
The Messenger



"... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!" Romans 10:15

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**Evangelist and Editor:
Dempsey Collins**

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Letting Happiness Pursue Us

by Ed Bragwell

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" so reads our Declaration of Independence. Thus, one of the great rights that most Americans cherish is that of being able to pursue happiness and strongly resist any efforts that would diminish that "unalienable" right.

Happiness is not easy to define, but to most of us happiness means a sense of well-being and contentment. We have no doubt that our Lord wants us to be happy. There are so many scriptural references to "joy," "peace," "contentment," etc. in connection with our lives to conclude otherwise. Yet, in spite of this, many spend a lifetime pursuing (chasing) happiness but never find it. Some jump from one marriage to another. Others jump from one career to another. Still others constantly move from one location to another. Even from one local church to another. All of this in an effort to find the happiness they think they deserve.

The irony of it all is that the best way to pursue happiness is not to pursue it at all. When one's single-minded approach is pursuing happiness for its sake, he looks past those things of which happiness is a natural fruit. Jesus came to seek and save the lost - not to bring one happiness per se. When he gave the great commission, he told the apostles, to go and "make disciples" of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20), not to go make happy folks of all nations. Yet, when they made a disciple (by baptizing them and teaching them to observe all things commanded), they made a happy rejoicing person (Acts 8:39, 16:34).

A result of going to God in prayer in time of anxiety is the peace of God will guard our hearts (Phil. 4:6,7). And a result of concentrating on doing the apostolic teaching and examples is "the God of peace shall be with you" (Phil. 4:9). Concentrate on doing the Lord's will as your primary focus in life and you may just be surprised by happiness.

When I was a youngster we lived on a little plot of ground out in the country. We had our livestock and other things that farm folks have. We had a pony that my brothers and I loved to ride. But, he did not like being bridled. Once the bridle was on, he was gentle

enough to ride. To get the bridle on we had to chase him down. One Saturday, I wanted to ride him to a store not too awfully far from our house. After chasing him nearly all morning, I gave up, and started walking to the store. I was not out of sight of our house when I heard hoofs to my back. There was that stupid pony following me to the store. I didn't catch the pony, but the pony caught me. Happiness is kind of like that.

The problem with making happiness the pursuit of our lives is that we will follow any and every path that *we think* might lead to it. Our focus shifts from doing the right thing to doing that which we think will give us that sense of well-being and contentment. With this mind-set, even if one finds a measure of happiness, it will not last because his whole world revolves around his personal happiness. He is soon wondering if he might not be able to find even greater happiness and becoming discontent with his present state, he goes off again chasing after that happiness pot at the end of another rainbow.

But, when our lives are focused on pursuing the kingdom of God, and his righteousness which involves obeying all things commanded which often brings sacrifice and hardship, the happiness desired will very likely find us. The early Christians found happiness, or maybe happiness found them, even in the midst of their hardships as a result of following the Lord. Their happiness did not depend on external circumstance, but it was imbedded in their hearts by their knowing that they had hope in Christ Jesus. Paul could write of his contentment from a Roman prison (Phil. 4:11). The apostles could leave the Jewish counsel, after being beaten and ordered not to preach any more in the name of Jesus, *rejoicing* and continuing to preach and teach in the temple and in every house (Acts 5:40-42).

My friend, why not cease your incessant pursuit of happiness and turn to the Lord in humble obedience to the gospel with a commitment to observe all things Jesus commands and let your life's purpose be to "fear God and keep his commandments" (Eccl. 12:13)? Do that and let happiness take care of itself - let it find you rather than spending so much time and effort trying to find it.

A DYING EMBER

The story has been told by many preachers about a wayward member and a preacher. The story goes like this:

A member of the church was sorely missed at the regular services, so the preacher went to his house and found him sitting before an open fireplace. The absentee, somewhat startled, hastily placed another chair for the preacher, and then braced himself for the expected rebuke. But not a word was spoken by the preacher.

Taking a seat before the fire he silently took the tongs, and lifting a glowing coal from the midst of the others, laid it down by itself on the hearth. Remaining silent, they watched the blaze finally die out.

The member of the church got the lesson. When he spoke, he said: "You need not say a single word, Brother. I'll be at the services of the church where I belong."

Brethren, do you need this lesson?

NOTES & NEWS:

Remember to check the prayer list for those with ongoing spiritual weaknesses and physical illnesses.

"...Pray for one another...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James 5:16