier? Now take those things and apply them to your Christian walk. _____

5. Why did Paul tell the Philippian church to hold Epaphroditus, and such men in high esteem? _____
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A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
Philippians 2:3-4

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Father, your standards for leaders are high. Give me grace to rise to your standards rather than to fall to my own. Let my life radiate the humble leadership of Jesus Christ. Where I fall short, have mercy on me and help me grow. I pray in Jesus' name.

HABITS OF HAPPINESS

HABIT 7. HAPPINESS IN RELYING ON JESUS

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11

INTRODUCTION:

Anytime we demonstrate faith, we are relying on something. When you sit in a chair, you are relying on the chair's manufacturer to produce something that will hold you up. When you are on the freeway, you are relying on every other driver around you. Who do you rely on? We all rely on other people in some way or another. Many of you rely on your morning cup of coffee to even function so you can come to church. We all rely on someone or something. But do we rely on Jesus? Is this a daily habit? Paul went from relying on himself, his works, his religion, and his efforts to total dependence on Jesus. Here he is writing from a Roman dungeon, yet completely relying on Jesus. How do we do this? To rely is to be dependent, to have confidence based on experience and to depend on with full trust or confidence. What a great word that should describe our relationship with Jesus! If we say we are followers of Jesus, then learning to rely on Him is a pretty important habit to learn and practice. Do we truly depend on Him? How do we walk in this habit?

1. Rely On Jesus Not the Opinions of Others V.2.

I realize this is very strong language but let us understand what was taking place historically. Paul would travel from town to town sharing about Jesus and starting churches. After he would leave, Jewish people (often from Jerusalem) would travel to these churches and tell the people they had to be circumcised in order to be truly saved. They would tell these new believers they had to follow the Old Testament law as well. So how does this relate to us? How do we rely on Jesus and not the opinion of others?

- a. ***Keep your faith simple.*** John 10:27 “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” (NLT) I love the simplicity of this verse. If I just listen and follow Jesus in this life that is enough. I am pretty sure if I do this well I can stand before Jesus with confidence He will be pretty pleased with me. Is your faith simple or complicated? Are you letting others complicate your faith? Everybody has faith. You had faith this morning when you ate your cereal—faith that your spouse didn't put poison in your granola! You had faith when you sat down in your computer chair—faith that it wouldn't collapse. Everybody has faith; the difference is what you put your faith in. Sometimes people will tell me they don't want to surrender to Jesus until all their questions are answered; they don't want to make a commitment until everything is understood. You don't need a whole lot of faith to do great things for God.
- b. ***Value what Jesus says more than others.*** We live in an age where we have access to everything. We can listen to, watch and read what other Christian leaders say all over the country and world. What have developed over the years are Christian superstars.

We have Christian celebrities. Often, it is not the spiritual leaders' fault this happened. It is simply human nature. What I see, hear and observe is that most believers spend much more time quoting their favorite spiritual leaders opinion rather than Jesus. Christian culture is consumed and driven by the current spiritual celebrity and what they say. I can't remember the last time I saw someone post on Facebook what Jesus said. Facebook is filled with posts / videos of the opinions of others. Now, of course we learn from other people. Yes, this is God's design. BUT, I think we can take it too far and now they influence us more than Jesus. Whose words do you value more?

If we are going to rely on Jesus, we are going to have to stop being so influenced by the opinions of others. Let us be influenced most and rely on Jesus most rather than others. People who accomplish big things in life must face naysayers who try to discourage them. When the Wright brothers tried to fly their first plane, people told them it would never work because humans can't fly. When Moses led the Israelites across the desert, the people complained: "We are going to die! We want to go back to Egypt!" When John F. Kennedy said the United States would send a man to the moon, many people said it could never be done. Anyone who has ever tried to do anything great has always come face-to-face with naysayers.

The thing is, naysayers aren't necessarily bad people. They may truly want what is best for you. They may love you. But they are not God. So don't treat their opinions like you would God's opinions. Some of us have been disabled by the opinions of others and we don't even realize it. In a sense, some of us have become *addicted to the approval of others*. When you give more weight to the opinions of others than you do to God's opinion, you will stay on the sidelines when God wants you in the game. You will stay locked up in a prison of self-made fear. Other people's opinions can sidetrack you from God's purpose for your life. Don't let that happen.

When have naysayers sidetracked you or almost sidetracked you from your purpose? What did you learn from that experience?

2. Rely On God's for Your Salvation not WorksV.3

Historically, there were people adding conditions to salvation during Paul's day. It became a message of Jesus plus works, Jesus plus circumcision and Jesus plus Old Testament Law. BUT, if we are not careful, we can fall into the same trap. How do we guard ourselves from this?

- a. *Rely on what Jesus did for you was enough.*** Jesus died on a cross to pay the penalty for our sin. His death satisfied the justice of God on our behalf. Because of Jesus, we have been spiritually acquitted and have been justified which means, to be declared righteous before God. There is nothing left to be done! The reason some of you struggle having confidence in your relationship with Jesus and struggle finding happiness in this relationship is you are not convinced what Jesus did was enough for you. You struggle relying on Him spiritually. Sometimes this is driven by our guilt and shame from the past. How can I be completely forgiven for what I have done? Surely God can't forgive this? It is absolutely essential for us to trust what Jesus did for us on the cross was enough. *Rom. 4:5 "But people are counted as righteous, not*

because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners.” (NLT) Rom. 3:25 “For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood...” (NLT) You and I can’t add anything to what Jesus did on the cross for us. No sacrifice you can make will add to the sacrifice of Jesus. Your relationship with Jesus is not dependent on you. It is dependent on Him! Now trust Him!

- b. *Rely on what Jesus continues to do for you is enough.*** What does He continue to do? He continues to expand your experience of your salvation. He grows your experience with Him in this life. We rely on Jesus to get saved but we also rely on Jesus to experience our salvation. *I Peter 2:2 “Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation...” (NLT) How does Jesus help us experience more of our salvation?*
 - i.** *Jesus continues to forgive you.* This is one of the most encouraging truths we experience in this life. I don’t have to be perfect for Jesus to continue to accept me. His forgiveness is ongoing. His ongoing forgiveness is not an excuse for bad behavior. It is the hope that I can always start again, always start over and always have hope. Haven’t you been so discouraged spiritually you want to quit. “Why try, I’ll just fail again!” What is the point, I just can’t seem to overcome this!” *Rom. 7:15 “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate.” (NLT) Rom. 7:24-25 “Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? 25 Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord...” (NLT)*
 - ii.** *Jesus continues to protect you.* *John 10:27-29 “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father’s hand.”(NLT)* What beautiful imagery. Jesus is actively protecting your salvation. It was not your works that got you saved and it is not your works that keep you saved. This truth removes the fear that if my performance is not good enough, I lose my relationship with Jesus. Salvation is not about works

This does not create a license to sin it creates security that we are loved! Love is a much greater motivator for behavior than fear! Some of you are driven by fear in your relationship with Jesus rather than love. That is why you have no happiness! You are relying on yourself (your works / performance) for your salvation not Jesus. Our salvation is only by grace in Jesus Christ and this lead to happiness. Every day relax in God’s grace. Don’t try to earn God’s approval, don’t try to earn his love, and don’t try to earn his recognition. You don’t earn it. God is love and God loves you unconditionally. Let me explain the difference between religion and a relationship. Religion is what you do for God; relationship is what God has done for you. Jesus did not come to give you religion. God is not interested in religion; God is interested in you having a relationship.

The Bible is all about what God has done for you and what Jesus did for you on the cross, not about what you do for God. So Jesus said I don't want your religion; I want a relationship. And every time you forget this you will lose your happiness; every time you think I have to earn God's smile, I have to earn God's love, I have to do something really cool to make God love me. We are not trying to earn our way to heaven. We are not trying to work our way to heaven. We are not trying to prove we are good enough to get to heaven because none of us are good enough to get to heaven. It's only God's grace.

3. Rely On Jesus for Your Confidence not Human Effort V.3

Paul had quite the list of accomplishments. His human efforts were pretty impressive. But, compared to Jesus they were not worthy of his trust. It is easy to have confidence in our efforts. It is easy to trust in what we can do. So, how do we rely on Jesus and not ourselves? It is by increasing your skills without decreasing your trust. It is not that human confidence is a bad thing. We should develop confidence that we can be competent. But, no matter how much we feel confident, human confidence cannot substitute for Godly trust. This is where we begin to deviate from following Jesus. We all have this tendency in us. "I got this God." We need to be able to grow both over the course of our lives. Keep learning and keep growing in your trust.

HOW

- i.* Develop a dependent life
- ii.* As your skills increase give credit to God
- iii.* As your confidence increases, stay humble before God
- iv.* As your influence increases, use it to serve God
- v.* As your blessings increase, make sure you thank God

Watch your spiritual barometer throughout your life. What is this? It is your prayer life. If you are truly depending on Jesus you will pray. If you are depending on your efforts you won't. Your prayer life will be the biggest evidence of who you trust and the biggest influence on your trust. The last step to building more margins in your life is to depend on Jesus. Why should you do that? Because God can do more in 20 minutes than you can do in 20 years. Some of you have had some goals and dreams that you have been striving, seeking, working, hustling, hurrying for year after year after year, and you haven't achieved them yet. Why don't you just back off a little bit? Relax. Chill out. Rely on Jesus.

What does relying on Jesus give you the confidence to do or change in your life?

4. Remember what matters most.V.7

Every day I need to remember what matters most. When I get up in the morning I need to remind myself what counts and what doesn't count. I should not be distracted by what is inconsequential in life. What is petty, what is trivial, what really doesn't matter? What is unimportant? I should not be distracted by what is inconsequential in life. Why is this an important habit? Have you noticed how easy it is to lose your happiness over some small thing? It is usually the small irritations that cause you to lose your happiness. Somebody cuts you off in the middle of the road when you are trying to make a turn and they won't let you do it, you lose your happiness. Or You

are having a bad hair day or the clothes you put on don't fit any more; that all cause you to lose your happiness real quick! It is the little things. Yet do those things really matter in life? No, they do not.

So if you want to be a happy person, Paul says in Philippians 3, you need to remember what matters most, and not worry about all the stuff you used to think is so important before you knew Jesus Christ. Verse 7 he says this, *"All the things that I once thought were so important to me, I now consider worth nothing, because of Christ."* All those things that I thought were so important to me I now consider worth nothing now that I know Christ. What was the most important thing to you before you met Jesus Christ? Is it Your Work? Is it your Career? Making money? Maybe it was getting a date. Maybe it was being popular. Maybe it was having security or making lot of money etc.

Paul says all those things they are just not that important to me anymore. He says all those things I used to think were so important –being cool, looking cool, having the goods, looking good, feeling good, that is just not important anymore because it is not going to matter in the long scheme of things. He says that stuff doesn't matter anymore. How do you know if you have really been saved by Jesus Christ? I will tell you how you know. Your values change. If your values haven't changed you haven't been changed, thus you haven't been saved. Because you can't have somebody as big as God come into your life, dwell within you and it not change you. It changes your values.

The culture around us makes us not to value what is most important to us. Every day there are thousands of advertising messages that say, you are not worth anything until you have our product. This should matter to you. Even television news makes every item sound like it is the most important thing of the day. It is not. So what you have to ask yourself is this question, and now a days on everything the news channel and paper may tell you is important and truth: How much will this matter in a hundred years? How much will this matter in five years? How much of what I'm worrying about right now is going to matter even tomorrow in the purpose and plan God has for your life? It is not going to matter much tomorrow, much less for eternity. You need to live in light of eternity. Everybody and everything around you is constantly telling you that the petty and the trivial are important.

We are living for things that are not going to matter. So to be counter culture which means you are going to be a whole lot happier than everybody else then focus not on what is current but what is eternal. And no greater example do you have than Jesus Christ life here on earth. Live your life in light of eternity and realize that most of this is not going to matter in eternity, so why am I worrying about it? Why am I stressed out? Why am I anxious? Why am I fearful? Why am I so uptight over this? It is not even going to matter next week much less for eternity. Jim Elliot a famous missionary when asked about giving up a lot of things said this, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep for that which he cannot lose." Jim said, "I'm giving up a lot of things here that other people think are really important right now. They don't mean anything to me, because I'm gaining eternal life and eternal rewards in heaven that I cannot lose.

Life is not about things. It is about learning how to love. If at the end of your life you have giant pile of things but you are estranged from your wife and kids, you have missed the purpose! When you are generous with your time, money, effort, and energy, you are saying that what matters most is God and people. What matters most is love. Paul talks about this in Philippians 3:7: *“I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.”* How do you break the grip of materialism? There is only one way. The antidote for getting is giving. So every time you are generous and give to others or to God, then you are actually breaking the hold of materialism in your life. *“We are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives”* (Philippians 3:20a). Your purpose is not to live for here and now. You are storing up for eternity! You are not building a pile on this side of eternity. You are building into people and relationships that will matter on that side of eternity. You are living in light of Heaven.

When have you attempted something that could only be done by the power of God? How did you see God work through that situation? _____

5. Rely On Jesus to Experience Oneness with Him V.8-9.

Paul knew what the greatest gift in this life was. It was not his accomplishments. It was experiencing Jesus. It was gaining Him and experiencing oneness with Him. Compared to this, everything else was considered garbage. In fact, the Greek word used here for garbage is poop. Compared to Jesus, everything in this life I can do is a big pile of poop. Our dilemma is that because we lack the oneness with Jesus, we don't value Him like this. Because we have so rarely relied on Him, we have never really experienced the incredible value of this oneness.

- a. *Realize you are missing out on something.*** Whenever we try to explain something to another person who has never had the same experience, it is tough. Some of you know what I'm talking about and some of you have no idea. Some of you are missing out on the greatest ongoing experience in this life. You are missing out on something that makes everything else garbage in comparison. Is not this something worth pursuing?
- b. *Trust Jesus and see for yourself.*** Ps. 34:8 *“Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!”* (NLT). Some of you have never trusted Jesus for your eternity. Some of you have never trusted Him to follow daily. Some of you have never trusted Him outside your comfort zone (money / serving / mission trip /) Because of this, you've never seen Him come through.

Reliance = Oneness which = happiness. Some people have never experienced the exhilaration of swimming. Why? Because they never get in the pool. Some of you have never experienced the exhilaration of experiencing Jesus in your daily life because you just won't get in the spiritual pool with Jesus. You won't rely on Him. You won't trust Him. You won't see for yourself. Some people are good at the immediate. They can jump right into anything, but they are not good at “keeping on keeping on.” And other people are good at lasting, but it takes them a long time to get there.

To live the exciting life of faith that God has planned for you, you need to be good at both the immediate and the lasting. And both of those require that you keep on trusting. Joseph didn't understand what it meant for Jesus to have a virgin birth; he didn't understand Jesus would be God in human flesh. But he knew what God told him to do, so Joseph kept on trusting. He was a newlywed who didn't get a honeymoon, and his new marriage was not anything like he planned, but he still kept trusting. What are you going to do when life doesn't work out like you planned or wanted?

I am always encouraged by what the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:8, *"We are pressed on every side by troubles, but not crushed and broken. We are perplexed because we don't know why things happen as they do, but we don't give up and quit"* (TLB). I don't know why some people are diagnosed with terminal cancer. I don't know why some children rebel so strongly against their parents. I don't know why so many things happen that don't make sense. So it's encouraging to hear one of the greatest men of faith say, "I don't know why things happen as they do, but I still choose to not give up."

It is good to know that we can trust God and that he knows things we don't. He has promised that one day he will set everything right. One day he will bring together everyone who trusts in him. Until then there are two ways you can live your life. You can live feeling like God owes you an explanation or you can live realizing God has given you great gifts. If you live life feeling like God owes you an explanation, you will only wind up in a constant state of bitterness, because God doesn't owe you anything. But even though he doesn't owe you anything, he has given you everything. He gave you his own Son. He gave you the gift of eternal life. He gave you the promise of being together with him forever. Those are great gifts.

Do you trust God for the things that you don't understand? How is that evident in your life?

6. Get to know Jesus better.V.10

Get to know Jesus better. You should every day say to yourself and the Lord, Lord, if I don't get anything else done today, anything else done, I want to get to know you a little bit better and I want to love you a little bit more. You were made to live in relationship to God, and if you think you can be happy without getting to know him better, the very thing, the very reason I was made for by Him, I'm just fooling myself. A lot of you, you have had a taste of happiness that I am talking about here and there and you are just reaching for it all the time. Where is the happiness found in our lives? It is found in the number one thing we were created for. Getting to know God a little bit better, loving Jesus every day a little bit more, that is where we are to be. Paul discovered that. He says in Philippians 3:10, *"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering, becoming like him in his death so that somehow I may be raised to life."* So it is the thing about knowing Christ. You have to understand the difference between knowing about someone and knowing someone. Many people know about Jesus but they don't know Him. Paul says I want to know Christ Jesus.

There is a difference in knowing about someone and knowing someone. You know more about President or your Governor than you want to, but you don't really know them. You know your wife/husband and you know your kids because you spend time with them. You have a relationship with them. Paul became "deeply and intimately acquainted" with God because he had a relationship with him and took the time to get to know him. Paul says, I know Christ because I spend time with him. I have this relationship with him. I love this in the Amplified version. It says, *"For my determined purpose is that I may know Christ – that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding Him more strongly and more clearly..."* That phrase "determined purpose" the truth of the matter is you don't get to know Christ by accident. You don't just wake up one morning and sort of accidentally fall into knowing Jesus Christ better. It is a determined purpose. It is something you have to do something about. You have to invest your time in it. Nothing will ever grow just by sitting there. Your money is not going to grow just sitting there. You have to invest it somewhere in order for it to grow. We all know that. Your relationship with God is not going to grow unless you, like any other relationship, invest time in that relationship.

If you meet someone who has a strong relationship with God, a strong relationship with Jesus, I will guarantee you they have spent a lot of time investing in talking to him and letting him talk to them. You don't grow a relationship without investing time in a relationship. Some of you need to take the first step. What is the first step, get involved in a small groups. What is going to keep you or take you from getting involved and growing in your relationship with Jesus? It is busyness. We just get too busy. And busyness destroys relationships. It destroys relationship with your husband, your wife, and with your kids. It destroys your relationship with God if you don't spend any time with him. To get to know Jesus you have to make time, and spend time with him.

But let me tell you, it doesn't take a lot of time. If you will just set aside ten, fifteen minutes in the morning... you know this, in any relationship, just a few minutes of focused time can make all the difference in the world. So I am not talking about hours and hours. If you spend just a few minutes in the morning, evening, afternoon, whatever is best for you. But in that time there is something you have to do. You do not have to be busy. You have to do what Psalm 46:10 talks about. You have to *"be still."* Some of you, those are terrifying words to you. I know. You are busy all the time. *Be still.* When you are still, then you know that he is God. If you want to get to know God better you have to spend time with him. If you want to spend time you have to make time for him.

How do you need to adjust your schedule so that you can make time to spend with God? _____

CONCLUSION

Many people have a hard time accepting God's grace. To be sure, they appreciate God's gift of salvation, but they want to earn it through some sort of effort on their part. Why? Well, maybe our efforts make us feel superior to those who haven't done the work. Paul warns the Philippians against this type of thinking. Basically, he says: "Don't get caught up in the false teaching that you have to do certain things for salvation. Happiness comes from realizing that Christ has done it all."

Paul was religious before he was saved, but his religion could not save him. He had to lose his religion in order to find eternal life! He begins this chapter by warning the believers against religion apart from Christ. The Jews called the Gentiles "dogs," but here Paul uses the term "dogs" to describe the Jewish teachers who emphasized circumcision and keeping the Law. True worship is in the Spirit and not in the flesh; it honors Jesus Christ, not religious leaders; it depends on God's grace, not on fleshly strength.

How much of what passes for the Christian faith in this world is really only fleshly religion. Paul had the best possible reputation as a Jewish rabbi. In birth and training, he far surpassed all of his friends (See Gal. 1:11-24). He was sincere too; his Jewish religion meant life and death to him. So sincere was he that he even persecuted those who differed with him. If any man could get to heaven on the basis of character and religion, it was Paul, and yet he was a lost sinner apart from Jesus Christ! When he met Christ, he considered all of his earthly and fleshly accomplishments as rubbish! "I counted" is the way he puts it. He measured carefully, took stock of himself, and decided that all of his religion and worldly honors were not worth it. He wanted Christ!

TALK IT OVER

1. Why would Paul's background have been a source of pride to him before he became a Christian? Why do you believe he was so willing to give it up for Christ? _____

2. In verses 3-6, Paul explains what it means to "put confidence in the flesh." According to these verses, what type of fleshly things could have made Paul feel worthy of God's approval? _____

3. What would happen if you considered all things "loss" and "rubbish" for Christ's sake? What things might you have to consider loss that you now have? _____

4. In verse 9 Paul contrasted two kinds of righteousness, two ways of being in a right relationship with God. What are the characteristics of each? _____

5. Why is it important that Paul clarifies that he has not yet reached the goal? Why is it dangerous to think that we have “arrived” in our Christian faith? _____
- _____
- _____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER.

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:10-11(NIV)

RESPONDING IN PRAYER.

Dear God, I want to learn to relax in your grace every day. Let me not try to earn your approval but to realize you already loved me. And you will never love me any less or any more. I want to live by grace and I want to be gracious to everybody else. Then Lord, help me to focus every day on what matters most. Help me to focus on what is going to last for eternity. I want to spend time with you every day, a quiet time, to read your Word, to pray and to listen in conversation with you.

HABITS OF HAPPINESS

HABIT 8. HAPPINESS IN PRESSING ON TO KNOW CHRIST

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-21

INTRODUCTION

In our study today, Paul uses an intense running analogy to describe the Christian life. Having described his passionate, all-consuming desire in verse 10, “to know Christ,” the apostle now tells the Philippians that he is not stagnating. He is not slowing down. He is still running hard after Christ. As Paul explains this explosion of spiritual longing, he tells the Philippians that they should follow his example and he takes his perspective on spiritual progress. In verse 15 he says, “Therefore, all who are mature should think this way” (15a). Every Christian, then, should take a close look at this passage because *Paul provides an inspiring and instructive path for growing in spiritual maturity*. Let us consider five particular applications from Paul's example and explanation of spiritual maturity.

PRESSING ON

1. Happy People Never Stop Growing V.12-13

Following Jesus is a decision and then a process for the rest of your life. You can't follow without walking. You need to have movement! When Paul wrote that verse, he was an older man in prison in Rome. He was at the end of life. He was an incredibly mature person. Yet he says he had not arrived. If anybody had the right to say, “I have arrived spiritually,” it would be the guy who wrote most of the New Testament. But Paul says, no, I have not arrived. I am still growing. I am still learning. I am still becoming more like Christ.

You need to everyday do a little personal review of your life. Take a couple of minutes out of every day during your quiet time with God and do a spiritual daily checkup. Take your spiritual pulse. You can do it during your quiet time. Say, Lord where do I need to grow? What do I need to work on? Where am I weak? Where do you want me to be stronger? “*Search me O God and know my heart; Try me, test me, and know my thoughts. See if there is anything evil or wicked in my life. And lead me in the way that's everlasting.*” (Psalm 139:23-24)

What is the trap that will keep you from following Paul's example and continue growing in Christ? It is Pride. Pride will keep you from growing, because when you pretend that you have it all together, you won't make an effort to become more spiritually mature. No one has it all together! Humility leads to happiness because it makes you teachable. Unhappy people never stop growing. Unhappy people never stop discovering, never stop stretching, and never stop learning. If you have stopped growing, you are miserable, because you were made to grow. Happiness and humility go together because humble people are teachable. They are always asking, “How can I be a better husband? How can I be a better friend? How can I be a better boss? How can I be a better follower of Jesus?” “Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups. You

need firsthand evidence, not mere hearsay that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it” (2 Corinthians 13:5 MSG).

What is the trap that will keep you from following Paul’s example and continue growing in Christ? _____

2. Happiness Requires Letting Go V.13-14

Happiness requires letting go and learning to forget. Worry won’t change the past, so forget what can’t be changed and focus on the future. Look to the future with amazing hope. Let us just be honest. We have all been hurt in our past. Many people hurt severely maybe emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or financial abuse. You have been hurt in many ways. Happiness requires letting go of the hurt and learning to forget. Worry won’t change the past, so forget what can’t be changed and focus on the future.

You see, you can hold on to your pain. Nobody is going to force you to let it go. You can hold on to that memory. Or you can be happy. You only have a limited amount of energy. That is why you get tired. That is why you get fatigued. That is why you get worn out. Since you only have a limited supply of energy, I highly recommend you not waste any of it on the past. Every day, choose to focus your energy on what is in front of you and what lies ahead. This habit is so important to your happiness; there are three traps you have to be aware of.

- a. *Regret.*** How often do you play the “If only” game? If only I could do it over again. If only I had listened sooner. If only I could erase the past. If only I could forgive myself. The thing to remember is that no one is perfect. We all have regrets. We have all made bad choices and said foolish things. We have all wasted time and hurt ourselves and others. How do you release your regrets? There several strategies we tend to use that simply do not work:
 - i. *You try to bury your past.*** Burying the past will never help you get past your regrets. You can try to minimize (“It wasn’t a big deal”), rationalize (“Everyone does it”), and compromise (lower your standards), but your regrets are still there, and if unresolved, they’ll keep coming back to haunt you over and over again like a creature in a horror movie.
 - ii. *We blame others.*** This tactic is as old as Adam and Eve. When Adam sinned, he took it like a man: He blamed his wife! We use blame to balance out our guilt.
 - iii. *We beat ourselves up.*** We try to pay for our guilt unconsciously through illness, depression, setting ourselves up for failure, and other forms of self-punishment. The problem with beating up on yourself is this: Your conscience never knows when to stop! Some people spend their entire lives in self-condemnation.

What does God want you to do with your regrets instead?

- i. **Admit your guilt.** Own up to it. Don't make excuses. *"A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them, he gets another chance"* (Proverbs 28:13 TLB).
- ii. **Accept Christ's forgiveness.** He is waiting to clean your slate. Ask him to clear your conscience. Romans 8:1 says, *"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (NIV).
- iii. **Forgive yourself, and focus on the future.** *"Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it? There it is! I'm making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands"* (Isaiah 43:18-19 MSG).

You have to let go of regrets. Are there things I wish I had done differently in life? Of course there are. But I can't dwell on them because I can't change them. Don't waste any emotion on regrets.

- b. **Resentment.** If you hang on to resentment, it always hurts you more than anyone else. Resentment is self-destructive and counterproductive. Resentment just makes no sense. If any guy ever had a reason to be resentful, it was Job. He was a godly man, who had everything he wanted — wealth, fame, and a great family. One day he lost it all. Enemy nations killed all his livestock. All of his children were killed. He got a terrible disease. He literally lost everything he had. All he had left was a nagging wife. Then his friends came along and said, "Job, it's your entire fault." Though Job had every reason to be resentful, he tells us in the biblical book named after him that resentment is a bad idea. Job says, *"To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do"* (Job 5:2 GNT).

Job was a wise man. He knew he didn't have time to be resentful. He knew it was foolish, senseless, and illogical. If you think back through experiences in your own life, you will probably agree. We can do silly things when we are caught up in resentment. We will say things like, "I'm going to get him!" Then we often do the ridiculous to make that happen. When we give in to resentment, we act in self-destructive ways and hurt ourselves much more than those we are holding grudges against.

For example, I remember one time watching the old comedy act, "The Three Stooges." Mo kept hitting Curly on the chest. Curly said, "I'm going to get even with that guy. I'm going to stop him!" So he took a stick of dynamite and strapped it to his own chest. Then he said, "Next time he slaps me, it's going to blow his hand off!" That is what happens when we are resentful — we do really dumb things to try to get even with people. Worse yet, resentment is not helpful. It makes us miserable in the process. It never ends with us getting what we want. Holding on to resentment doesn't hurt anybody but you. Let it go! For your own sake, you must forgive. Do

they deserve it? But do you deserve forgiveness from God? Those who experience grace are gracious.

- c. **Tradition.** Everything is constantly changing, and you cannot stop it. You have to decide whether to resist and resent those changes or to be happy. Happiness is a choice. How you handle change in life reveals your spiritual maturity. When you are guided by and anchored to eternity, change can take place all around you and you can choose to be happy.

Nobody who is sincere follower of Jesus wakes up one day and says, “that’s enough of that! Now I’m going to be as enemy of the cross of Christ! But I have seen plenty do it gradually. I won’t go to church today; I just need some ME TIME. I won’t have time for small group anymore. I can’t really afford to give any money at church; the repayments of my loans are killing me! I would love to read the Bible and pray more, but I get so sleepy reading it! It sounds petty, doesn’t it? But the little things become habits, the habits become a lifestyle, and the lifestyle becomes a change of destination: You know what? Don’t really think Jesus does have all the answers. He is just a good teacher. And I wish his students would shut up and leave me alone!

Your past is past. You are not your past. Your past influences you, but your past does not define you. What matters today is not your past. I don’t care what you have done, who you did it with, or how long you did it. That is not you. Satan will tell you it is you, but that is not the truth. What matters today is what direction your feet are headed right now. If you want to grow, you must stop focusing on your past and focus instead on the future. Focus on what you want, not what you didn’t want to happen to you. Focus on your goal, not your habits. This is why diets don’t work. When you are on a diet, what are you focused on all the time? Food. You think far more about food on a diet than you do when you’re off the diet. Or take the smoker who wants to quit and says, “One of these days I am going to give up smoking because I know it is bad for me.” But the whole time, he is focusing on what he doesn’t want to do. That keeps you stuck in a rut. You have to focus on something else.

This is what Paul talked about in Philippians 3:12: *“I do not mean that I am already as God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal, but I continue trying to reach it and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that, which is the reason he made me his”* (NCV). But also notice what the next two verses say: “I know that I have not yet reached that goal, but there is one thing I always do. Forgetting the past and straining toward what is ahead, I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize for which God called me through Christ to the life above.” Don’t focus on what happened. Focus on what you want to happen. If you insist on driving while looking in the rear view mirror, you are going to crash. So stop it! It is over. If you want to finish the race well, you need to commit to a daily time with God so that you can fill your mind with God’s Word and focus on his goal for your life, not your past.

What is it from your past that you find it difficult to stop thinking about and dwelling on?

3. Happiness in being the doer of the word of God. 15-16

If we have a mature faith, we shall understand this need to keep on striving, to press forward, putting the past behind us. Those who don't yet understand, God will enlighten if they continue to respond to His word. As we make progress in our spiritual lives, let us take courage and move forward together. The Philippians have some fine examples of Christian faith in action in the apostle Paul and his companions, men like Silas, Timothy and Luke. Paul is not boasting. He is encouraging his readers. They can see he is not just a talker but he is a doer.

Receiving, reading, researching, remembering, and reflecting on the Word of God are all useless if we fail to put them into practice. We must become *doers of the word* (James 1:22). I understand this is a hard step, because Satan fights it so intensely. He doesn't mind you going to Bible studies as long as you don't do anything with what you learn. We fool ourselves when we assume that just because we have heard or read or studied a truth, we have internalized it. Actually, you can be so busy going to the next class or seminar or Bible conference that you have no time to implement what you have learned. You forget it on the way to your next study. Without implementation, all our Bible studies are worthless. Jesus said, *"Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock"* (Matthew 7:24 NIV).

Jesus also pointed out that God's blessing comes from obeying the truth, not just knowing it. He said, *"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them"* (John 13:17). I cannot overstate the value of being a part of a small Bible study discussion group. We always learn from others truths we would never learn on our own. Other people will help you see insights you would miss and help you apply God's truth in a practical way. The best way to become a *doer of the Word* is to always write out an action step as a result of your reading or studying or reflecting on God's Word. Develop the habit of writing down exactly what you intend to do. This action step should be personal (involving you), practical (something you can do), and provable (with a deadline to do it). Every application will involve either your relationship to God, your relationship to others, or your personal character.

With whom are you sharing what you learn and apply from God's Word?

4. Happiness in belonging to God's family.

There are only two ways to get into a family: You can either be born into it, or you can be adopted into it. God does both for you! It is called being born again, and it is called being adopted into the family of God. God does both. In Roman law, during New Testament times, you could disown a child you birthed. But if you adopted a child, you were forbidden to ever disown that child. God says you are not only born again into his family, but he has adopted you, and there is no way he could ever disown you. That is good news! You may ask, "No matter what I do? Really?" No matter what you do!

The Bible says in 1 Timothy 3:15, *"I want you to know how people who are members of God's family must live. God's family is the church"* (GW). This means church is not something you go to. Church is something you *belong to*. We are the family of God. Many people think that

Christianity is a belief system, but it is a *belong* system. Yes, there are beliefs involved, but it's more than that. It means you are a part of the body of Christ. You belong to the family of God: *"You will all be joined together, and you will give glory to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ accepted you, so you should accept each other, which will bring glory to God"* (Romans 15:6-7 NCV).

Many people today are not sure where they fit into the scheme of things. They are searching for meaning and direction as they go through life. People are confused and like Jesus said, "They are like sheep without a shepherd." They are wandering around trying to find where they belong. People are asking these questions: Why am I here? Where do I fit in? What is life all about? Who cares about me? Ultimately, we find these answers in the one who created us. We will look at four areas today that will help us find where we belong and how to get there.

- a. ***We Must Know Whose Example To Follow. V.17.*** Paul tells them to join together in following his Godly example. If you are the only one who sees a certain thing as right or true, that should concern you a little bit. Maybe there is wisdom and accountability in joining with other believers in determining what is the best way to live. I am not suggesting that we base our lives solely on what other people think we should do, but we should realize that we may have an incomplete picture, if we rely only on our own understanding, or only use our personal experience to process information. We often need other believers to help us figure out what God is telling us.

Proverbs 11:14 "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety." Who should we follow? Obviously, Jesus is the One we must ultimately follow. However, He has also placed people around us who can help show us how to live right and please God with our lives. And a word to every follower of Christ; be real! Yes, you are an example for others to follow, but here is what that does NOT mean: Hiding your faults and mistakes so you look like a good example. No. Be real. Be you. But let the grace of God work freely in your life so that when people see the real you, they can still recognize Jesus in you!

- b. ***We Must Know the Fate of Those Who Reject the Gospel. VI8-19.*** Paul clearly spells out the fate of those who reject Jesus. He says "Their end is destruction." Those who refuse to call on the name of Jesus and be saved do not have a bright future ahead of them. Unless they surrender their hearts and lives to Jesus, they will face an eternity of separation from God, of darkness, of eternal punishment and torment in the lake of fire, as described in Revelation 20:15. This is not a pretty picture. It is sobering, and should cause us to take the gospel seriously. Furthermore, it should cause us to be more concerned than ever about those around us who do not know Jesus.

When is the last time we wept for the lost? Maybe you have family members that do not know the Lord. Have you been deeply concerned to the point of praying for their salvation? How about other friends or neighbors? Does the compassion of Christ well up within you when you think of these people spending an eternity in hell? Hell is a real place, and it seems that a lot of people are determined to go there. Will you be the one to stop them and let them know the truth? There is a better way. They do not have to face an eternity without God.

- c. ***We Must Know the Nature of Our Citizenship. V.20-21.*** Paul was telling these believers, who lived in the city of Philippi, that their real city was in heaven. Even though they lived in Philippi, they had been granted all the rights & privileges of those in heaven. They really belonged to heaven, not to Caesar, not to Philippi, not to a synagogue, nor to anything else. They were God's people whom He had placed in Philippi to spread the ways of the kingdom of heaven. They were there to show the love and unity that is found in Christ. They were there to get to know Christ more and show the people around them what Jesus was really like. They were a colony from heaven that was strategically placed in Philippi to make a difference in people's lives. We can view each local God honoring church as a colony of heaven.

Those who belong to each church and have a relationship with Christ have full citizenship in the heavenly city, and also have been given the responsibility of helping the world see and acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is up to us to show the people of our community that there is a place they can go where everybody knows their name. We need to demonstrate to those who do not yet know Christ that they have a place to belong in the family of God. People must see how we love one another and live in unity. Then, they need to be invited to join the family of God. How do people join the family? Two basic things are needed: repentance and relationship. They must repent of their sins against God, and start a relationship with Jesus Christ. Romans 10:13 "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." TS: That leads us to the final point.

What are the benefits of belonging to the family of God?

CONCLUSION

In his book, *Classic Christianity*, Bob George, a well-known Christian counselor, observed: "Whatever a man puts his mind to and thinks about determines what he will feel. Although we cannot always rely on our emotions, we can, to a degree, control our thoughts. Therefore, it is absolutely critical that we think thoughts that are truthful, rather than thoughts that are in error." Whether we realize it or not, we are in a race. It is the race of our lives! If you are a Christian, or aspire to become one, then there is no escaping your obligation to pursue excellence in all that you do, think, feel and act. And the manner in which you conduct yourselves will have an

impact, either positively or negatively, on the lives of others. A life of excellence can and should be our objective; one that is not only obtainable, but observable. If we conduct ourselves in accordance with God's will, we can leave a lasting legacy for others to follow.

TALK IT OVER

1. What do you need to let go of from your past so that you can focus on the future? _____

2. Why do you think it's so difficult for people to let go of tradition?

3. What does your attitude toward change reveal about your spiritual maturity?

4. Who some of the "enemies of the cross" are in today's world? How do we recognize them as false teachers?

5. How much attention do we give to looking forward to that blessed hope -the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ?

A VERSE TO REMEMBER.

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:13-14.

RESPONDING IN PRAYER.

Dear Lord Jesus, I long to know you more and more and have a deep yearning in my soul to draw closer to You Lord. I pray Lord that in the power of the Holy Spirit You would endow me the spirit of wisdom and understanding, so that I may know you more and love you better, with every passing day. I pray also that the eyes of my heart may be illumined by Your Word of truth so that I may know more fully the hope to which I have been called

THE HABITS OF HAPPINESS

HABIT 9.HAPPINESS IN GOD'

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-13

INTRODUCTION.

Today we are going to continue to look in to God's word, the bible, on how to keep from stressing out. We have been in this series through the book of Philippians and WOW can you believe we are almost winding up, next week will probably finish it up. I want you to note the key verse on our study today. This is verse 7 which says: *"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* The Bible calls this the peace that passes understanding. When you are in a situation where you are in total chaos, maybe a total meltdown, total stress, total tension, everything is going wrong at the same time and yet you are at peace inside. That is the peace that passes understanding. God says I guarantee this to you. *"If you do these things you will experience God's peace which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts quiet and keep your heart at rest."*

The Hebrew word for "peace" in the Bible is *shalom*. You have heard this word. *Shalom* means more than just ending of hostilities. In fact, you will find more than 790 verses about the peace of God in Scripture. For those with a broken heart, God gives us *comforting peace*. For those with a confused heart, he gives us *guiding peace*. For those with a shamed heart, he gives us *forgiving peace*. When we have a worried heart, he gives us *confident peace*. *He provides peace for every problem*. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He came to Earth to bring peace. He summarizes how he brings peace in a single sentence: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28 NIV). If you truly get this sentence, your stress level will drop. Jesus promises rest that is beyond anything you have ever experienced. It is much deeper than physical rest. It is soul rest. Your problem is not overworked muscles. It is an overworked mind and an overworked spirit. You need rest from anxiety, tension, guilt, and fear.

Did you know that there are over seven thousand promises in the Bible? And did you also know that every promise that God has for you, there is a premise. And what I mean is God says if you do this, then I will do this. There is a condition. We see it clearly in the first part of verse 7. It says, if you do these things it is going to keep you from stressing out and instead you will experience God's peace. His peace will keep your thoughts quiet and His peace will keep your hearts at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus. You find peace — rest for your weary soul — when you come to Jesus. It is an act of faith that shows Jesus you expect his help. It is God's way to the peace that won't end.

What do you think it means to find "peace that passes all understanding"?

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO FIND PEACE.

1. Be of the same mind with other believers. V.2-5

You have to live in harmony with your brothers and sisters in Christ. You have to agree with each other if you want to find peace. Euodia and Syntyche were two sisters in the church who couldn't get along. And Paul urges them to "agree in the Lord", literally, to think the same, to be of one mind and to focus on the same goal. Their disagreements were creating turmoil in the church and hindering the forward progress of the Gospel. They were not focused on Christ. They were focused on their own preferences, and peace flew out the window! If we want real peace, we have to "agree in the Lord!" His honor and His glory must be the focus of our attention, not our own preferences. In verse 3, Paul urges the church to "help these women." The word "help" literally means to receive together, to take hold of something together.

The same word is used in Luke 5:7 where Jesus performs a miracle and Peter has more fish in his net than he knows what to do with. He calls for his partners in another boat to come and help. Literally, he wants them to come and take hold of the fishing nets together with him so they don't lose the fish. Jesus has called us to "be fishers of men." We don't need to be arguing over the color of the boat. We don't need to be critical of the way somebody dresses or sings or parts their hair. NO! We must take hold of that task together – that task of bringing in the net as we fish for men and women, that task of equipping people to follow Jesus. If we are going to be right with each other, we must live in harmony with each other. We must help each other, and we must be humble. We must stop demanding our own way and yield to one another. Happiness comes when we are "reasonable". Now, that word "reasonable" literally means "yielding." In other words, if we want to find true peace and happiness, we must be willing to yield to one another; we must be willing to let others have their way instead of demanding our own way.

What are some ways you can be "tender without surrender" in a relationship?

2. Refuse to worry about anything. V.6

Refuse to worry about anything. Worry is unreasonable for a couple of reasons. Worry exaggerates the problem. Have you noticed if somebody says something bad about you, the more you think about it, the bigger it gets? Second, worry doesn't work. To worry about something you can't change is useless. And to worry about something you can change is stupid. Just go change it! Why? Because the number one source of stress in your life is not your work and it is not your relationship. It is that you worry. Jesus thought that worry was such an important topic that he spent a major section of his most famous sermon called the Sermon on the Mount talking about worry. In that Sermon on the Mount he gives us the four reasons why you should never worry about anything.

- a. **Worry is unreasonable.** It is illogical, it is unreasonable and it doesn't make sense to worry. He is saying this is not logical. You have your priorities out of order. God says, you have allowed things to become more important to you than me and my promises to you. Stop, don't worry about anything! Worry exaggerates the problem. Worry never makes a problem smaller. It always makes it bigger. And besides that

not only does worry exaggerate the problem, worry doesn't work. It never has worked and it never will. It is worthless

- b. Worry is unnatural.** In the entire universe that God has created, the only creations of His that chooses to worry are human beings. Birds don't worry, cows don't worry, dogs don't worry, and cats don't worry. Worry is unnatural. What do I mean by that? You were not born with it. There are no born worriers. You learned it. Worry is something you learned. Here the good news about that if you learned to worry you can learn not to worry. Never worry about anything. Why? It is unreasonable, it is unnatural and it is unhealthy. Your body was not designed to handle worry. When people say, *"I'm worried sick,"* they are telling the truth. Doctors say a lot of people could leave the hospital today if they knew how to get rid of guilt, resentment, and worry. **Proverbs 14:30** says, *"A peaceful heart leads to a healthy body"* (NLT).
- c. Worry is unhelpful.** Worry cannot change the past and worry cannot control the future. It just messes up today. That is all it does. It doesn't change the past and it can't control the future. It just messes up today. The only thing that worries changes is you. It makes you miserable and unhappy. It will never solve a problem. It is unhelpful.
- d. Worry is unnecessary.** God says, "What in the world are you worried about? Don't you think I'm going to take care of you? Don't you think I'm going to meet your needs? I made you. I created you. I saved you. I have put my Spirit in you. I love you. Don't you think I'm going to take care of your needs? Worry is unnecessary. There is no need to worry.

You have three basic choices when it comes to the stress in your life: You can worry, you can ignore your stress, or you can relax and trust God. The Bible says in Psalm 116:7, *"I said to myself, 'relax, because the Lord takes care of you'"* (NCV). You can't trust God and worry at the same time. That is not just good spiritual wisdom from the Lord; it is wisdom for your health as well. The Bible also says in Proverbs 14:30 that a heart at peace is a healthy heart: *"A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones"* (NIV). It is not just what you eat that destroys your health — it is what eats you! You can have the best health plan around — eat fresh, healthy, organic, and in proper portions — but if you are resentful against someone in your life or worry about tomorrow, your health will suffer.

Worry is like a poison or a fire. It burns you up inside. I remember watching an old episode of the detective show "Columbo" when Country singer Johnny Cash played the bad guy. When he finally got caught, he said, "I am so glad I got caught, because the guilt was killing me." We deal with all sorts of worries in our lives, but many of them revolve around these five areas. We worry:

- We will be left alone.
- We won't know what to do in the future.
- We won't have what we need in the future.

- We will be hurt by something or someone in the future.
- We won't have the strength to survive in the future.

But there is good news: You don't have to worry. Worry is optional misery! You have many things that impact your health that you cannot control. *But you can control the amount you worry!* If you have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, you know the One who created your future. His promises about your future give life, not stomach-eating worry. You have no need to worry. The One who holds your future will walk with you through it.

Think of something you have been worrying about. What is an action step you can take instead of worrying?

3. You talk to God about everything.V.6

Don't panic, pray. Don't worry but worship. Stop talking to yourself about all of the stuff that is stressing you out and start talking to God. Talking to yourself won't do anything. But talking to God will change everything. Paul is saying talk to God about everything. This is the second part of this verse, Philippians 4:6 *"Never worry about anything. Instead in every situation let God know what you need in your prayers and in your requests."* Instead of worrying, pray. Worry about nothing, pray about everything. Every problem in your life is tiny to God. Jesus brings hope to everything. There is no big problem in your life; there is no little problem in your life because all of them are tiny to God.

Prayer can change things. Romans 8:32 says, *"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"* (NIV) God solved your biggest problem — getting into Heaven — when he sent Jesus to die for you. If God loved you enough to send Jesus to die for you, don't you think he loves you enough to take care of all these other problems?

Keep a journal of all your prayer requests, and watch how God answers your prayers.

4. Thank God in all things.V.6-7

It is not easy to stop worrying about the often-scary, everyday parts of our lives, but God tells us how in the next part of the verse: *"Pray about everything ... and thank him for all he has done."* Grateful prayer brings peace. God says when you start to worry, pray. Parents understand the power of grateful prayers. Most parents would not appreciate their children always making requests without saying "thank you" for what they have already received. God sees it the same way. He wants us to ask him for what we need and want. More than 20 times in the New Testament, we are told to "ask" him. But he wants us to ask with gratefulness. The Bible urges us to be specific in our requests — and our praises. Instead of a simple "thank you for everything," he wants us to tell him what we are grateful for.

When I say to my wife, "I am so grateful for you," she tells me to be specific. She likes to hear what I appreciate about her and what I am grateful for about her. God does, too. So when you pray, tell God what you are thankful for. Prayer is one of the most important ways we tell God

“thank you.” Thanking God in advance is a big step of faith. When we have faith to thank God ahead of time, miracles happen. The more thankful we are, the more God works in our lives. The Bible says that God inhabits the praise of his people. He uses our thanksgiving as an instrument of power in our lives. So, what are you thankful for?

It **doesn't** say thank God *for* all things. Because there are a lot of things you shouldn't be thankful for. There is pain in the world. There is evil in the world. Somebody gets cancer; you don't have to thank God for cancer. Somebody dies; you don't thank God for their death. But it says *in all things* give thanks. This means even in bad times, you can find something good. Here is the third part of that verse. Philippians 4:6 he says worry about nothing. Then he says *“When you ask God for what you need also thank him for all he has done. Always ask with a thankful heart,”* I am not going to belabor this point because twice already in this series we talked about the connection between gratitude and happiness. You cannot be happy and ungrateful at the same time. Happy people are grateful people. Unhappy people are ungrateful people. Study after study has shown that the healthiest emotion known to human beings is the attitude of gratitude. The more you build gratitude in your life the happier and the healthier you are going to be.

What will be the center of your life? In other words, who or what are you going to live for? There are a lot of options. You can center your life around a career, a sport, a hobby, making money, or having fun. There is nothing wrong with any of these things. They are all fine, but they all make a lousy center for your life. You need something at the center of your life that is absolutely unchanging, that can never be taken away from you. Because if it can, you will lose your security. You will always be under stress. You need something that is unchanging and secure. One of the ways you know that Jesus is at the center of your life is you worry less. Any time you start worrying, it should be a red flag, a warning sign that says, “I've allowed someone or something to become the center of my life instead of God.”

You could make a person the center of your life, and you will be under stress because you know that person can walk out of your life any time or die or get sick. There is only one thing you can put at the center of your life that will never change and is strong enough to sustain you through life: Jesus Christ. When your core is solid in God, you have bounce-ability. You bounce back from stress faster. You bounce back from problems faster. You bounce back from grief faster. You bounce back from crisis faster. You have something solid in your life that doesn't change, and you worry less.

Being as specific as possible, for what are you thankful to God? Spend some time in prayer thanking God for those things.

5. Think about good things.V.8

The more you think about something, the stronger it takes hold of you, which is why the Bible teaches that we should *“run from anything that gives you the evil thoughts . . . but stay close to anything that makes you want to do right”* (2 Timothy 2:22a TLB) Temptation begins by capturing your attention. What gets your attention arouses your emotions. Then your emotions activate your behavior, and you act on what you feel. The more you focus on “I don't want to do this,” the stronger it draws you in. Ignoring a temptation is far more effective than fighting it.

Once your mind is on something else, the temptation loses its power. So when temptation calls you on the phone don't argue with it — just hang up! Sometimes this means physically leaving a tempting situation. This is one time it is okay to run away. Get up and turn off the television set. Walk away from a group that is gossiping. Leave the theater in the middle of the movie. To avoid being stung, stay away from the bees. Spiritually, your mind is your most vulnerable organ. To reduce temptation, keep your mind occupied with God's Word and other good thoughts. You defeat bad thoughts by thinking of something better. This is the principle of replacement. You overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).

To think about good things is so easy to say and so hard to do. But this is extremely important because the stress and your war with stress in your life, that war, that battle that is going on between your ears. The stress is not out there, it is in here. It is between your ears. The battle is in your brain. It is in your thought life. It is in your mind. Your war with stress is won or lost in your mind. What you fill your mind with will determine the level of stress in your life. If you want peace of mind, you are going to have to start controlling what you allow in your mind. Most people, their mind is like a freeway. Anything can drive through it. And they fill their mind with poison and garbage and stuff, all kinds of things.

You know the mind is like a computer. Garbage in, garbage out. Whatever you put in your mind is going to come out in your life. So you go and see movies that you shouldn't see and you will watch shows you shouldn't watch and you read books you shouldn't read. You listen to gossip you shouldn't listen to. Here is what the Bible says, Philippians 4:8 *"Fill your mind with those things that are true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and beautiful and respected. If anything is excellent, if anything is worthy of honor, think about those things."* In this verse there are eight tests for us to use whether we should allow a certain something in or not. If you want to lower the stress you have to change what you think about and control what you allow in your mind.

These eight tests you should consider before continuing to listen, or watch, or talk, or say something, or listen to something you should say, **is it true? Is it good? Is it right? Is it pure? Is it beautiful? Is it respected? Is it excellent? Is it worthy of honor?** When you think about these things – true, good, right, pure, beautiful, respected, excellent, and worthy you know what that is? That is a perfect picture of God. What he is really saying is, think about God, and think upon God. Here is what Isaiah says *"You Lord will keep in perfect peace."* Wouldn't you like to live in perfect peace? Wouldn't you like to be less stressed out? *"You Lord will keep in perfect peace all who trusts in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you."*

If you fix your thoughts on God he says I will keep you in perfect peace. What you think about is going to determine how stressed and how worried you are. I think it was Billy Graham who said, "If you look at the world you will be distressed; if you look within you will be depressed. But if you look at Christ you will be at rest." It all depends on what you have your eyes on. When I was growing would say, "Look within. I did. I didn't like what I saw." I don't want to look within. I want to look without. I want to look at God. I want to look at Christ and think about good things.

What do you spend your time thinking about? Where does your mind wander when you're not focused on something specific?

CONCLUSION.

As we end our study today, it is important to note what we have learned today. They are very easy to explain to bring out of the scriptures for you but they are very hard to do. It is not easy to worry about nothing. It is not easy to pray about everything. It is not easy to thank God in everything. It is not easy to think about good things and it is not easy to be content with anything. So where in the world are you going to get energy to do these things that reduces stress in your life? God says this: You come to me and I will give you the power and the ability to do what will help you do what is best for you. He says to each of us today, right now, if you come to me I will help you. I want to close with this last verse, Job 22:21 says this “*Obey God and be at peace with Him; this is the way to happiness.*” Some of you here, the real reason you are not at peace is because you are at war with God. You want to do everything your way, or the world’s way. When you make peace *with* God then you get the peace *of* God and then you can have peace with others. There is not going to be peace in the world until the Prince of Peace is reigning in our hearts. So in order for you to have the peace *of* God, you have to first have the peace *with* God. If you fix your thoughts on God he says I will keep you in perfect peace. What you think about is going to determine how stressed and how worried you are.

TALK IT OVER

1. Why do you think gratitude is so important for our spiritual lives? _____
2. What is the difference in worry and happiness? _____
3. What are the things that are wearing you down and keeping you from living a happy life? _____
4. What types of disagreements in a church or a family should be handled by just coming to “the same mind” over a matter? _____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Philippians 4:4-6.

Responding in Prayer:

Dear God, I don’t really want to be stressed out. I want to learn the habits of happiness. You have promised that if I do these things I will experience your peace, a peace that passes all understanding. Help me to worry about nothing. To remember it’s unreasonable and unnatural and unhealthy and unnecessary. You are going to take care of me. And dear God, help me to pray about everything.

THE HABITS OF HAPPINESS

HABIT 10: HAPPINESS IN CONTENTMENT

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-23

INTRODUCTION:

Would you consider yourself habitually content or habitually frustrated? Maybe you should ask the person sitting next to you? Some people just have a hard time being content. Wouldn't it be nice if we all could just learn to be content? Paul says we can. The Bible tells us to be content with anything. Let me explain biblical contentment because a lot of people misunderstand the meaning of contentment. A lot of people think contentment means I have no ambition. No. Paul, who wrote this book of Philippians, he is probably one of the most ambitious men ever to live. Paul single handedly takes the good news, the gospel, all across the Roman Empire. He is one of the most ambitious people ever. He says I have learned to be content. This has nothing to do with ambition. That is not contentment. Contentment is not laziness. Contentment is not apathy. Contentment is not complacency. Contentment is not fatalism. Contentment is not lacking ambition.

Contentment is enjoying, it is being happy with what you have right now rather than waiting for something else to happen in order for you to be happy. Does that make sense? It is enjoying what you have right now. It doesn't mean I don't want to progress. It doesn't mean I don't have goals. The Bible says you should always have goals. What it means I am not waiting for something to happen in my life in order to be happy. Contentment is the opposite of coveting. Coveting is when and then thinking. When *this* happens, *then* I will be happy. When *that* happens *then* I will be happy. That is when and then thinking. Contentment is actually independence from circumstances.

- It means my happiness; my happiness is not connected to what is happening in my life right now.
- It means my happiness; my happiness is not based on my happenings. It is not based on my circumstances.
- It means I have learned to enjoy whatever I have got right now and I'm not waiting for something or someone else to make me happy. Here is what Paul says in the next two verses, verses 11 and 12 "*I've learned to be content*, Contentment is not natural. I'm not by nature content. You're not by nature content.

HOW CAN I HABITUALLY BE A CONTENT PERSON?

1. Contentment Must Be Learned V10-11

Experiencing contentment in life is something that we have to learn; it does NOT come naturally. You are not by nature a contented person. Neither am I! I am a discontented person. It is my nature to want things to be different, to want them to be better. It is not my nature to be contented, and neither is yours. But if you are going to be happy in your life, you have to learn contentment. It is learned over time. What comes naturally is just the opposite. We naturally feel

stress, frustration, anger, unrest and unhappy. Paul also says, “*Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that*” (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

He is saying life is not about things. I didn’t have anything before I was born. I am not going to have anything after I die. Yes, I need things, but they are not what life is about, so I will just be content with what I have. Let me explain what contentment is *not*. Contentment is not abandoning your ambition. You ought to have ambition. You ought to make the most of what God has given you. God says it’s good to have godly ambition. Contentment doesn’t mean you don’t have any goals, dreams, or plans for your life.

Contentment means this: You don’t need *more* in order to be happy. You are happy right now with what you have been given. Happiness is a choice. You are as happy as you choose to be! You can’t blame unhappiness on your circumstances. If you are not happy with your circumstances, you are not going to be happy with different ones. There will always be something wrong. We live on a broken planet, and nothing is perfect. God wants you to learn to be happy in spite of difficult situations by trusting that he will give you exactly what you need when you need it. Since learning contentment is a process, what is one step you can take today to practice gratitude? How can we learn to be contented?

- a. ***Learn to stop comparing.*** The source of all discontent is comparison. The Bible tells us over and over, it is foolish to compare yourself to anybody else. Why? Two reasons. First, you are always going to find somebody who is doing a better job than you and somebody who has more than you and if you live comparing you are going to get discouraged. Two, you are always going to find somebody you are doing a better job than and you have more than and you get full of yourself with pride. Discouragement and pride are the two things that knock you out of life. So he says don’t do that. God says I called you to be you. I made you to be you. If you don’t be you, who is going to be you? When you get to heaven God is not going to say, why were you not more like your sister or your brother, or whoever? Or why were you not more like your mom or your dad? Why didn’t you be you is what He would ask? He is saying, I made you to be you.

Most of us start out as originals and end up as carbon copies. God never makes copies of anything. No two human beings are alike. You have a unique thumbprint, handprint, voice print, footprint, and eye print. You are unique. Even identical twins aren’t really identical. They are different in millions of ways. God never makes a repeat. Man makes clones. God never makes clones. When God made you he broke the mold. God wants you to be you. If you don’t be you who is going to be you? If you are going to be somebody else in life God may as well snuff you out because he doesn’t need two of that person. He made you to be you. And he wants you to be you. So he says stop comparing. When you compare you get jealous or you get envious. Contentment makes the body healthy. So stop comparing.

- b. *Learn to stop thinking that having more is better.*** There are three myths we are taught by advertising in society today. **First**, having more will make me happy. **Second**, having more will make me more important and third, having more will make me more secure. None of those are true. They are all lies. Having more will not make you **happier**. Having more will not make you **more valuable**. And having more will not make you **more secure**. In the first place, you can lose it all. You can lose a billion dollars in a lot of ways. And your **value** is not based on your **valuables** and your **self-worth** is not based on your **net worth**. It is based on who you are not on what you own. So stop thinking that having more will make you happier, having more will make you more important, having more will make you more secure. None of those are true. You need to find your security in something that can never be taken from you and that is your relationship to God.

You can't control everything that happens in your life but you can choose how you respond. That is your freedom and that is the only freedom there really is how you respond. Ecclesiastes 4 *"It's better to only have a little with peace of mind, than to be busy all the time with both hands, trying to catch the wind."* Think about that; picture that in your mind. This is probably the biggest obstacle most Christians find themselves in. It is what I call the Christian syndrome. We go out and buy things we can't afford with money we don't have to impress people we don't even like. Then we get in debt and we have to become workaholics to pay for all the things we have bought. A lot of people are possessed by their possessions. There is nothing wrong with possessions. Nothing is wrong with them unless you make them your god. But you cannot be possessed by your possessions. He says if your whole life is trying to work harder to pay for stuff, you are missing the point.

- c. *Learning must be intentional.*** Learning doesn't happen by osmosis. We just don't naturally become happy. We can't simply wait for the winds of happiness to blow over us. If we desire consistent contentment, we must decide to be intentional at learning what this takes. Reject the myth that happiness finds you. You and I must learn to be content in the way God says we can discover it.
- d. *Learning requires motivation.*** It takes motivation to learn. Lazy people are not content. So many people seem to be waiting around for the escalator to take them to the summit of contentment. There is no free ride to happiness. We must find the motivation to make some hard choices. Learning is a hard work that has an amazing payoff. We must reject the idea that discovering contentment is easy.
- e. *Learning requires evaluation.*** We can't learn successfully without consistent evaluation. It amazes me how rarely we evaluate how we feel and why we feel this way. Have you ever asked yourself, "Why am I so unhappy?" "Why do I feel the way I do?" Emotions should not be the driving force of our lives, but they are indicators. They can be the warning lights on our dashboard that tells us to check something. Ignore the warning lights, and you just might get emotionally stranded on the side of the road. If you are not experiencing contentment, don't automatically assume it is

your spouse's fault, jobs fault or lack of money. Stop settling for quick, shallow answers. Evaluation has to go deeper than this.

- f. Learning requires time.* No one learns everything they need instantly. Learning how to be content takes time as well. I'm still learning how to walk in contentment because life changes, circumstances change, stress levels change and painful events happen. With each new situation in my life I have another opportunity to discover how to experience contentment in Jesus.
- g. Learning requires examples.* Whatever I'm trying to learn I need people who are successfully doing this. I need flesh and blood models of what I want to experience. If you want to learn contentment, stop hanging out so much with grumpy, discontented people. You need people in your life who help you grow. Find contented people and learn from them.

How will learning contentment help you slow down your life? _____

2. Contentment Is Not Based Upon Circumstances.v.12

Let us remember where Paul is. He is in a Roman dungeon. Yet, even in these horrible circumstances he is experiencing contentment. If we base our contentment in this life on circumstances, we are setting ourselves up for tremendous disappointment. WHY?

- a. Circumstantial contentment is fragile.* It is fragile because the circumstances can change instantly. Good situations can break they are delicate. Circumstantial contentment is fragile so you are stressed out trying to protect your good circumstances.
- b. Circumstantial contentment is temporary.* We all know this to be true. This is why when things are really good, we say things like; "I wonder when something bad is going to happen". This is not being pessimistic. It is living in reality. We know that good circumstances don't last indefinitely. When we have the expectations that good circumstances should last forever, we set ourselves up for great disappointment. Some of you get so upset when something difficult happens in your life it is as if you have an expectation things should be perfect all the time.
- c. Circumstantial contentment is unpredictable.* No matter how much we try to control the circumstances in our lives, there is always a high level of unpredictability. You can take great care of your health, but something can happen. You can have tremendous planning for your future retirement, but the Market can take a turn. You can plan for your kids and their future, but they may decide to choose a different course. Because of the unpredictable nature of circumstances, we experience stress and disappointment instead of contentment. The more we seek to control circumstances, the more stress we usually experience. This is why Jesus said: *Matt. 6:27 "Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?" (NLT)* In fact, science has shown us that worry does just the opposite. It shortens our lives.

- d. ***Circumstantial contentment is hopeless.*** Because we live in a broken, fallen world, bad circumstances are just going to happen. It is not if but when. *II Cor. 4:8-9 “We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.” (NLT)*

If our contentment in this life is connected to circumstances, our emotions are going to all over the map. We are going to experience much more disappointment in this life rather than contentment. Basing your happiness on circumstances is the fast track to unhappiness. There has to be a better way.

Since learning contentment is a process, what is one step you can take today to practice gratitude?

3. Contentment in having a right relationship with Jesus. V.13.

Through a secure relationship with Jesus, you can grow and change in ways it is impossible to do without one. In truth, we can't accomplish anything having to do with our health without God: *“I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength”* (Philippians 4:13 NLT, second edition). Getting healthy, like any major change we make in our lives, can seem like an impossible challenge. Of course, it is impossible for those who try to do it on their own! But in our inadequacy, God's strength for the person of faith is made perfectly evident. That is why it takes faith to maintain your health the way God desires. You will never be able to do it on your own. You were never intended to be able to! Anything you can do in your own willpower doesn't require faith, and when faith is not required, we are living faithlessly.

When you come to Christ in acknowledgement of your weaknesses, he often turns your greatest weakness into your greatest strength. God loves to turn our greatest weakness into our greatest strength. If you feel you have a weak faith or even no faith, depend on God, and let him turn it into your greatest strength. But that only happens through God's power. The Bible tells us there is a direct connection between faith and power. The more faith you have in God, the more power and the more blessings you will have in your life. Jesus illustrated this in Matthew 13, where he went for a visit in his hometown, Nazareth. The Bible says Jesus *“did only a few miracles there because of their unbelief”* (verse 58). God blesses people who are not afraid to trust him completely.

When you give him your trust, God fills you with his power. In the Bible, Abraham is considered the father of faith. It says, *“He didn't doubt God's promise out of a lack of faith. Instead, giving honor to God for the promise, he became strong because of faith”* (Romans 4:20 GW). Without God's power in your life, you are just running on your own energy. And God never meant for you to do that. It is like having a laptop that is unplugged; the battery will eventually drain and all the power will be gone. Why would you live like that? Think of it like this: You have a small battery in you. You can run through life on your own power, which means you will be tired all the time. Or you have access to God's power plant, provided you just plug in and admit you need God's help. It is really a pretty easy choice

Is your relationship with God the most important one in your life? What is the evidence in your life that this is true?

4. Contentment in storing up your treasures in Heaven V. 17-18

Every time you are generous, you invest in your eternal home. Jesus called this principle “storing up treasure in Heaven.” He actually used this phrase six times in the Bible! Any time Jesus says something six times, you better pay attention. If you don’t, you are going to miss the blessing. Life is not about storing up things here on Earth. Life is about storing up things in Heaven. The Bible says don’t store up a bunch of stuff here on Earth where thieves can steal it and rust and moths can destroy it. Store your treasure in Heaven. That makes sense. Why? Because you are going to spend a lot more time in Heaven, and you are going to need the spoils and rewards far more in Heaven than on Earth. You only get 80 to 100 years on this planet, and you have to leave everything behind. But, you will get to enjoy your treasure in Heaven for eternity!

So, how do you store up treasure in heaven? How do you send it on ahead? The Bible says you do it by investing in people. There are only two things that are going to last forever: the Word of God and people. People will spend eternity in either Heaven or Hell, and your investment in someone could make all the difference. God wants you to invest in people, because those investments have eternal consequences and rewards. Philippians 4:17 says, *“Though I appreciate your gifts, what makes me happiest is the well-earned reward you will have because of your kindness”* (LB). Paul wrote to the Philippians to express his appreciation for their support, but he said what meant the most, what brought him the most joy, was knowing that their sacrifice and generosity gave them treasure in Heaven.

They invested in him, but they also invested in their eternal home. You will be rewarded for everything you have given away. Are you giving away your time? You are going to be rewarded in Heaven. Are you giving away your energy? You are going to be rewarded in Heaven. Are you giving away your money? You are going to be rewarded in Heaven. You earn a living by what you make, but you earn the respect and gratitude of others and a legacy and reputation by what you give. Who are the people in your life you are most grateful for? They are the people who have invested time, money, energy, and patience in you. The people you are most grateful for are the people who have given the most to you.

The most giving people are the most appreciated people. Paul gives an example of this: *“How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn’t have the chance to help me. Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty. As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News.... No other church did this. At the moment I have all I need — and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me.... They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God”* (Philippians 4:10, 14-15, 18 NLT).

Is anybody grateful for your generosity? How many people can you think of who would say about you, “That person is so loving and giving; they have been so generous with me”? There is no better day than today to thank the people who have been generous to you. You can thank them by calling them or writing a note and letting them know how they specifically invested in

you and what it has meant in your life. Then, use those people as your model for how to give of yourself and be generous with others.

What opportunities has God given you to invest in other people that you have not taken advantage of?

5. Contentment is empowered by Jesus. V.19

For many believers in Jesus, this is their favorite verse. Do you realize this verse was written in the context of experiencing contentment? We can tap into the strength of Jesus and actually learn how to be content no matter what? Contentment even when you feel like life is a prison? How?

- a. *Contentment Is Discovered In Jesus.*** We must go to the right source. We have to come to understand that the source of our contentment is Jesus. As much as we hope for favorable circumstances, we must have a more secure source for contentment in this world. We need a source that is constant, unchanging, secure and never ending. This is what Jesus was trying to explain to a woman at a well one day. *John 4:13-14* “Jesus replied, “Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. 14 But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.” (NLT)

You don’t need the government or even a job. If God wants to, he can have ravens drop food on you as his way of providing. That is how he provided for the Prophet Elijah when he was exhausted and burned-out in the desert (1 Kings 17:1-16). When God turns off one job opportunity, he can turn on another just as easily. Don’t trust in your bank account. Trust in Jesus.

- b. *Contentment is Relational not rational.*** What do I mean? Our contentment is not a cognitive exercise. You can’t think or work or plan your way into contentment. Paul says that this contentment is something that goes beyond rational understanding. *Phil. 4:7* “Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand...” (NLT) It is the result of relationship. It is the result of connection. It is the result of oneness with Jesus. Contentment is connected to a Person and that Person is Jesus. We spend way too much time working at trying to change our circumstances rather than learning how to be content in our circumstances? We believe our happiness is connected to circumstances. We think it is merely a rational process instead of a relational connection.
- c. *Contentment is Relational not remedy.*** I know we all beg God to change our painful circumstances. I am not saying we stop asking God to do so. But the peace and contentment that is promised is not connected to a remedy. It is not connected to a change in our circumstances. Remember, Paul was still in a dungeon. His contentment came from the fact Jesus was in the dungeon with Him. It is easy to be so focused on asking God to change something in our lives that we miss connecting with Him entirely. Since contentment is discovered relationally, we should spend

more time connecting with Jesus rather than asking Him to remedy our situation. If you are in the midst of some painful, difficult circumstances, why not ask God to be enough for you. Instead of only asking God to change the situation you are in, how about asking God to change you? *Phil. 4:19* “*And this same God who takes care of me will **supply all your needs** from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.*” (NLT) “All your needs” includes emotional needs, relational needs and spiritual needs. NOT only physical.

- d. Contentment Is Grown Through Trust.** The more we trust and rely on ourselves to control circumstances for our happiness, the more stress and anxiety we will experience in this life. The more we learn how to rely on Jesus, the more contentment we will experience. Trusting Jesus in this life is simply something we have to learn. *Is. 30:15* “*This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.”* (NLT) How often does God call us to come to Him relationally and trust Him with the chaos in our lives and we refuse it? Because we refuse Him, our anxiety multiplies and our stress increases. Then we have the tendency to blame God for not removing the anxiety. For the follower of Jesus, Trust and Contentment are connected. How can you grow your trust in God? It is **Obedience**. Simply obeying what God has revealed to us in His word is one of the most profound ways you and I can develop trust. The more you obey the more you develop trust. The more you develop trust, the more contentment you experience. Do you trust Him relationally? Do you trust Him with your priorities? Do you trust Him with your money?
- e. Contentment Is Deepened With Time.** The reason our contentment deepens with time is because our experiences with trusting Jesus multiplies over the years. We have a track record of His faithfulness. Because we have experienced contentment in Jesus, we can now trust Him more consistently. Contentment becomes a real and constant quality of my life because now trust is what defines my life as a follower of Jesus. When difficult circumstances arrive, we don’t panic, complain, blame God, we don’t get blown out of the water but we simply trust. We draw on a lifetime of experiences that protects our heart and mind. Some of us simply have a deep and lasting trust in Jesus because we have learned to trust Him over the years. Trust and contentment defines our lives.

Contentment frees you to enjoy every good thing God has given you. Contentment demonstrates your belief that God loves you and has your best interest in mind. Discontentment stems from the sin of ingratitude and a lack of faith that God loves you enough to provide for all that you need. Strive to be grateful for all that God has given you. A grateful heart has no room for envy. It is only when we rest in God that we are truly content. God already knows what we need and what we don’t need. When we are at peace with Him and thankful for every blessing He has bestowed upon us, we are content. It doesn’t matter if we are broke or have an abundance of money, unless we let God satisfy us, we will never truly be content. Contentment is not based on your possessions, but on who possesses your heart, Jesus

What blessings of contentment do you see in your life—satisfaction in the present, in little things, in the eternal?

CONCLUSION

Our world promotes dissatisfaction with our lives. We are constantly bombarded with newer and better things that will make our lives more complete if only we would obtain them! If we listen to the world, we will always be comparing the lifestyles and possessions of others with our own, and we will always be dissatisfied. If our contentment comes from possessions, activities, or other people, these can be altered or removed. If our contentment comes from our relationship with Christ, there is nothing that can take that away

I heard a story about a wealthy employer who overheard one of his employees remark, "You know what? If I had \$1,000, I would be perfectly content." Knowing that wealth had never brought him contentment, he walked over to that employee and said, "You know, I have always wanted to meet someone who is perfectly content. So I am going to grant your desire." He pulled out his checkbook, wrote a check for \$1,000 and gave it to her. As he walked away, he overheard her say rather bitterly, "Why didn't I ask for \$2,000?" That is the way it works. It's called human nature.

Getting more stuff does not bring happiness or contentment. One psychologist who has conducted research on what brings contentment said, "If people strive for a certain level of affluence, thinking it will make them happy, they find that in reaching it, they quickly become habituated to it and are at a point when they are hankering for the next level of income, property, or good health." So what was the secret to Paul's happiness? What was the secret of his contentment? Paul found the secret of contentment is not in what you have; it is in whom you know. And the "whom" to which I am referring is Jesus. Hebrews 13:5 says, "Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, 'I will never fail you. I will never abandon you'" (NLT).

It is because God is with us always that we can say, "I have found contentment." No matter what happens, no one can take that from you. No one can take God's presence from you. And knowing that, you can face whatever comes your way in life. Maybe it will be the greatest challenge ever that will be difficult and hard. And maybe it will be untold blessings that would turn many a head. But you will be able to keep your balance in all of that, because you recognize that God is the provider. Happiness and contentment do not come from stuff; they come from a relationship with God. Contentment is not the state of your accounts; it is a state of heart. Contentment is found in making the most of the least. That is what the apostle Paul was saying.

So despite what adverse circumstances you may be facing, you can have joy and contentment in the midst of a troubled world. I believe one of our greatest testimonies to an unbelieving world is the contentment we experience. We go through the same life pain, the same frustrating circumstances, and the same difficulties as everyone else. Yet, we have a contentment that makes us so radically different. Are you learning this contentment? Are you pursuing it in the right way – Relationally with Jesus not circumstances? Are you discovering that Jesus truly is enough?

TALK IT OVER.

1. How will learning contentment help you slow down your life?

2. What does it mean to have godly ambition?

3. Since learning contentment is a process, what is one step you can take today to practice gratitude?

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

I can do all this through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13

RESPONDING IN PRAYER:

Almighty God, when things do not work out the way I want or expect, help me to be contented. May I have happiness in whatever I face. Let my light shine in the midst of adversity because I know you are the all-knowing, most powerful one, who I have chosen to be in control of my destiny. No matter what journey I have to travel, I want to be contented, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Where I fall short Abba, pick me up and lead me to victory.

THE HABITS OF HAPPINESS

HABIT 11. HAPPINESS IN GOD'S PROMISE TO THE GENEROUS

PHILIPPIANS 4:19

INTRODUCTION

We have been looking at the book of Philippians. We have been looking at the Habits of happiness. Today we are going to wrap up the series by looking at the last habit in the last passage. Paul ends this book with the greatest promise ever given in the Bible. Without a doubt Philippians 4:19 is the greatest promise God gives to you and to me. I have decided we look just this verse because of the importance of having the heart of generosity. And the reason I say it's the greatest promise is because it is so inclusive, this promise covers it all. It is so expansive because it is encompassing of every other promise of the Bible. Philippians 4:19 says this *"You can be sure that God will take care of everything you need, his generosity exceeding yours, in the glory that pours from Jesus."* First, it says *"you can be sure."*

In other words this is not a hope, this is not a wish, and this is not He might. This is a certainty from God. God says I guarantee that I will take care of everything you need, my generosity exceeding yours. I will take care of everything you need. I had to go look up that word *"everything."* It is a little Greek word in the Greek, *"pas"* in Greek *Pas* means anything, everything, all things, whatever, whenever, however, every circumstances, at all times. What is not included in that word? Is Nothing. So my big question when I look at that verse is this: Then why do you have so many unmet needs? Is God a liar? Is this just a verse that I can kind of hope this works or not. Is God really a liar or is God actually saying I will meet every need?

And does every need include emotional needs? Yes. Does it mean physical needs? Yes. Financial needs? Yes. Relational needs? Yes. Spiritual needs? Yes. God says I guarantee that I will meet every one of your needs. And my generosity will exceed yours. So why are not all your needs met? There is a condition with every promise. There is a premise with every promise in the Bible. There are over seven thousand promises in the Bible and God says if you do this then I will do *this*. If you do this then I will do *that*. And if you do that then I will do this. And God says there is a premise with every promise; there is a condition. In other words I can't claim Philippians 4:19, unless I do what is talked about in verses 14-17 and verse 18.

In that passage of Scripture it talks about generosity. In fact that phrase in the Message paraphrase says *"God's generosity exceeds yours."* This promise is tied to generosity. God says I will never let you give more than me in everything. You cannot out give God. There are only two kinds of people in life. There are givers and there are takers. You have to make a choice. This is one of the habits of happiness. You have to make a choice. Am I going to be a giver in life? Or am I going to be a taker in life and life is always all about me? I told you it is not by accident that the word *"miser"* and the word *"miserable"* go together. The more it is all about me, the more I take, take, take, take, the happy. I am. The more I give, give, give, the more generous I am with every area of my life with my praise, generous with my love, generous with my time, generous with my money. The more generous I am, the happier I'm going to be.

Now Last week we looked at Philippians 4:11ff where he says, you have to learn to be content. That is a habit of happiness. He says if you learn to be content then you are going to learn to be happy. Then these last few verses of this book he says, you have to learn to be generous. And if you learn to be generous your happiness and happiness is going to overflow. So here is what I want to do today. I am going to give you list of six things of the benefits of being a generous person. Then I am going to explain to you how you can claim that promise where God says I will meet every need in your life – my generosity will exceed yours. The Bible says in Proverbs 11:17 “*The kind and generous man benefits himself.*” What does that mean? It means you are going to get out of life what you put into it. The kind and generous man benefits himself. God has established one of the laws of the universe is this: You are going to sow what you reap. Whatever you plant you are going to harvest.

*What condition is it given on Verse 14-18 for verse 19 to be fulfilled in your life?*_____

BENEFITS OF GENEROSITY.

1. You earn the gratitude of others.

You earn the gratitude of others. You go up in esteem. You go up in your reputation. You go up in people loving and being grateful for them in your life. The more of a giver you are the more others will be thankful for you. **Think About this:** If you think about the people in your life that you are most grateful for, who are they? They are the people who have invested in you. They are the people who have invested time, money, energy, patience, their love, and whatever to you. The people you are most grateful for are the people who have given the most to you. If they have been stingy you are not grateful for them. Thanksgiving is not supposed to be a day that we celebrate once a year. It is to be a spiritual habit of the radical believer. The more deeply you understand God’s love, the more grateful you are going to be.

You can thank God in every circumstance because God is in control. He can bring good out of evil. He can turn around the stupid mistakes you make. No matter what happens, God isn’t going to stop loving you. There are a hundred things to be thankful for in any circumstance, even when the circumstances stink. Let me give you a little Thanksgiving project. Why don’t you write a note or make a call to the people who have been generous to you? That would be a good thanksgiving project. It is a way to give thanks. You can give thanks by talking to those people or write them a note. Just simply say, “Thank you for your generosity to me, the way you have been so giving in my life. You were there when I needed you, you helped me financially, you helped me physically, and you helped me emotionally.” The people who have been giving to you, you be grateful to them.

Gratitude always builds deeper relationships between you and other people and between you and God. Whoever you want to get closer to, start expressing gratitude to that person. If you have moved away from your husband or your wife, you need to start doing what you did when you were dating: Express gratitude. Write little notes of kindness and encouragement. Make calls or text during the day, just to tell him or her that you are thankful. Do the things you did at first.

The reason you have lost that loving feeling is because you stopped doing the things that created that loving feeling early on, and you take each other for granted. Do you want to build your small group? Don't just go to small group. During the week, text them, email them, call them, write them. Say, "I'm grateful for you, and here is why." You will find that the more grateful you are for your group, the more your group will bond. The Bible tells us to "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). As you build others up, you will find that God builds into your life as well through your deep relationships with him and others.

What are some simple ways you can express your gratitude to your spouse, friend, or small group members?

2. You show what really matters most.

You show what really matters most every time you are generous. Why? Because what matters most? Things or people? People. Things don't matter most. Life is not about the acquisition of things. When you give and when you are generous with your time, your money, your energy, every time you give you are showing what matters to you. You tell me how you spend your money and time and I will tell you what matters most to you. Jesus said it like this "*Wherever your money is your heart is going to be there.*" Philippians 3:20 Paul says "*We're citizens of heaven where the Lord Jesus Christ lives.*" He says I'm not living for the here and now. I'm storing up for eternity. I'm not trying to make my pile on this side of eternity. I'm trying to make my pile on that side of eternity. I'm living in light of heaven. So we have said first that every time I'm generous I earn the gratitude of others and I show what really matters.

When you share with others, God shares with you. The world says, "Get everything you can and you will be financially secured." The Bible says share with others in need and you will sow what you reap: "Give and it will be given to you." (Luke 6:38 NIV) God says that when you give to somebody else, you are not throwing it away. It is an investment in the lives of others. God says the one who gives will gain even more: "He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord and He will reward him for what he has done." (Proverbs 19:17 NIV) When you see people in need and you give to them, God looks at this as if it were a loan to Him. He says, "I will reward back." God is always going to take care of you and your needs. Do you believe that is true? Generosity is a matter of faith. Will you take God at his Word?

Think of a time when you were happier to give something than to receive it. Can you think of a time when you were more blessed to receive rather than give something?

3. You become more like God.

Why is that? Because Jesus is the most generous person who ever lived. God is a giver. Why am I becoming more like God? Because giving is the essence of God. God is a giver. If God was not a giver none of us would be sitting here right now. Because everything in my life and everything in your life is a sheer gift of God. The air we breathe, and the sun that shines down on us. The fact that my heart is beating and the fact that I have lungs is clear I didn't earn these lungs. I didn't earn this life. It was given to me out of God's great generosity. If God was not a generous

God I would never have been created. Every farmer knows this. God is generous. Everything we have in life is because of God's generosity. We wouldn't have anything — we wouldn't even be alive — if it were not for God's generosity. And God wants us to be generous like he is. God wants you to use some of your money to help people in need. God didn't put us on this earth to live for ourselves. He blesses us so that we can bless others.

Imagine if your father was a billionaire, and he wanted to share his fortune with you. But he knew you needed to be tested first to see if you would be able to handle it. So he gives you a set amount of money and says, "I want you to learn to live on less so you can use the rest to help others. I'm going to be watching you to see how you manage and distribute my resources. If you do well, I'm going to will it all to you." How would you use that money? God particularly wants us to be generous. Throughout the Bible, God tells us he is watching how we help, and he attaches tremendous promises if we do so. The more we help others, the more God blesses us. He gives to us so we can give to others. Why? Because God wants you to be like him, and God is a giver!

If you had to stand before God today and give an account of how you have used his blessings, would you be embarrassed or proud of your report? Why?

4. You strengthen your faith.

Your faith gets stronger because when you take something you have and you use on others then you will depend on God to help you. You are depending on God and you are not going to worry about it but to pray about it with thanksgiving and expect you to take care of your needs. Every time you give your time and your money, your faith grows stronger. Every time you give it is like a muscle; it just gets stronger. Philippians 4:6 says this *"Do not worry about anything, instead pray and ask God for everything you need, always giving thanks."* In other words I'm just going to trust God to meet my needs. That was a test of my faith and each time my faith gets stronger and stronger.

God uses finances to test your faith. Have you ever had to decide between paying a bill and tithing? You only have so much money — where is it going to go? It is a test. God is saying, "Do you really believe that I can take care of your bills? Or do you think you have to take care of them on your own?" He says, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do ... I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!" (Malachi 3:10 NLT, second edition).

In effect, God is saying, "I dare you! I dare you to see what I will do if you become a giving, generous person. Tithe, and see what happens to your life." Did you know there are more promises in the Bible regarding giving than any other thing? Jesus talked more about giving than he did about Heaven or Hell. I believe this is because giving is the essence of being like Jesus. The Bible says God is a giver: "God so loved the world that he *gave* ..." When we give, it shows God that we trust him and believe his promises to provide for us. Giving strengthens, stretches, and tests our faith. Do you really believe God will take care of your bills?

If you're struggling in this area, ask God to help you in your unbelief. He wants to help you find the freedom in your finances that only comes from trusting in him. Let me give you an illustration from the physical world. If you want to strengthen your muscles you must work them beyond their current ability. In other words, you must lift a weight that is heavy enough to exhaust you by lifting it 5-7 times. Lifting a very light weight many times will not strengthen your muscles. One of the reasons I believe God calls us to give is that it strengthens our faith and helps us grow spiritually. If we merely give out of our excess we don't give God the opportunity to prove his faithfulness. That is like lifting a very light weight. It won't strengthen your muscles. But when we give sacrificially, we exercise our faith and we learn to trust in God by giving him a chance to prove himself trustworthy.

Spend some time in prayer and let the Holy Spirit search your heart for any hint of idolatry in relationship to your finances. Your checkbook and credit card statements might just help your meditation!

5. You invest in your eternal home.

The Bible says that every time you invest, every time you are generous with your time, your money, your energy, then you are investing in your eternal home. Jesus called this principle “*storing up treasure in heaven.*” This phrase, he says store up for yourselves – not for God. It says store up for yourselves treasure in heaven. You want to know how many times Jesus used this phrase when he says, “*store up for yourselves treasure in heaven?*” He didn't say it once in the Bible. He didn't say it twice. He didn't say it three times. He didn't say it four times. He didn't say it five times. Jesus said the phrase “*store up for yourselves treasure in heaven*” six times! Anytime Jesus says anything **six** times you better listen to it. Because if you don't you are the one who is going to get hurt in the long run.

You are the one who is going to miss the blessing. You are going to miss the benefit. And what He is said to us is life is not about storing up things here on earth. Life is about storing up things in heaven. It is like banking in heaven, it is investing in heaven. You can store up things either here on earth or in heaven. The Bible says don't store up a whole bunch of stuff here on earth where thieves can steal it, where rust can rust it away, where moths can eat the clothes away. But it says store up in heaven. That makes sense. Look at what Paul says here. He says I invest in my eternal home I'm really glad you Philippians are being generous because you are actually storing up treasure in heaven too. You are going to get the reward there. You will be rewarded for everything you have given away. Philippians 4:17 Paul says *though I appreciate your gifts, what makes me joyful is the well-earned reward you will receive because of your generosity*”

God wants us to use some money to take the Good News around the world. We invest in eternity every time we use money to bring others to Jesus. Imagine when you die and get to Heaven, your friends will welcome you there and say, “Thank you for investing in me. I'm in Heaven because of you! I'm not your friend for life; I'm your friend for eternity. I'm in Heaven because you cared enough. You bought me a Bible. You bought me a ticket for an event. You gave me a Christian book.”

Others will say, “You spent your money to help spread the Good News to my village, even though you never seen us before. Because you gave, I’m now a follower of Christ. I’m in Heaven because of you!” Helping others find Jesus is the highest use of your money.

What are some sacrifices you can make so that you can give more to mission trip or provide funds so someone else can go on a mission trip?

6. You make God happy.

There is a popular illustration on giving, regarding a little boy and his sister. The sister needs a blood transfusion to live, and her little brother is the most suitable donor of her rare blood type. As he lies down on the stretcher beside his unconscious sister, the nurse inserts the needle that will give his sister the life giving blood she needs. A frightful experience for a little boy to say the least, but he never whimpers. After a few moments, the color in his Sisters face returns to a rosy red, as her blood supply is replenished and her situation pulls out of the critical stage. The little brother’s face however is ashamed and worried. The doctor comes in, checks his sister’s pulse and blood pressure and announces that she will be fine.

The little brother breathes a sigh of relief knowing that his sister will be fine, but still has a sullen look on his face. He turns to the doctor and asks. Doctor, how long until I die? The doctor realizing what the little boy has been thinking now has a tear in his eye. "You are not going to die" You will be up and fine in about an hour. The little boy thought that he had been asked to give all of his blood to his sister, and that he would die in the process. Yet he gave just the same. Expecting nothing in return, in fact expecting that he would die, making the ultimate sacrifice, and he was willing to do it, perhaps without a smile on his face, but certainly a smile in his heart.

That is what makes God to happy. To give, sacrificially, without expecting something in return, and with a smile on our face or in our heart makes God to smile. Every time you are generous you make God smile. You make God happy. Generous giving is an act of worship that honors God. Notice this, Philippians 4:18 *“Your gifts are like a fragrant offering to God, a sacrifice that God accepts, and is pleasing to Him.”* Your generosity makes God smile. It makes God happy. God is watching you every day of your life to see what you do with what he has given you. He is watching to see how generous you are. This, everything I just said, is the premise behind the greatest promise in the Bible. He is ending the book with this promise. When you, God says, are like these Philippians who were noted for their generosity, he says when you give out of gratitude, when you give to become more like Jesus, when you give to stretch your faith, when you give to invest in your home in heaven, when you give to show what really matters most, and when you give to please God then God says, this promise, Philippians 4:19, then *“...God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*

Have you ever been generous without anybody knowing it? What was the effect on you? What do you think God reaction to your generosity?

CONCLUSION.

What do you put your security in? If you put your security in your bank account, your job, or your investments, that means you are an insecure person, because you can lose all of those things. You have to put your security in something that cannot be taken from you — God! If you want God's blessing in your life, you have to depend on God's wealth and not your own. Here is what the Bible says about God's wealth: *"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:19 ESV). Your job should not be your security. Your job is a channel, but God is your source. If you understand this, you will have so much less stress in your life. Let me say it again: Your job is a channel, but God is the source of your supply.

If you were to turn on the faucet in your kitchen and no water came out, what would you do? Would you say, "Oh my! The world has run out of water! There is no water coming out of the faucet, so there must not be any left in the whole world"? Of course not. You would know the problem is not with the source. There is plenty of water in the world. The problem is the channel; it is gotten blocked one way or another. If one channel gets blocked in your life and the faucet stops working, God can turn on another faucet just as easily. If God closes a door in your life, he can open another door. And if another door closes, he can open a window, and you can crawl through it.

God is not limited to your ability and capacity. Your job is a channel. If you think that your job is what keeps you financially secure, you are going to be insecure your entire life. You have to understand that God is the source of your supply, and you can depend on him to know exactly what you need and give it to you. Jobs may come and go. Bank accounts rise and fall. Economies go up and down. Stock markets can go bull or bear. It doesn't matter! You can trust in God's wealth for your security. We can be a hero one day and a zero the next day, a millionaire one day and bankrupt the next. No matter how much we make, no matter how much we save, finances are uncertain. So we worry. What does the Bible say about worrying over money?

1. **It is unreasonable.** (Matthew 6:25) You are going to have fears in life, but there are better things to be scared of than a lack of finances. Even if you go bankrupt, it could get worse. Life is more than just the accumulation of things. Worry about what is truly important.
2. **It is unnatural.** (Matthew 6:26) Jesus reminds us that animals and plants don't worry. Birds don't say, "I'd better build a bigger nest for retirement." Only human beings don't trust God to provide for them. Everything else in creation does.
3. **It is unnecessary.** (Matthew 6:30) Financial fears come from a misunderstanding about God and what he is promised to do for you. He assumed responsibility for your needs. He says, "I'm your heavenly Father; you are my child. I'm going to take care of your needs." We always get into trouble when we doubt the love of God.

Worry is playing God. It is assuming responsibility for something that God has said he will take care of. Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:19, *"And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus"* (NLT, second edition). God knows what is going on in your life — and in your wallet. He

knows all your needs even before you ask. He wants to help you out. And my God will meet all your needs— This is a great promise. It involves the reciprocity of sufficiency. These Philippians had undoubtedly given from their meager resources. They were not wealthy people. Paul is saying to them, “My God will reimburse you. He will supply all your needs. Since you supplied my needs, God will supply yours. This verse makes it clear that God will supply the Christian’s needs. He doesn’t promise to meet our wants but our needs –food, clothing, housing and other things which are absolutely necessary for living.

He does not say a Christian may not go through some hard times and have to skip a meal now and then. Needs and wants can often get all scrambled up in the Christian’s mind, especially in our materialistic society. Wants and needs deal with motivations. “People are funny; they spend money they don’t have, to buy things they don’t need, to impress folks they don’t like.” God meets the needs of Christians “according to” not “out of” His riches. God meets needs proportionately to His own riches which are infinite. The source of God’s bank account is His own riches in glory. The God who owns the gold in every mine and the cattle on a thousand hills can meet the needs of all His children who dare to be faithful givers. We have no guarantee God will meet our needs if we are not giving to Him faithfully. But we do have the guarantee He will meet the needs of all who are faithfully giving to the Lord’s work.

TALK IT OVER

1. What is God’s promise in verse 19 to those who give to meet the needs within His Kingdom? Is there a difference between meeting our needs and giving us what we want?

2. How does giving unto the Lord testify to the ability of God to supply our needs?

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

“God will meet all my needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 4:19

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Father, as I continue to walk in your word, I know that you wish for me to prosper and be in good health. You have provided access to your throne of grace in my time of need and assured me that you will supply all of my needs according to your riches in glory. I expect all these things to be added to my life because you have promised to be my provider