

Introduction

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Date: 06 May 2018

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[0 : 00] Well, today we're going to begin a new series on this book. It's called The Happy Christian, Ten Ways to Be a Joyful Believer in a Gloomy World.

It's by David Murray, the person that we just went through on digital technology. And so you can buy this book online. It's very good. I'd recommend it. It's The Happy Christian.

And I guess that's where I want to begin. I want to begin with just two questions. The first question is, should Christians be happy? Amen. Yes. Does anyone want to disagree?

Not after the title of the book. Not after the title of the book. Good idea. So should Christians be happy? And the second question is, are you happy?

Are you happy? Maybe someone here will say, well, Christians should be joyful. That's where I see some people get hung up on just the word happy.

[1 : 09] They say Christians should be joyful. And maybe they say that because happy can kind of, at least for them, carry some worldly baggage.

Or they think of happiness as like that shadow or those desert ephemerals. They're just quickly fading away. We just talked about those. And they would say joyful is a better word.

He actually uses both in his title. But I think when you boil it right down, that might just be a distinction without much of a difference. If you're happy or if you're joyful.

The Bible itself doesn't talk about Christians as just being happy. Or non-Christians just as being happy. And believers have something different called joy.

I rather think that it's the thing that unbelievers are happy in. That are sinful and shallow and so short term.

[2 : 09] And it's the thing that Christians, that we should be happy in. They should be deep and lasting and holy. It's not really so much the difference in the feeling or even maybe the experience.

It's the thing that believers are happy in and what unbelievers are happy in. So, whatever you call it, joy or happiness, should Christians be happy?

And are you happy? Here's another question. And I'm going to let you sort of define this however it comes to your own mind.

Rate your faith with a positive or a negative. Is your faith positive or is it negative?

Now, rate your life. Is it positive or negative? Is it positive or negative?

[3 : 15] Well, they're connected, aren't they? A happy, positive, optimistic, hopeful faith produces a positive, optimistic, hopeful, happy life.

And that really shouldn't surprise us at all. King Solomon wrote, As a person thinks in his heart, so he is. As a person thinks.

That's what he is. That's his life. Our thoughts and our feelings, our perspectives, our attitudes toward God, toward ourselves, toward others, towards the church, towards the world, towards all parts of our life.

They very much dictate and determine the quality of our life. The kind of life that we have for all over. So positive, happy, hopeful, optimistic, cheerful things going on in our hearts and in our minds changes how we feel and how we think about everything else.

About what's going on in our lives. About what's going on in our world. About what's going on with our relationship with God, with others, etc. No. It affects every part of our lives.

[4 : 41] It affects our relationships. Let me ask you. Do happy people... I mean, what do you think?

Do happy people have better relationships than very unhappy people? What do you think? Yeah.

I think they do. Do you like being with an Eeyore? Or do you like being with a Winnie the Pooh? I mean, maybe a Tigger is too much.

Too much positive. But happy people... Do you think they're more creative? More artistic?

Not more artistic. More creative problem solving. Looking for resources. Finding help. Creative about relationships.

[5 : 38] Are happy people generally more creative and optimistic about their relationships? And then when there's trouble, do they get in a rut or do they go and try to find help?

What about happy people? Do they make better workers? What's your experience? Stan, what's your experience? Definitely. Definitely.

Steve. There's one lady who's in quality control at our work. She's a Christian and she's just so chipper all the time.

Nothing can get her down. And she just brings such a positive vibe to the workplace. She's very good to work with. Yeah. Happy people are better to work with.

Are happy people healthier? Well, we're going to find out. Are happy people holier? That's maybe a harder question.

[6 : 47] And before you jump out with a no, I want you to turn to Nehemiah chapter 8. Nehemiah chapter 8. So. If you can find 1st and 2nd Chronicles and then there's Ezra and Nehemiah.

And we're looking at Nehemiah chapter 8. Now, let me give you a little bit of the context as we're, as you're turning here. The people are now back from exile.

They've already rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem. And now it's come to the first day of the seventh month of their year. And that was what they called the Feast of the Trumpets.

It was a one day feast. And that's where we find it. When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled as one man in the square before the water gate.

So this is the first day of the seventh month of the seventh month. It's time for the Feast of the Trumpets. And many people think that the Feast of the Trumpets was a memorial, was a celebration of God giving Israel the law.

[7 : 55] And it was on that day that they remembered that they were in covenant relationship with God. God and their covenant relationship involved God giving them the law.

And remember, when God came down to Mount Sinai, there was these long, loud, continually louder blasts of the trumpets. And so that's why on this day they were to blare the trumpets and they were to celebrate.

So now here they are celebrating that. The people are under God, with God, in covenant. And they have the law.

And that's really why after seven days of this feast, on the eighth day or on the tenth day of the seventh month, there was the day of atonement. Because now they've been thinking about their relationship with God and God giving them the law.

And what kind of things do you think came to mind as they were thinking about their relationship with God under the law? Well, we're sinners. And now here's the day of atonement. So that's the context.

[9 : 08] So Ezra, the scribe, brought out the law of God, and he read it before all the people. And as he started to read it, they started to weep. And they're weeping for their sins.

They're weeping for everything that they've lost. They're weeping for everything they've forgotten. They're weeping over what they've done to deserve the exile.

They're weeping for the sins of the people. But then look at verse 10. Look at verse 10. Now Nehemiah, he's the governor.

He stands up and he says, Go and enjoy choice foods and sweet drinks and send some to those who have nothing prepared.

This day is a sacred. This day is sacred. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

[10 : 05] The joy of the Lord is your strength. So where was their strength going to come from to obey this law that they've been just been reading about? What's the answer?

The joy of the Lord. It was there. There's definitely a place for weeping and mourning and grieving. But I think we need to be clear that those things will only take you so far.

But if we want lifelong obedience, it needs to come from the joy of the Lord. Grief and mourning are good.

I mean, Jesus said, blessed are those who mourn. But that just by itself, in and of itself, is not enough to carry us to lifelong obedience.

We need to have the joy of the Lord. We need to have this happy, optimistic faith in the Lord. And when we do, that's when we can, we have a heart that will obey the God's law.

[11 : 13] And that's what Nehemiah is saying. The joy of the Lord. That's your strength. And that's going to be your strength. So go eat, drink, share with others, rejoice, rejoice in the Lord together.

So are happier Christians going to generally be holier Christians? And the answer is yes. Happier Christians work harder.

Happier Christians sin less. Happier Christians don't get discouraged and distracted. Happier Christians persevere. And they bring joy and encouragement to others. Because the joy of the Lord is our strength.

Now, we need to be careful here. We're not merely talking. I don't want you to think that I'm merely talking about just this personality of just being chipper. I am talking about a God-centered, a grace-filled, faith-receiving all that God has for us.

That is the kind of happiness I'm talking about. And so should Christians be happy? And the answer is yes. The joy of the Lord is our strength. When we're living in the goodness of God, we are stronger.

[12 : 29] The Holy Spirit himself produces joy in us. And I just want to be clear as well, but it is all those things. It's grace-filled.

It's faith. It's God-receiving. It's those empty hands. It's filled with faith. But it's not by... When I'm saying that, I think we can also go to the other extreme that says, Well, it's some sort of rarefied, almost non-human joy.

But that's not what he's talking about. It's real, vital, real, felt, experienced happiness in the Lord. Now, the Spirit produces that in our lives. The fruit of the Spirit is joy. And that's not some sort of joy that just is kept in our soul.

It's a joy that gets worked out in our lives. Now, Jesus himself, he came that we might have life. And what did he say? What kind of life? Life to the fullest.

[13 : 36] Life to the fullest. Life to the fullest is a happy life, isn't it? The Spirit gives it. Jesus came that we might have it. In heaven, that's what we're going to be experiencing. And that's what we're supposed to be beginning to experience now.

Jesus died to save us from sin and misery. And to bring us into righteousness, holiness, and happiness. Life to the fullest. The Apostle Paul saw that as one of the goals of his ministry.

When he looked at his ministry, he said, this is what I want to do. This is one of my primary objectives. Philippians 1.25, he says, Progress and joy in the faith.

The Apostle Paul wanted to stay with the Philippians and with all of the churches so that he could make them happier in the faith. That they'd be stronger in the faith.

So there's progress in faith and there's a growing joy in faith. A growing peace. A growing assurance. A growing optimism.

[15 : 00] That's what hope is, isn't it? I'm optimistic that God is going to help me. I know that God is going to help me. And I feel that and I live that out. There's growing comfort and growing happiness.

There is such a thing as flourishing in the faith. And that's what Paul was aimed for. That's what Paul was aiming for. And so what we're going to be doing is, in this study, is we're going to be looking at 10 ways that Christians can be joyful, can be happy in a gloomy world.

10 ways that Christians can be joyful in a gloomy world. Now, none of this is denying the difficulty and the painful reality of living in a sinful world.

Of living in a sinful world, in a world where people suffer. We're all sinners and we're all sufferers. But unfortunately, I do think that sometimes that as Christians, we can grow in our sense and experience of sin, of our sinfulness and suffering.

[16 : 19] But we don't necessarily always grow at the same rate in our experience of joy. So we grow in our understanding, I am so sinful, I am so sinful.

But we don't necessarily always grow in our sense of, but I'm accepted in the beloved. And God loves me. And we don't grow in our joy at the same rate.

We too easily, and maybe you can just, maybe this isn't true of you. But I would just ask you to ask yourself, am I too one-sided?

We can talk about how bad we are, but do we talk about how good God is? Do we talk about the pain, but not about the promises?

We too easily think that holiness is unhappiness. And we wouldn't dare say that, but sometimes mature, growing Christians, or we'll say experienced Christians, can look at a happy young believer, and instead of looking at their joy and saying, what am I missing?

[17 : 37] We can very easily say, oh, just wait. Just wait, they'll learn, they'll see. The school of hard knocks will get to them.

Now, I'm not denying, and we're not denying that there are hard knocks. And we're not denying the truth of that song that we sing, I ask the Lord that I might grow.

And how did he answer that prayer? With just like magic power on one day, I instantly became a better Christian? No, it was through seeing the depths of his sin, through suffering.

We're not denying the fact of that. But there is a way of growing in that wisdom that God uses hard things to make me grow.

And that understanding of this is one way that God works. There is a way of growing in that sense of my sin, the depth of my sin, in the hardness of life, and at the same time of growing in real joy.

[18 : 49] Real joy. And again, not just some sort of invisible joy in my heart, but a joy that comes out in my life. Joy that would attract unbelievers.

Joy that would attract unbelievers. Has anyone ever been wooed to Christ by a miserable Christian?

Has anyone ever looked at a miserable Christian and said, wow, they have what I'm missing? Do you want to be countercultural in this world?

Do you want to be countercultural missionaries wherever you're at, where God's planted you? Well, I would say be a happy, optimistic, joyful in the Lord.

You can show the power of the gospel in just that. In just that. That in this gloomy world, that there's a place that joy.

[20 : 01] There's joy. Christianity is not just, oh, we'll have happiness in the by and by. But happiness even begins here. Now, you're all out there. Let me ask you.

Is it a gloomy world? Is it a cynical world? Roger's shaking his head. Can you hear? Very. Yeah, I'm going to look at what's going on around us.

Very discouraging. I mean, every time you turn the radio on and listen to the news, it's just so depressing. All the bad stuff that's going on. We're actually going to talk about that in a couple of weeks.

I mean, bad news sells. So we've got to be thinking about that. Steve? Steve? Steve? The, at work, complaining is so pervasive, it's almost the native language.

That's just how you talk to people. And relate to people is by complaining. Well, did anyone agree with Steve in that? Yeah. Yeah. Cynical, bad news, gloom.

[21 : 16] Disrespect. Snarky criticism. Like the only humor is sort of critical humor. Snarky humor. It's undermining people all the time.

I mean, is there any other way that we're seeing it? I want to... Michelle, you said, yeah, that's what you see at your work.

Wait, sorry? Anything and everything. Mark? I think that's why most people entertain themselves through escape.

Trying to escape the misery of their, you know, nine-to-five life. Hmm. You know, that's why there's so much escapist entertainment.

Yeah. Isn't that interesting? It's like when we want to go and be recreated, recreated, we want to be built up. We don't go and engage in anything positive, generally.

[22 : 23] Our culture just, well, it's either I go out the back door or I experience this misery. Just drive down the road in your car and see the disrespect.

People in a hurry. Honking if you're a second late. I mean, there's just, it's everywhere. Yeah. Go to the grocery store. Wait in line and listen to the conversation. Yeah.

So do you see what he's saying? It's a gloomy world. Do we want to be countercultural? Do we want to be not worldly? I mean, we're used to thinking about worldliness in a certain set of terms, but is that part of the worldliness that we are called to shun?

That doom and gloom and cynicism and criticism and complaining. Do everything without arguing or complaining. Here's my next question.

If that's true, that as a man, if it's true that as a man thinks, so he is like what a man thinks about, that's what comes out in his life.

[23 : 30] What does that say? People in the world are thinking about what's going on in their hearts. What, what, what, what, what's going on in their hearts?

What are their hearts like? What do you think? They have no hope. They have no good news. Every day is a losing battle. Every day is a losing battle. These are things that they're saying to themselves. These are the things that are real for them. What else are they thinking? I mean, I mean, I know before I was a Christian, I, I was just never happy.

No, no matter what was going on, there was, there was not happiness. And that's one of the things I say, you're not going to find it in the world at all.

So, so that's what it is. Now, my question for, for us, and we really need to consider this is, is the culture not right for the gospel?

[24 : 40] I mean, what more really could we want? What more could we want? A shoe salesman went to Africa to some remote village, and he was so discouraged when he first got there because he saw the people and they didn't have shoes.

And so he said, oh, no, I've come to the wrong place. People don't wear shoes here. And so he sold maybe a pair or two until he finally gave up.

And as he was leaving, he went to the little airport and he saw another shoe salesman getting off the plane with all of his shoes. And he said, don't bother. No one wears shoes here. And what did the second salesman say?

An untapped market. Thousands of people who can buy my shoes. And according to the parable, he does very well. He went in there and he sold shoes to everyone.

Our culture is an untapped market for the joy of the Lord. And so you can see them going heavily along. And it's a it's perfect for a bunch of happy Christians to go out there and tell them.

[25 : 52] Let me tell you about the joy of the Lord. Let me tell you about what Jesus has done. And so, yes, there is sin and suffering. But Paul says sorrowful yet always rejoicing.

Poor yet making many rich. Having nothing. Yet possessing everything.

I mean, we can be quite good at the sorrowful and poor and that sort of that side of things. But what about the rejoicing and making many rich and possessing everything that that second half of those those sentences or what the study is about?

It's about being happy in a gloomy world. Now. How we can do that. And how we need to change what we do and what we think.

To be those happy Christians that attract unbelievers that. That glorify God. Does it speak well of the Lord for us to be miserable?

[27 : 04] Those are his people. No. Happy Christians make God look good. They speak well of him.

It's more than that. Happy Christians give glory to God in so many other ways because what we see the Lord doing in people's lives. And how he gives them joy.

It really does lead to a life of flourishing. And that's not Joel Osteen talking. That's the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs. Happy. Blessed. Is the man that finds wisdom. Now what is the. What. What. In Proverbs. What is the heart of wisdom?

The fear of the Lord. This. And that's not just merely a terror. It's respect and reverence. It's this relationship that's marked by love.

[28 : 06] And obedience. And. And the joy of being in the Lord. And that's what wisdom is. And it's lived out. So happy is the man who finds wisdom.

The man who gains understanding. For she is more profitable than silver. And yields better returns than gold. She's more precious than rubies. Nothing you can desire.

Can compare with her. The fear of the Lord. That's. We could put that in there. The fear of the Lord. She's more profitable than silver. Yields better returns than gold.

She's more precious than rubies. Nothing you can desire can compare with her. Her long life is in her right hand. And in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways. Are pleasant ways.

And all her paths are peace. The Bible is saying. Those who live. In the fear of the Lord. Those who live with their God.

[29 : 03] Always before him. And with him. That's the best way to live. It's the happy way. It's the profitable. The flourishing way.

Peaceful way. It's the happy life. Now. How do we see. That joy of the Lord. Leading to flourishing.

And what we find here is. In the world. Yes, Yes Yes