

“GOD WANTS ME TO BE HAPPY”

Prayer Requests

... “Lord, open now my heart to hear, and through your Word to me draw near. Let me your Word e’er pure retain; let me your child and heir remain. Your Word inspires my heart within; your Word grants healing from my sin. Your Word has power to guide and bless; your Word brings peace and happiness.” Amen.

Introductory Activity *(do with those sitting next to you – 6 minutes)*

- ❖ Give examples of scenarios where people say: “God wants me to be happy, doesn’t he?”
 - Why is such thinking so appealing?
 - If you buy into this way of thinking, what is the foundation of your happiness/satisfaction in life?
 - Agree/Disagree: There is profit in serving God.
 - In Genesis 3:16-19, what did God promise we will experience as a result of sin?

To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”¹⁷ To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

- This too is a blessing. What would result if we don’t experience the consequences of sin?

What God Wants for Us

1. Read Mark 8:31-37. What does God want for us?

Mark 8:31-37 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

2. In Matthew 16:21-22, Peter expresses the natural reaction to suffering: “Never!” What did Peter want?

Matthew 16:21-22 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

Like Peter, we may have our own ideas about what we would have planned for Jesus. We certainly have our own ideas about what we would like for ourselves.

The chart below shows some things that we MIGHT HAVE WISHED for Jesus. Fill in the chart to show corresponding wishes that we might have for ourselves.

<i>For Jesus</i>	<i>For Us (His Followers)</i>
Jesus is crowned King on Palm Sunday.	
Everybody loves Jesus.	
No one ever contradicts or opposes him.	

3. Bearing the cross can be summarized in two words: “Deny self.” Why is that so hard?

4. In your own words, what does it mean to “deny self”?

The cross in a Christian’s life is not simply suffering, but it is suffering that comes as a result of being a Christian. Who of us has not thought, “If I only had _____, then I’d be happy”? (*Fill in the blank for yourself.*)

Actually, getting what we want leads to disappointment, or the *joy* lasts only a moment before the heart chases after another desire. Identify the root cause of disappointment and discontent. Give examples that demonstrate how it expresses itself in our lives.

5. Suffering is experienced by everyone and is not necessarily *self*-denial. What must happen before pain and suffering can become *self*-denial?

6. Read Romans 7:14-25. What one word describes what life is for us (and what God wants for us)?

Romans 7:14-25 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

²¹ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

7. Think of Luther's explanation to the First Commandment: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." What makes that so difficult for us Christians?

8. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 together. What does God want for us?

He wants us to be _____.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

9. In 1 Timothy 2:3,4 we read: "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." What does God want for us?

To be _____. (This means he'll do _____)

10. John 20:31 says, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." What is the main purpose of the Bible?

Discussion

1. The old self is at work most when the new self is trying to be strengthened. Explain how the old self is at work even when we are praying, listening to God's Word, or giving an offering.
2. "He doesn't ask you to take a pilgrimage to Mecca. He doesn't ask you to wash in the Ganges. He doesn't ask you to walk on burning coals, or burn incense, or ring bells, or enter a monastery. What he asks is much harder. He asks and insists on it: Deny yourself, and take up the cross and follow me. He asks and he insists on it: Be a Christian!" (Daniel Deutschlander, *Don't Be Afraid! Cheer Up! It's the Cross!* Part 1, p. 6). In what ways is being a Christian much harder than the items listed?
3. What do we mean by the "Cross of Christ"?
4. What is meant by the "Cross of the Christian"?

Closing Prayer