

“The Secret of Happiness - Humility”

Scripture: Philippians 2

Graphics: smiley face, cross, knees bowed, mind and heart

Big Truth: The secret to happiness seems to be something that we desire and even chase after, but often don't experience. Life circumstances, family relationships, work, school, and many other things rob us of our joy, which affects our happiness. The Apostle Paul had every reason to be unhappy, but he was filled with joy because of the people who loved him, partnered with him, and were growing in Christ. Paul gave us a formula for the secrets to happiness - gratitude, humility, death, and celebration.

Focus Phrase: Happiness grows as I humble myself before Christ and others.

1. Introduction

- A. **PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**
- B. When I first started feeling the Spirit lead us to study the book of Philippians in worship, I wasn't sure what God would speak into us.
- C. Then, as God made it clear that I was to preach about happiness, I honestly had a picture in my mind of smiley faces, which didn't seem like a very spiritual image...nor was happiness something that seemed to me to be very spiritual.
- D. Yet, as I began to read and pray through Paul's letter to the Philippians, and think about Paul's joy in the midst of his terrible circumstance in a Roman prison, I began to realize that happiness is as much a spiritual state as joy. Paul was not only joyful, but he allowed his joy to overflow and be expressed as happiness and rejoicing and pleasure because of the disciples who were serving, striving, and witnessing in that church.
- E. Church, I feel the same way about you. I'm not Paul, and am not in prison, but I am filled with joy and happiness because of you...serving with you, worshiping with you, loving with you, witnessing with you...even in spite of some of our struggles and challenges in the church and in life.
- F. I'm thankful for you and all we've been doing together. That gratitude leads to joy which is expressed as happiness. I pray this past week you were reminded by the Spirit to SMILE more and be filled with happiness. Gratitude is our first secret of happiness.
- G. Our second second secret of happiness is **humility**. Then, in two weeks, we'll get even lower to look at our third secret - death. From there, we'll rise up to look at the final secret of happiness - celebration. And, just as a clue, you won't want to miss that worship service on Nov. 5 - because we're going to celebrate. And you'll hear more about that in the weeks to come.
- H. Let's dive into Philippians chapter 2...humility.

- I. If you're taking notes in your bible or journal today, here's where we're heading: **Happiness grows as I humble myself before Christ and others.**
- J. Humility is a posture that our hearts and minds, and often our bodies, take when we willingly honor God's place in our lives and put the needs of others ahead of our own needs.
- K. Humility is a secret to happiness because when we get to the place where other people with us are thriving and we can be part of that, then we can smile knowing that God is at work in you and me and others.
- L. For Paul, his ministry (even from prison) was focused on the thriving of others, especially in the churches he planted. Our ministries must be places where others can hear the Good News and thrive in the Spirit.
- M. Let's read the first section of Philippians 2... 3...2...1...ready?

2. Scripture

A. READ Philippians 2:1-11

- i. Humility. A dictionary definition of humility tells us that humility is *the quality or condition of being humble; modest opinion or estimate of one's own importance, rank, etc.* (dictionary.com) It's also defined as *freedom from pride or arrogance.* (Merriam-Webster)
- ii. Paul defines humility like this: *having the mind of Christ Jesus.*
- iii. With those definitions in mind, this next section of Paul's letter to the Philippians was filled with excitement and encouragement. Remember, Paul is writing this from a dank, dark, cold, stinky, Roman prison...and YET (YET!) he was filled with joy that was being expressed as happiness!
- iv. And, as we often experience when we experience happiness, he wants MORE of that happiness and joy...he wants the church to experience more happiness on their faces because of the joy in their hearts.
- v. So...he writes things like: there is encouragement for you in Christ...there is consolation from love (comfort in hardship that is offered to you because of love for each other and for God)...there is sharing in the Spirit (the Spirit connects us together)...you have compassion and sympathy for each other and for me...
- vi. You HAVE BEEN GIVEN all those things...those gifts from God through your faith in Jesus and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. SO, Paul wrote, "Make my joy complete..." That's a curious phrase, but for Paul it means this: "I'm happy for you because you have encouragement, comfort, sharing, compassion, and sympathy. But do you know what would make my joy complete and increase my happiness for you? It would complete my joy if you were all of one mind, having the same love for each other that you have for me."

- vii. Here's how Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Philippians 2:2 says it in The Message: "...then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead."
- viii. It's kind of like seeing your family members getting along and loving each other. It's a wonderful thing! For Paul, this church was like his family.
- ix. And it starts with Humility - the mind of Christ - putting yourself aside so that others can thrive.
- x. This is also something we see when sports teams are working together. We see this at work when people help and teach and mentor others. We see this in our families when one spouse cares for another without needing to be repaid. We see this when a parent sacrifices for a child.
- xi. Yet, in every one of those scenarios, we would admit that there's ALWAYS a temptation for wanting to get what's due after we serve. It's just part of our fallen nature.
- xii. That's why Paul, after encouraging the Philippians to be humble and loving and put others first, gave them the ultimate example - **Jesus**.
- xiii. Now, this section about Jesus was most likely a hymn in the first century in the Church. This is an incredible proclamation of the Gospel...
- xiv. I want to read this hymn again...but this time...I want us to read it together and it'll be up on the screen...starting in verse 5. As we read this together, think about your own life, our church, your area of ministry, our community, your family. What would change if this hymn became for us a source of joy and happiness expressed in each of those places?
- xv. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
 who, though he existed in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be grasped,
 but emptied himself,
 taking the form of a slave,
 assuming human likeness.
 And being found in appearance as a human,
 he humbled himself
 and became obedient to the point of death—
 even death on a cross.
 Therefore God exalted him even more highly
 and gave him the name
 that is above every other name,
 so that at the name given to Jesus
 every knee should bend,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

- xvi. Humility is more than just putting others first. Humility, according to Paul, is being willing to empty yourself of everything that would give you status over someone else SO THAT that person can thrive.
- xvii. Jesus did that to the ultimate degree by willingly being nailed to a cross, enduring the shame and pain of crucifixion. He did that so the Philippians, Paul, you and I would be able to not only be saved for everlasting life, but to thrive in THIS life as we imitate Jesus...taking on the humility of Jesus.
- xviii. Paul then went on to describe to the Philippians what that would take... let's read verses 12-18. The thing I love about this next section - be listening for this - is that God is **happy** about those who pursue humility for the sake of others. Those who pursue deeper levels of intimacy with God in humility are like shining stars in the sky, according to Paul. Stars never call attention to themselves...they're just things to behold as they quietly and confidently point to the power of God. Paul asks the church to be the same...verse 12...

B. READ Philippians 2:12-18

- i. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Basically, know who you are, who has saved you, and what that means to you. You and I can't save ourselves. Apart from God's grace shown to us through our faith in Jesus Christ and him crucified and raised from the dead, we would spend an eternity in hell separated from God.
- ii. But, praise be to God that God is at work in you and me...and - I love this part because I picture God smiling and happy with you and me - He's enabling you and me both to will and to work for His good pleasure.
- iii. God is pleased when we step towards Him...when we work on our faith in Him...when we pray and come to worship and spend time sharing our faith with a hurting world.
- iv. But, Paul said, we must do all that with humility...without murmuring or arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, without blemish...in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. The people around the Philippians were pagan who served their own desires and wants, worshipping false gods and using money and sex however they wanted.
- v. Jesus people are called to humble themselves to obediently follow the commands of a holy and jealous God (to hold fast to the word of life).

- vi. It gave Paul great joy to watch the church humble themselves under the authority of Christ and to humble themselves to each other in love.
- vii. He ends this section with an expression of happiness. As the church worked out their salvation, based on the sacrifice of Jesus, and watching them thrive and strive to follow Jesus' teachings, it gave Paul GREAT JOY...he was glad and rejoice. He wanted the church to be glad and rejoice as well.
- viii. Happiness grows as we humble ourselves before Christ and others.

3. Application

- A. To make this a little more personal: **Happiness grows as I humble myself before Christ and others so I honor God and so others can thrive.**
- B. Timothy Keller, who recently died, said this, "The Christian Gospel is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for me. This leads to deep humility and deep confidence at the same time. It undermines both swaggering and sniveling. I cannot feel superior to anyone, and yet I have nothing to prove to anyone. I do not think more of myself nor less of myself. Instead, I think of myself less."
- C. It was C.S. Lewis who said, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less."
- D. When you think about yourself less, and you turn your attention to God and to others, a strange and sometimes counter-intuitive thing happens. You would think that when you pay attention to your own needs, get your "me-time", and focus on yourself, that you'd be happy and content. But in God's economy, it's only when you turn your attention to God and to the spiritual thriving of others, THAT a God-given sense of happiness comes flooding into your life.
- E. It doesn't come because you're proud of yourself or that you've proved anything to anyone. God has placed in each of our hearts, by the power of the Holy Spirit, a desire to worship Him and to see other people do the same.
- F. Where you and I usually run our ships aground is when we feel like there's something we need that we don't have...when we think others have something we don't but that we deserve.
- G. Listen...the antidote to that root of bitterness is to remember the hymn from Philippians 2. Jesus was and is God. Yet, it wasn't a status that He exploited to get what He wanted. He gave it all up, in ultimate humility, and went to the cross for YOU and YOUR sin. What could you possibly need in this life that you don't have in that one saving act of Jesus?
- H. Take on the mind of Christ and not of the world.
- I. Here's what that does in your life:

- i. It **allows God to keep working in you** to make you more and more like Christ. This is the process of sanctification. Paul calls it “...working out your salvation with fear and trembling...” Whatever you call it, it’s humbling yourself to the fact that (1) YOU are not god of the universe or even your own life, and (2) YOU are being invited by Christ, through the Holy Spirit in you, to keep growing as a disciple. You never stop learning how to be humble and taking on the mind of Christ...never too old...never too important...never too humble. Do you know why? Because you haven’t yet done what Jesus did...you’re still alive. God’s not finished with you yet. How are you still growing in humility? Pray about that and then take the next step.
- ii. Second, taking on the humble mind of Christ, **allows others to spiritually thrive**. Your humility in Christ not only lets YOU thrive, yes. But it also creates, in You, a desire to share your joy and happiness about your salvation with others because you know that you have the best news ever! And, it’s not YOUR news, but the Good News about Jesus. And like a mentor who sees a mentee grow, or a parent that watches a child become a fully-grown disciple, there comes a moment when no words are needed... but a simple, confident, awe-inspired smile break across your face. Your humility has become joy and happiness as the other has thrived. Do you have someone in your life right now that you’re pouring yourself into as a disciple? If not, this week is a good time to ask God to give you someone to humbly serve, lead and teach so THEY can thrive in Christ as well.
- iii. The secret to happiness is gratitude. The secret to happiness is humility.
- iv. Happiness grows as I humble myself before Christ and others.

4. Conclusion

- A. 1 Peter 5:6 reminds us, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you...”
- B. Humbling yourself is something we’re called to do today - and that DOES lead to joy and happiness as we honor God and help others thrive. Yet, being exalted by God doesn’t come in this life. See, because, as we’ll see in a couple weeks, being exalted can only come through death.
- C. It seems odd that happiness and death are related, but all we need do is spend time with Philippians 2 to know that death and happiness are directly connected in Jesus - who was pleased to die for us.
- D. This week, SMILE! Smile because your heart is filled with gratitude. Smile because in humility before God and others, God is honored and others can spiritually thrive with you.
- E. God is SO good! Amen? Let’s pray...