

Pursuit of Happiness

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[0:00] It's the longest lasting scavenger hunt in history. The pursuit of happiness. We heard in Isaiah 55 that that's what we long for, and that's what we only are satisfied in God Himself.

The French Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote about the scavenger hunt. All men seek happiness. This is without exception.

Whatever different means they use, they all tend to this end. The reason some go to war and others avoid it is the same desire in both.

This is the motive of every action, of every man, even of those who hang themselves. I googled the secret of happiness.

And .17 seconds later, I had 73,900,000 websites. Everyone is seeking happiness.

[1:10] And friends, God is not against that pursuit. He's made us to seek happiness, blessedness. And in Psalm 128, He teaches us how to find it.

And some of you think that God is a killjoy. That loving Him and living for Him and believing and obeying Him will ruin your life. And Psalm 128 says, friends, you have it all wrong.

Blessed, Psalm 128. Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in His ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor.

Blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be a fruitful vine within your house. Your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. Thus, in this way, is the man blessed who fears the Lord. May the Lord bless you from Zion all the days of your life. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem. And may you live to see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel.

[2:17] From the garden, the devil has been telling people, just as he tempted Eve, a big lie. Satan in this world has been propagating this big lie that God is not good.

That God is mean-spirited. That living for God, living with your whole world tied around Him, anchored to Him, is the pathway to bitterness, to fighting, to small-mindedness.

You'll become a crank of the worst sort. You'll be miserable and you'll make others around you miserable. And what a lie it is.

What a cruel lie it really is. Because at the same time, it defames God and it robs us of our happiness.

And Psalm 128 sets us straight. Blessed, happy are all who fear the Lord, who walk in His ways. So who lives the blessed life, the happy life?

[3:28] Children, do you want to be happy all of your days? I think we all want to be happy. Well, who lives the happy, blessed life? All who fear the Lord.

And so first we have to ask, what does that mean? What does it mean to fear the Lord? That's an important question because everyone wants to be happy and the scavenger hunt for happiness ends in the fear of the Lord.

So what does it mean to fear the Lord? Well, to help you understand what the Bible is talking about, I want to tell you a little story that Sinclair Ferguson told one time. And it's a story about him.

He went to the seminary, Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia in the 60s, I believe. And at the time, John Murray was the professor there.

And Murray was a very godly man. And his love and his attention had an intensity, a fervor about it. He cared about his students to such a degree that you could tell that he cared about you, that it was almost hard to handle.

[4:34] And Ferguson said that one time, Professor Murray invited him, I suppose with other people, but invited him over to his house. And the intensity of his love and the intensity of his care was so great that afterwards, Ferguson remembered standing out on the sidewalk outside of his house.

And he looked around to make sure no one was watching him. And then he just started sprinting down the street. And he said, I don't know if I was running away from him, doing anything I could to put distance between me and him, or if I was running in joy that someone had loved me so deeply and intensely.

I don't know, that might not be the greatest of illustrations, but can you relate to that feeling of, I got to get away. He's too much for me.

But at the same time, I can't believe it. He loves me. And so on one hand, we're cast away. We want to get away from him. He's so much.

But at the same time, he draws us back to himself because he's so good. That's something of what the Bible means when it talks about the fear of the Lord.

[5:57] It's not a terror, but there is some terror in it. He's so great. He's not safe. He's not safe at all, but he's good.

He's so good. And so we're like moths on a dark night, attracted to that bug killer. And it might kill us, but we got to have him.

He might destroy everything that I am, but I can't help myself. I've got to have him. And we know if the Lord destroys, it's for our good.

He only destroys that which is evil in us. And so the fear of the Lord is taking all that he is, all that he is, taking it all in and responding in a mixture of fear and love and awe and respect and faith.

It's not a simple emotion. It's a complex motion. And it's an attitude. It's an emotion that always follows through with obedience. You see that.

[7:00] Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways. No one sees and understands the Lord. No one appreciates his glory and then doesn't obey. That's an impossibility.

Obedience always follows fear, love, respect, fear, honor. It excites obedience. And that's what it means to fear God.

And it's those people who are living under God and seeing him as glorious and great and good that God blesses.

And it's all of those people that he blesses. Blessed are all who fear the Lord. No one is excluded. I've been blessed because I've known the Lord.

And listen to me. Listen to me if you haven't believed in Jesus Christ. If you haven't come like we saw in Isaiah 55. I would never go back to the life that I used to live.

[8:06] I would never go back that way. And believe it or not, hell has nothing to do with it. This life is better.

This life is the happy life. And my brothers and sisters in Christ will say amen to that. Because they'll say yes to that. Because yes, we long for heaven.

And yes, we have new enemies. And yes, the fight has just now begun. I have new enemies and new sorrows. But I tell you that this life under God is the best life.

It's still better. Better is one day in your house, oh Lord, than a thousand elsewhere. It's such a happy life.

Because God is good. And I think that's the theme of Psalm 128. This is the goodness of God put on display. And his blessing finds its way into every part of your life.

[9:10] When you're living in the fear of God. How does it say that we're blessed? You can look at it. You will eat the fruit of your labor. Blessings and prosperity will be yours.

God blesses his people with productive, useful work. When you're living in the light of his greatness and his goodness, then work satisfies, but it does not enslave.

Work provides, but work does not become an idol that we worship. When you don't trust God's love. When you're not fearing God.

When your eyes are not cast upon him and his greatness. Then your work will become an idol. It will become an idol. You'll ask work to provide. And eventually it won't.

And you'll trust it to make you happy and satisfy you. You'll trust it. You'll put your faith in it to satisfy you and give you that deep soul satisfaction that we were talking about this morning.

[10:11] But in the end, you will end up gnawing on the ends of nothing. But the fear of the Lord transforms that work, which we find so deeply unsatisfying sometimes, into a blessing.

You will eat its fruits, but not be a slave to it. God will bless your work even as you find your deepest satisfaction in him. And then God's blessing finds its way into your family when you're living in the fear of God.

Your wife will be a fruitful vine. Your sons will be olive shoots around your table. Brothers, sisters, have you seen that joy lately?

Have you enjoyed that blessing lately? The joy of sitting down with your family and seeing them there at the dinner table and saying, God is good. This is so good.

Look for it. Look for it. Maybe you're missing out on some joy because you're not seeing it and it's right in front of your eyes. You're not looking for it. When you fear God, your family becomes a blessing and not a curse to you.

[11:26] And this is what I find so interesting about this psalm, is that what are probably some of the most common idols in men and women's lives.

Isn't it work and family? They so easily become our gods. So easily become the place that we look for blessing to provide us blessing.

We look for them to make us happy. But when we aren't living in the light of who God is, those good gifts end up rotting in our stomachs. And so we devour them.

We enjoy them. We make them our lives, our righteousness, our joy. And then they rot in our stomach. They leave us sick and they leave us hungry. But the fear of the Lord transforms those old idols into rich blessings.

And so now, when you're living in the fear of the Lord, you can look at your imperfect husband, your imperfect wife, your imperfect children, your imperfect job, and still say, God is good.

[12:37] I haven't done anything to deserve this. Why would he even take notice of me? Why would he give me these blessings?

But the psalm teaches us something else. What is the best way to do work? What is the best way to do school? What is the best way to do family?

What's the best way to do marriage? What's the best way to do parenting? It's in the fear of the Lord. The fear of God not only changes how we receive God's gifts, but it changes how we do and use them, how we do marriage, how we do parenting and work.

The fear of God brings us in line with God's law and God's commands. And his commands are good. They're a light to our path, as our brother prayed.

This morning we saw God said, I will lead you in what is best for you. God's laws aren't bad for us. They're what's best for us. And so walking in that fear is the best way to do marriage, to be a good parent, to be a good boss, to be a good employee.

[13:50] And so when we walk in the fear of the Lord, the natural outcome is joy and peace and productivity.

Satan is a liar. Brothers and sisters, Satan is a liar, my unbelieving friends. The way of sin is hard. It's hard. But the fear of the Lord brings life, and God is so good. Now, as we wrap things up, I want to head off a potential misunderstanding.

And this will be our last point. Getting rid of a potential misunderstanding. Now, people can look at this psalm, and we've only looked at it briefly, but people can look at the psalm and see in it something that isn't there.

It's something that our own hearts bring to the text, that we will read into it because we're evil and we're proud. And we can look at it and think that God blesses us because we do these things.

[15:05] And what I mean by that is that we look at these blessings as a payment that God makes for our work, as if it comes by works and not by faith.

And so we'll say, I want this blessing, so I will do this. And if we look at that psalm in this way, we see it as a call to be a mercenary.

I will fear the Lord, and he'll bless me. And that's how Satan himself thinks about things. We saw this in Sunday school. Remember, Satan comes to God, and he's talking to God about Job.

And he says, does Job fear God for nothing? Does he fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?

You bless the work of his hands, but stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face. Satan says, of course Job fears you.

[16:07] You bless him. So Satan imagines everyone a mercenary. No one will do anything out of love and fear and awe and respect and admiration.

It all has to be something about me. That's how he thinks. But do you see then how satanic it is to think of this psalm then as a method, as a technique to get God's blessing?

I'll fear him, and he'll bless me. Well, if you live long enough, you realize, and Job is a testimony to that, it doesn't necessarily work out that way.

If we fear God, that's just the right thing to do. He is God after all.

We haven't gone beyond the call of duty when we fear him. And if he blesses us, then that is his goodness and his grace to us.

[17:07] God's blessing isn't a payday. It's a king bestowing gifts to his people. Verse 5 pictures him as this good king, this generous king, sitting on his throne in Zion.

May the Lord bless you from Zion. Zion was the place where God ruled, where he had his throne on earth, so to speak. And so where do the blessings come from?

Well, they're pouring out from his throne. In the Old Testament, you get this picture of King David. You get this picture of this generous king.

In 2 Samuel 6, David, he brings the Ark of the Covenant up to Jerusalem, up to Mount Zion, and he calls for a celebration. And so all the people are there.

All the men and the women are there. And then as he sends them on their way home, he gives them gifts. He sends them home with presents. And they're not useful things so much as things that will make them happy.

[18:10] He gives them loaves of bread and cakes of raisins to every man and to every woman. Those are gifts that they could celebrate with. And so Psalm 128 is a picture of God as the king giving good gifts, blessing his people.

I think it helped me to think about it in this way, to make sure that I wasn't looking at this as a technique or as a method, that I'm going to get this out of God if I do the right things.

If I just figure out how to fear him, then this blessing will come. You can think of it like this. In verse 1, it says, Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways.

Who walk in his ways. And so we are walking through this life, brothers and sisters. And if we are in God's ways, then God is in front of us. He's leading.

This is his path. This is what he wants us to do. And this is the way he goes. And as he's walking ahead of us, he's throwing gifts on the path, on the trail.

[19:17] Good gifts. And as we walk behind them, we find these gifts. We find these presents. Blessing after blessing. So in either case, God's blessing comes to us not as a wage, but as a gift.

Yes, they come as we walk in his ways, not because we have earned them, or God owes them to us. And seeing that, it should keep you from pride.

Keep you from pride. So, if you can look at your husband or your wife, and you can look at your children, and there they are. You have this picture of Psalm 128. And this is how it is in your life. There they are, your sons, your daughters, like olive shoots. And you're saying, oh, this is so good. God, those are gifts that Jesus won for you. Those are not gifts that you have earned.

They have come from the hand of your King. They've come from the hand of Jesus Christ. You certainly, if you're honest, you certainly didn't earn them with that good life, with a great life.

[20:31] But seeing that God's gifts come to us as a gift, his blessings come to us as a gift and not as a wage, it also protects you not only from pride, but from despair.

Some of you can't look at your life. You can't look at your wife. You can't look at your sons and say, oh, these are olive shoots.

Or your wife, this is a fruitful vine. Perhaps they are weeds in your house instead of blessings. Can you pout or despair?

Can you complain? If God has given you something bitter in your life, have you earned any better? Has God not blessed you in other ways, too? So maybe you don't have the domestic blessings of Psalm 128 that you see here, but aren't there other blessings in your life that your good King has given you?

[21:38] God has called you to be a son, his daughter. He's called you to know him. He loves you with an eternal, everlasting love.

I'll make an eternal covenant with you. He loves you with that everlasting love. He's called you to know him, to live with him, and to have him as your God, and to know Jesus Christ, which is life itself.

So if you don't have these domestic blessings, don't despair. God has been gracious to you in other ways. Psalm 128 is right.

Blessed are all who fear the Lord. Blessed are all who fear the Lord. And so let's go in the fear of the Lord, not only because he's so great and magnificent and powerful, but because he's been so good to us.

And walking in his ways is the path to happiness and to joy. So we're going to sing our response to God in number 28 in our grace hymns, O Great God.

[22:47] We sing of the greatness of God and the goodness of God, and we ask him to fill our hearts with our awe. Number 28 in grace hymns.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do ask that you would glorify yourself in our hearts, in our thoughts, and in our lives this week.

Pray that the greatness of who you are, the greatness of your love in Jesus Christ for us would cause us to fear your name, cause us to walk in your ways.

I pray for those who do not know you, blind to the greatest and the best reality in the whole world. Pray that you would open their eyes and see your goodness and your mercy for sinners like them. We've all been there, blind as can be, and you had mercy on us. Pray that you would have mercy on them. And for Christ's sake, amen.

[23:50] We're dismissed. Remember, we're doing the chairs.