

JANUARY 2009 Week 2 TEACHING

Joy and Happiness-Do You Know the Difference

A good friend of mine asked if I knew the difference between "joy" and "happiness". In the back of my mind I suppose I knew that there was indeed a difference, but I had never really given it much thought until that moment. To investigate, I looked up both words in the dictionary. It defines happiness as emotions that one will experience when in a state of well being. It gives the meaning of joy as an emotion of great happiness.

Both of these meanings sound the same, but there's an edge that's fundamentally incorrect when it comes to the scriptures. From these meanings, one might think of happiness as the foundation upon which joy is experienced--when in actuality, it is the other way around. As we examine the scriptures we will see that the difference between the two words can be worlds apart.

Galatians 5:22-23 KJV

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:22 tells us that joy is an inside joy. It is a byproduct of receiving the seed of God, which is the indwelling Holy Spirit. Like all the other fruit of the Spirit, having it on the inside doesn't mean that we will use it, nor does it mean that we will be happy just because we are born again. Harvesting any one of the fruit will depend largely on our choices about what we will plant.

To "plant" is to put something in the ground for growth. It means that the planter has some concept about the labor and endurance that is required in the "right now". He or she understands that sowing in the present is preparation for the harvest or "blessing" in the future. God is forever telling us to shift our minds from what we see right now, and look forward to the treasure that is yet to manifest. This is the whole premise of faith, and joy comes by way of faith.

As Christians, there is no question about it, we will face adversity. Luke 6:22 (NLT) says *"God blesses you who are hated and excluded and mocked and cursed because you are identified with me, the Son of Man."* This verse lets us know that we could be hated, excluded, mocked, and cursed because we are followers of Christ. Those are some pretty fierce words. But God also says in this verse that we will be blessed.

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This verse summons us to make a judgment call. What will we think is most important, the blessing that comes from knowing that we have pleased God, or the temporary sting of being ostracized and excluded by those among us?

None of us would probably run around shouting "*Wow, isn't this great...I'm being persecuted!*" It doesn't feel good to be talked about behind our backs, or to invest years in friendships only to find that those we thought would be in our corner have abandoned us. These are hurtful things, but God doesn't try to hide the fact that being a Christian can be difficult. He is upfront about it. Throughout His Word, He is teaching us to shift our focus on what we plant.

You see most of us are interested in planting seeds that will bring us happiness, and we equate happiness as the absence of pain and hurt. When we are hurt by others, the natural instinct is to want revenge, because we think revenge will bring us a feeling of happiness. When we are lonely, the natural instinct is to want someone near to comfort and make us feel valued, because we think our happiness can somehow be fulfilled within another. Although these feelings are natural, they are not spiritual, and we must always renew our minds to appreciate the difference between the two.

God created the ability to feel happy within us. It is a very wonderful emotion to experience, but it must be kept in perspective. The whole world is out of balance because people are seeking happiness from the wrong things and in the wrong places. Happiness is a temporary state, and it was meant to be that way. It can be fleeting and very much contingent on what is going on in your life from one moment to the next.

God is all about promotion and elevation, but first things first. We have to plant, endure, and then reap a harvest of not just the blessing we desire, but a harvest of spiritual growth too. Sometimes we want the quick-fix. We want to experience the "right now" happiness, but God knows that the "right now" happiness will not bring us real joy. As disappointing as it may be to hear, sometimes we have to endure a little while longer. We have to get to a point where we will desire the joy more than a temporary state of happiness.

I was fifteen years old the first time I felt joy. It was the first time I prayed in the spirit. It was a supernatural experience that swooped down upon me like an eagle targeting its prey. All I wanted to do for the rest of my life was duplicate that enormous rush over and over again. I wanted to hold on to it for dear life. This joy is a constant in my life and it grows deeper as I learn more about God and as I become more and more like Christ.

Joy is a deeper emotion than happiness. Some say they felt it during the birth of their children or falling in love for the first time or even hearing an old song on the radio that ignites tender emotions. These are joyous occasions for sure, but nothing compares to the joy that God gives us through Jesus Christ.

If you are not happy with your life, perhaps it is because a co-worker is extremely negative. Maybe your children are causing you grief, or maybe you are having a hard time finding a compatible and potential marital partner. Any one of these things can make you unhappy if you let it. The thing that you have to be completely sold out about is this, there's a way through Jesus Christ to bring the zest and zeal back into your life.

You are never alone, and your situation is never as dire as it seems. God wants you to see that He will make a way out of no way. He wants you to witness that even when it seems that there is no chance for your happiness, there is. He wants you to see your "unhappiness" as an opportunity to plant seeds of joy...to plant seeds of His Word in your heart, and in the hearts of others.

"Am I Happy?" is a good question to ask ourselves, but how we approach the answer is extremely important. Happiness is wonderful, but choose joy first. In so doing you can take the smallest gesture and turn it into an opportunity to change your life for the better. So be careful to choose the things of the spirit. It begins with you having faith that there isn't anything about your life that God does not see and that through His love, you are strategically positioned to experience joy right where you are. Say "yes" to joy, and happiness is sure to follow.