

HOW TO NOT WORRY AND BE HAPPY

Good morning! We're continuing our series on "Conquering the Stresses in Your Life". We're on part 2 and I've entitled this message, "How to Not Worry and Be Happy". In short, don't worry, be happy. Today, I want to look at what God's word teaches us about how to not worry and be happy no matter what happens.

You know, this is a skill that we all need to learn during difficult days. We are living in difficult days, aren't we? First we just emerged from the pandemic. Now, we're faced with wars that are happening one after the other. First, the war in Ukraine, then the one in Gaza, and now in Israel. You heard about Iran sending bombs to Israel last night, right?

Now, any time you want to study what God has to say about happiness, you go to the book of Philippians here in the Bible. It's the most positive, happy book in God's word. In spite of the fact that Paul wrote it while he was a prisoner in a dark Roman prison dungeon and he was chained to a 24 hour guard, but Paul knew how to be happy no matter what happens. Now, one of the key verses is Philippians 1:27. It says, *"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."*

Have you ever held a pity party for yourself? It's quite easy to throw a pity party. All you have to do is think up a list of everything negative in your life and then think about it over and over and over and then feel sorry for yourself.

Last Friday, I gave myself a pity party, it was a good one. First, I thought of the chronic pain that I'd been feeling for three weeks that was sapping all my energy, and then next, I thought of all the things that I wasn't getting done and the pressure that I felt from those deadlines. Because I hadn't been feeling good, so I had pain and pressure.

Then I thought of the people who needed my help and I thought of some other people who were upset with me and who hurt me and finally, in case that wasn't enough, I thought of all the problems in the world that we just keep hearing about.

You got pain, pressure, people, and problems. These are the four most common sources of unhappiness. They're what I call the killjoys, the common killjoys of life. I know you're very familiar with them too. Now today, we're going to see how Paul handled all four of these killjoys in the first chapter of Philippians.

Anyway, I started holding this pity party for myself, and at one point I actually thought, "You know, I don't like any of this and I'm really, really, really not happy right now." Have you ever felt that way? Maybe last week too. As soon as I thought the idea, "I'm not happy right now," I also heard this little question in my mind from the Holy Spirit that said, "Do you want to stay unhappy? Do you really want to stay unhappy?" I immediately answered, "No, no, I don't want to stay unhappy."

You see, friends, God says that happiness is a choice. It's not based on circumstances, it's based on choices. You must choose happiness. It is otherwise known as joy, right? Because it comes from within. It is a choice you make. And when you make that choice, God supernaturally give you that happiness inside. So, happiness is not something you look for. That's what many people mistake. If you look for it, you're not going to find it. Happiness is something you choose. The truth is, regardless of your circumstances, no matter what's going on in your life right now, no matter what's happening in your life, you are as happy as you choose to be. You can't blame anybody else for your unhappiness. Regardless of the pain, regardless of pressure, regardless of other people, and regardless of problems in your life, you are as happy as you choose to be.

One of the most common mistakes we make in life is what I call "when and then" philosophy. When I get this, then I'll be happy. When something happens the

way I want it to happen, then I'll be happy. When I get out of school, then I'll be happy. When I get a man in my life or a woman, then I'll be happy. When I get a job or promotion, when I retire, you could fill in with a million things, when and then philosophy. In Paul's case, it could have been, "When I get out of prison, then I'll be happy." But the truth is this. If you don't know how to choose happiness right now despite your circumstances, there is going to be pains and pressures and people and problems to blame for your unhappiness for the rest of your life and you're never really going to be happy long-term.

Now, let me explain the background of today's text, which is Philippians chapter 1. In the previous four years of Paul's life before he wrote this chapter we're going to look at today, Paul had spent two years in jail in Caesarea on false charges. Then, he was shipwrecked while he was sailing to Rome for another trial under Emperor Nero. Then, in that shipwreck, he was stranded on a desert island for a while and actually got bitten by a poisonous snake. Then when he finally got to Rome, he was imprisoned again in Rome for two years in a deep dank, dark dungeon with a 24-hour guard chained to him.

Paul had every reason to be unhappy, every reason to be bitter, every reason to be resentful or fearful or depressed. He had the right to hold a pity party, but instead in that dark, dank prison, Paul wrote the most positive book in the Bible, Philippians. Now, in Philippians 1:12-30, Paul, who is writing for prison, models four principles for being happy no matter what happens in your life. This is a very practical message, I hope you take notes on this. I want you to see the four choices that Paul made, so you can make these same choices too. Again, you're as happy as you choose to be, all right? Before I give you the four principles, let us turn to **Phil. 1:12-30.**

Here are the four principles, the four choices.

First, I can be happy **no matter what happens** in my life if I choose to

1. Remember God can bring good out of anything.

That's the first choice. I choose to remember that God can bring good out of anything. Now, of course, Romans 8:28, that famous verse of scripture in the Bible says: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

Now, that verse does not say all things that happen are good, because they're not. There's a lot of bad, there is a lot of evil in the world. But it says, "In all things that happen, God works for the good." The good is what God does with even the bad in our life. God can bring good out of bad.

Now, we get frustrated and we get unhappy when we don't see what God sees, when we don't have his perspective. The truth is God is working out a plan for your life, and even when all the people and the pressures and the problem and the pain are not good, God can turn them into good in your life.

This is certainly what was in the minds of Paul and Silas when they started singing and praising God when they were put in prison after being arrested for talking to others about Jesus. They were in dire circumstances but decided to be happy and praised God.

So, how do you do that? How do you consistently make that decision to praise God even in bad circumstances? By learning to **look at everything from God's perspective not your own**. Let me say that again. The way you make this first choice is by learning to look at everything in your life from God's viewpoint, God's perspective, not my own. It's a life skill you're going to have to learn if you want to be happy no matter what happens in your life.

Now listen closely. You must choose to look at every situation in your life from God's viewpoint. That's called wisdom.

Happy people have a larger perspective. Happy people see a bigger picture. They look past the pain, the people, the problems, and the pressure and they see a

bigger picture. What is the bigger picture? Romans 8:28, that we know no matter what happens, God is working for good in my life.

Let me show you Paul's example of this principle. It's verse 12 of Philippians chapter 1. Paul says: *"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel."* That's a whole different perspective. Rather than a pity party, you say God is using this for good.

Let me explain. Paul had dreamed for many, many years of sharing Christ in the center of the Roman empire. I'm sure his idea was "let's go to Rome, rent the Coliseum, have a harvest crusade every night and I will preach to thousands". But God's idea was to make him a royal prisoner of Nero. Nero was the emperor at that time.

Now, as a royal prisoner, he had an opportunity to share Christ with many key people that even other prisoners wouldn't be able to do. He's chained, he's not only in a Roman prison, he's chained 24 hours a day to a palace guard. What's a palace guard? They were the elite, handpicked security agents of Caesar, and they guarded prisoners in four-hour shifts. Now, follow me on the math of this. Paul was imprisoned in Rome for over two years. He's chained to an elite, handpicked, crack agent guard every four hours. We don't know whether they repeated shifts. But assuming they repeated only twice in two years, that means in two years there would be 2,190 different guards who were attached to him. And if they didn't repeat, that's 4380.

What's going on here? He's dealing with people of influence and he's got a captive audience, no pun intended. When I think about this, he's chained to these guards about 4,000 guards, who's the real prisoner here?

You're chained to Paul and you are a captive audience, and he talks to every one of these guys about the Lord. The Bible tells us that there were two results of this. In chapter 4 of Philippians, it tells us that some of Nero's own family had

come to Christ. Did you know that? Some of Nero's own family had become Christians because Paul is witnessing to the prison or the Royal guards. You might call that a chain reaction, because he's chained to these guards. That's the first benefit.

Second benefit is this. Instead of Paul going out and preaching in the Coliseum, Paul was forced to sit still in his prison cell. You know what he did during all those two years? He wrote the New Testament. Over half of the New Testament are letters of Paul to different churches, including this one to the people in Philippi. He's writing the New Testament and the expenses are paid by Nero. So, keep this attitude. **Face every situation with faith, not fear.** If I want to be happy, I must face every situation, whether it's people, pain, problems or pressures, face every situation with faith not fear. Get the bigger perspective. Learning to see your problems, your pains, your pressures, the people in your life, from God's point of view not just your own.

Now, before we go to the second principle, I want to practice this first one. I want you to bow your head right now, okay? Wherever you are, in this room or online, bow your head. If you're listening while driving, please don't bow your head. Pull over to the side of the road, and here's the first thing I want you to do. Think of a situation that you're facing right now that is either scaring you or it's causing you unhappiness. Now, I want you to say this in a prayer to God, say, "God, help me to see this from your perspective. Help me to face this problem with faith not fear. In Jesus' name, Amen."

What you just did is the first step to perpetual happiness. By the way, anytime you face a situation in faith rather than in fear, and you trust that God knows what he's doing and you remember that he's working out his plan, two things happen when you face your problems with faith not fear. First, it's a witness

to unbelievers every time you have faith instead of fear. Verse 13, Paul says, *"As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ."* It's a witness to unbelievers when you act in faith towards your problems rather than in fear, so witness to unbelievers.

It's also, number two, an encouragement to other believers. It's an encouragement to believers. Verse 14, he says: *"And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear."* It emboldens other believers to share the Lord because they see that in whatever circumstance God is working.

Ok. We come to the second point. I can be happy no matter what happens in my life if I choose to do this,

2. Never let others control my attitude.

Never let others, either by their words or by their actions, control my attitude. You see, they can't control you unless you allow them to. Now, while Paul was in prison, there were people who criticized his ministry. While he's down, they're kicking him. They slandered Paul, they judged Paul, they criticized him. There were those who were his friends who supported his ministry, they were companions and friends. But there were those who competed with his ministry while he's in prison taking advantage that he's out of circulation, and there were those who undermined his ministry. They actually attacked him and tried to destroy him while he was in prison.

In verses 15 through 17, Paul describes four kinds of people. Three of those are killjoys, and guess what, you're going to have all four of these in your life. There are critics, there are companions, there are competitors, and there are crazymakers or people who make you crazy. You're going to have all four of these in your life, and if you don't know how to deal with them, you're not going to be happy much of your life.

First, in verse 15, Paul had critics and he says this: *"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill."* In his experience, Paul notes that some are competing with him with respect to the gospel. They want to be known as better preachers than Paul and even criticized him.

Now, there are few things in life that cause you to lose your happiness faster than criticism. We all want people to like us. Right? But here is an important principle you need to remember if you're going to be happy in life. *You don't need other people's approval or permission to be happy.* All you need is God's approval, Amen? Keep that in mind.

So, he deals with critics in verse 15, then in 16 he talks about his companions. These are the good people and you want these people in your life. He says, *"The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel."* You know, we all want to have some friends in our lives. You don't need a lot but you need a couple of really good friends, friends of the genuine variety, not of the Facebook variety, that's why we always talk about being in a home group. If you're not in a home group, you need to get in one. You need a group of companions who will help you through the tough times in your life. It can be a source of encouragement and happiness for you.

In the next verse, 17, Paul says you're going to have competitors in life and he says this: *"The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition."* You see, there's going to be people in your life who want to compete with you. They're ego-driven and you can tell that they're competitive because they put down others in an attempt to make themselves look good.

Then, the second part of verse 17, he says there are challengers, there are people out there who really just don't like you. Haters will be haters. They're enemies. He says, *"not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me"*

while I am in chains." You see, some people actually want to stir up trouble for other people. They're happy in creating trouble for other people. These are the troublemakers and the crazymakers of life, and you know what their primary tool is? Gossip. Gossip can ruin your happiness very quickly too, just like criticism can.

Now, you're going to have all four of these in your life, critics, companions, competitors, and then these crazymakers, they're always just trying to tear you down.

Now, regardless of the people in your life, people are the second killjoy in your life, look at Paul's attitude, it's the next verse, Philippians 1:18. Paul says this: *"But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."* Or I'll choose to be happy whatever their motive is for the sake of Christ.

What I want to say on this second point is summed up as this. If you live for the approval of other people, you get your happiness from their approval, whether it's likes on your Facebook page or how many people give you a thumbs up on your Instagram or whatever, if you live for the approval of others, you will die by their disapproval. That's the wrong way to find happiness. You have to learn you don't need anybody else's approval to be happy. You are as happy because you are approved by God.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, *"Give thanks in all circumstances [whatever happens]; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* Notice, this is God's will. You want to be in the center of God's will? Always be grateful and thankful even no matter what happens, no matter what other people say, what other people do.

Third, I can be happy no matter what happens if I choose to

3. Trust God to always work things out.

That's the third key. I must trust God to always work things out, whether it's pain or pressure or problems or people. This is the third faith factor in happiness.

You're going to either worry about what's happened in your life or you're going to worship. You're going to panic or you're going to pray. You're going to have faith or you're going to have fear.

The last part of verse 18, Paul says: *"Yes, and I will continue to rejoice."* That's a choice. It's a choice of the will, it's a decision. I will continue to rejoice. Why? *"for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance."*

So, trusting God when you don't see the whole picture and you can't see the end of the story, gives you hope, it gives you courage, and it gives you happiness. Look at the next verses there in Philippians 1:20-21. *"I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."* He says, "I don't know the end of my story, I don't know if I'm going to get out of this prison and be a free man again or if they're going to feed me to the lions or I'm going to be set in with gladiators or just be hung or crucified, but I am trusting God for my life even if I die. I'm looking forward to eternal life in heaven." That's an incredible statement of faith!

Some of you, you're at the end of a chapter in your life, but you're not at the end of your story. God is still working.

Finally, there is a fourth principle. I can be happy no matter what happens in my life if I

4. Stay focused on my purpose not my problem.

Now again, remember what Paul is experiencing as he writes these words. Paul is old, he's in bad health, his body aches, he's in a dank, dark, depressing Roman prison in a dungeon, he's awaiting death by persecution or execution, they've taken away everything, they've taken away his freedom, they've taken away his friends, they've even taken away his privacy, he's chained to a guard 24 hours a

day. But they couldn't take away his purpose, God's purpose for his life, and that's why Paul says this, verses 22 through 25, "*If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith*". He says, "The reason I'm here is not for my benefit. The reason I'm still here is for your benefit. I'm writing these letters to all the different churches," which became the New Testament, "so I can add to your progress and joy."

Now, notice here. Paul has a purpose. Very clear and he even explains what his purpose is, he says, "I'm living for your benefit and for the glory of God. On Earth, my purpose is to serve God by serving others. After I die, my purpose is to be with God forever in heaven." Paul is saying, "I just stay alive for the sake of others." Wow! He says, "Selfishly, it'd be better for me to go on to heaven. No more problems, no more pain, no more pressures, no more problematic people."

Now, don't miss this fourth secret principle of happiness. I'm going to say it as clearly as I can say it. Happiness does not come from self-gratification or living for yourself. Happiness does not come from selfishness. It doesn't come from living a self-centered life, all about me, myself and mine. **Happiness comes from self-sacrifice, living for the benefit of the glory of God and in order to serve others.**

Folks, true happiness is translated as joy. Fake happiness is induced by what happens to you. True happiness is when you're happy whatever happens. And you can rejoice inside of you. Of course, you don't shout "I'm happy! I'm happy! I rejoice! I rejoice because I have problems." That's crazy. But being happy inside and rejoicing inside has been the hallmark trait that characterized the early Christians despite persecutions, despite being thrown to the lions, despite being burned to the stake and every imaginable torture they experienced. Are we going to

imitate their example? They're just imitating the Lord Jesus himself who went through so much more pain and sorrow for our sake. He sacrificed his own life for us. He died on the cross for us. He loves us so much. Again, **Happiness comes from self-sacrifice, living for the benefit of the glory of God and in order to serve others**. The choice is yours.