

Text: Various
Target audience: All
Topic: joy
Theme: Ingredients to the recipe for joy
My purpose for this message: To help people see how they can become a more joyfilled person.
Delivered: June 19, 2005 @ KEFC

Recipe for Joy (#1)

PRAY.

If you did not receive a joy index last Sunday, please raise your hand and the ushers will see that you get one—here or at the Gate.

Last Sunday my mechanic happened to be here so when he called me on Wednesday to tell me my car was finished, the first thing he asked me where I was on the joy index! I went and picked up the car, he handed me a bill for a mere \$28, and I told him that pushed me a lot further toward the happy side!

And isn't that how it is? When things go well for us, we're happy. When they don't, we're not. Whether it's financially as in that case, or in career success, or getting into the school we wanted, or in having a child we couldn't have, typically our circumstances rule our happiness. If *they're* good, we're happy; if they're *not*, we're miserable.

Doesn't that sound like slavery? My happiness depends on factors I can't control. Is that how it must be? Must we stay stuck? Or is it possible to free ourselves from living or dying by what a friend says about us, or whether that girl likes me or not, or if my children are turning out like I hoped or not? Can I live a relatively happy life despite things going south? How can I become happy on my *own* terms?

Today, I want to share 2 preliminary truths about joy, followed by an ingredient to a recipe for joy that has made some significant difference in my own life over the years.

1. #1 Truth: Joy often takes you through a rough neighborhood.

Joy often takes you through a rough neighborhood. A mother gives birth to her daughter in great pain; a man works long hours at his new business, only rarely taking vacations. And then it all pays off. Or the wife stays and she and he agonize through counseling, talk out hard things, offer and ask for forgiveness. Well worth, the rough neighborhood.

Jesus thought so. Turn to Heb.12:2. Again, I want to recommend a book I mentioned last Sunday which I have found so helpful to my thinking about joy and happiness: *Desiring God* by John Piper. If your Christianity has been shaped by a "Miserable for Jesus" mentality, you desperately need some time with Dr. Piper. Our great challenge is to *Delight ourselves in the LORD!* (Ps.37:4) rather than all the other stuff that our delight can depend on.

READ. Notice the sharp tension: the agony of the cross on one hand, but on the *other*, some future exhilaration. Remember Jesus' prayer in the garden? "Father, take this cup from me." I really don't want to do this. Yet beyond the cross, Jesus saw something so joy-producing, that he was more than willing to take the cross.

- ⇒ Power of death broken (2 Tim.1:10)
- ⇒ New birth given to millions of people (Jn.12:32-33)
- ⇒ Your enemy and God's, defeated (1 Jn.3:8)
- ⇒ Saw ecstasy of pleasing His Father (Jn.4:34)

A life of joy is not a life without pain. Or a denial of what hurts. It's not a plastic smile. But it's usually on the other *side* of sorrow, disappointment, and pain. Like Jesus, we reach *across* such things for the joy that lies beyond.

READ 12:3. Like Jesus who had great opposition arrayed against him, we all face bad stuff. Do not let that rule you so that you grow weary and lose heart; so that you become discouraged, depressed, gloomy, moody. Reach across it to the joy on the other side.

READ 1 Thess.1:6. They experienced severe suffering for responding to the gospel, but *embraced* it because of the joy it brought. If you're on the prowl for happiness, understand that getting to it, is usually difficult, usually painful, usually demanding.

2. #2 Truth: God Owes us One Thing

Second, think about what God owes you. At 61 years of age, Mick Jagger is still traveling around the world telling us he can't get no satisfaction. And if we're honest, we are all Rolling Stones. Because we're dissatisfied. For some of us it's more usually a few hours, but for others it's weeks, years or a lifetime. Even if it's off your radar screen, you'll always find a root of dissatisfaction if you scratch down deep enough into your unhappiness. Like a computer virus a longstanding dissatisfaction can burrow its way into your mind so that you don't see it on your screen, but it plays havoc with your operating system and your files.

Dissatisfied with your small house, dead end job, or uneventful life. Dissatisfied with your spouse, your old car, your lack of children, your distant friendships, your arthritis. Some of it might be little more than envy which would lose its clout if no one else had anything more. But is there really anything wrong with wanting to be married, to have children, to be in good health?

It's not a matter of right or wrong, but a matter of happiness or misery. In fact, it becomes a matter of worship or—dare I say it—blasphemy? For you see, if God is sovereign, ruling all, then what I *don't* have is as much from God, as what I do. So, *He's* responsible for what I'm dissatisfied about.

10 years ago Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, an ex-communist who used to teach at Warsaw University, wrote this provocative book: *God Owes Us Nothing*. As God asked Job in Job 41:11: *Who has a claim against me that I must pay?* Or, as we've summarized from the Bible what's the *one* thing God owes us in our natural state? Right, hell. READ Rom.3:9-10, 23; 6:23). God doesn't owe us heaven, or life, or an inheritance, or a house, or a good job—any job actually. He doesn't owe us a mate, children, friends, or any other good thing. He owes us nothing but hell.

3. Main ingredient: Gratitude

Therefore, everything you have beyond hell, is a bonus. And people who get bonuses are grateful. Listen, since joy is a feeling, we can't just choose to feel it. But feelings are born of thoughts, and those we *can* choose. That's why God says we can be changed by changing our thinking (Rom.12:2). And being grateful, is thinking.

From 1999-2002, 2000 people were involved in a study by the University of Miami. The study's conclusion was that the most grateful people are the happiest. Lead researcher Dr. Daniel McCullough said the team discovered that most grateful people have low rates of depression and negative moods, but high self-esteem.

Gratitude. The hungry man without bread, with no money to buy bread, with no family to provide bread, is stunned when given bread by a stranger. His natural response is profuse gratitude. He did not deserve the bread, had no right to expect it,

yet, here he is filling his growling stomach with the generosity of another. READ 1 Thess.5:18.

Brother or sister, instead of staring at what you've been denied, can your eyes not see the great blessings you've been given despite not deserving them?

- I have arthritis, but I'm not in a wheelchair; thank you Lord
- I have no husband, but I'm not at war with a mate; thank you Lord
- I sinned again, but I have an advocate who speaks for me; thank you Lord.
- I can't have children, but no son or daughter is hooked on drugs or refuses to speak to me; thank you Lord
- I don't have a home of my own, but I have a roof over my head; thank you Lord
- I don't have a very new car, but it's reliable; thank you Lord
- I don't have any family living, but I have the body of Christ; thank you Lord
- Our picnic got rained out, but the crops were really withering; thank you Lord
- I have to have surgery, but I can have the best medical care in the world; thank you Lord.
- I wish I could have gone to college, but I have a good job anyway; thank you Lord
- I don't do well in school, but my friends would die for me; thank you Lord
- I live on a noisy street, but at least it's a safe neighborhood; thank you Lord
- I was the worst sinner, but when I put my faith in Christ, God forgave me; thank you Lord.

Concl:

This was from Friday's Dear Abby (READ). Being dissatisfied, we become unhappy. So we go after something that satisfies; for the moment. Like a hamster on his wheel, we chase things round and round, hoping each new adventure, possession or relationship will bring happiness. Rarely does it but for the moment. For we are too soon dissatisfied.

Chasing joy is a *lifelong* quest, not a moment's discovery. There will be no abrupt change. *And*, no one is *constantly* joyful, rather the successful are *commonly* joyful. But gritting your teeth isn't the answer. In *The Purpose-Driven Life*, Rick Warren says...

“willpower can produce short-term change, but it creates constant internal stress because you haven't dealt with the root cause. The change doesn't feel natural so... you quickly revert to your old patterns.” Instead you need to “change your autopilot—the way you think.”

In thinking, gratitude's the key. Be satisfied with what you've been given instead of dissatisfied with what you haven't. We don't' deserve *any* of it anyway.