

“God Wants You Happy”  
Psalm 42:11  
Rev. Benny Parks  
July 30, 2017 • Morning Sermon

This is God’s Word. Psalm 42:11–43:5 says [11] *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.*

*43:1–5, [1] Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! [2] For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?*

*[3] Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! [4] Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.*

*[5] Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.*

About a year ago, around this time, I walked into my office with great enthusiasm and excitement and declared “I am a happy man! I even have a happy theme song to go with it called ‘Happy Man’ by The Pat Terry Group.” That declaration was not met with great enthusiasm and excitement with the office staff. It was met with groans, the rolling of eyes and ‘what are you into now’ and so I told them. So I told them I was reading a book by Randy Alcorn titled Happiness and you have to be happy if you’re reading that. That started me becoming the objects of some great jokes and poking fun in the office. My sweet wife even said on a few occasions ‘I guess you’re going to try and make me read that book on happiness, aren’t you?’ I said as sweetly and compassionately as I could to my sweet wife, ‘No Brenda, you can stay miserable as long as you like.’ I have allowed myself and other people to have a lot of fun with this and that’s brought a lot of joy and laughter which leads me to a study that was done.

There was a study done and reported on in Health Magazine several years ago and the title of the article was ‘Can you laugh your stress away?’ This study showed that children laugh 400 times a day and adults 15. So we have lost our joy and happiness but I hope we’ll learn something from children.

A statement with no context like ‘God wants you happy’ can be dangerous. If I were to say that God wants you happy all the time with no interruptions for all eternity in heaven then you would probably agree with me but if I were to say God wants you happy in the here and now then that’s a different story. Some might think God wants us holy not happy and that’s what I’ve thought for a long time up until several years ago.

Then I read the book by Jonathan Edwards titled Charity and its Fruits and it said ‘God wants you happy.’ Edwards said when man is redeemed God doesn’t take away his love of self in a Biblical sense and his love for his own happiness. He says who are the happiest saints alive? He says those who are in heaven because they are the most holy. So he says God actually strengthens our desire for happiness as we’re saved, when we become a Christian.

We also might think that God doesn’t want us to be happy but joyful. Joy is found in Jesus but happiness is found in our circumstances, the things that happen to us. Then I read Randy Alcorn’s book titled Happiness and he says God wants us happy. He does a fantastic job in this book showing the numerous verses and passages in God’s Word, looking at both the Hebrew and the Greek that show happiness, joy, gladness, delight, and blessedness are

synonyms, in the same semantic domain. The idea is that joy and happiness are synonyms and that has helped me a lot when I read this book.

This has been a fascinating study for me as I've gone through this and as I am in the sanctification process seeking to grow in grace. I hope this study will encourage you as well as we go through this. I want to make two important comments before we look at the Scripture for this study. The first comment is Biblical happiness and worldly happiness are two different things and vastly different. The world's view is totally dependent upon circumstances, what happens to us and what we experience. In the Biblical view we find happiness and joy in spite of our circumstances or in the midst of them no matter how difficult they are or whether they are good or bad. Worldly happiness has to do with me and it's all man-centered whereas Godly, Biblical happiness has to do with the focus on God and His glory.

The second comment is that believing that God wants you happy does not dismiss the difficulties of life. Randy Alcorn at the beginning of his book *Happiness* says "I'm no stranger to happiness. I'd be the last person to write a breezy book on happiness that ignores life's difficulties and denies the struggles of living in a fallen world. But by God's grace, as the years have passed, I've experienced a more consistent heartfelt gladness and delight in Christ. That – perpetual and unsustainable ecstasy – is what this book is about." That is helpful for when we say God wants us happy God wants us holy, patient and kind and none of us experience that in an unbroken or perfect way and the same goes for happiness but it's important to realize this as we go through the passage in Psalm 42:11.

The first point deals with unhappiness and man-centeredness. Psalm 42:11a says *[11a] Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?* The NAS version of Psalm 42:11a says *[11a] Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me?* This statement is repeated two other times in Psalm 42 and Psalm 43 and in some manuscripts these two psalms are combined as one psalm. Here the Psalmist is going through a very difficult time. It is like he is dying of thirst and can't be satisfied. He feels that God has abandoned him and that He is absent. He is being mocked and taunted by his enemies. Faintly he remembers a time where he actually led the people of God in corporate worship singing songs of praise but it's a difficult time for him.

Nothing in these two psalms indicates that the Psalmist struggles in difficulties, despondencies and depression was due to his own sin. All kinds of things can lead to our discouragement in this fallen world but at times are difficulties, despondencies and depression can be from our own sin but not necessarily the case here or at other times. In the book by a puritan name William Bridge titled *A Lifting Up for the Downcast*, this whole book is on this one verse, Psalm 42:11. Bridge says there are three things that are implied in this passage.

The first implication is that the Psalmist remembered good times. He remembered the better times when he experienced more comfort, peace, joy and happiness. Another thing implied in this passage is that many things disrupt the Christian's peace, comfort, joy and happiness. The third thing implied in this passage is that Biblically speaking and ultimately there is no reason for a Christian to ever be without peace, comfort, joy and happiness. That is because we have God and He can't be taken away from us.

I know many of us are going through difficult times right now and the Psalmist nor William Bridge are saying that you are unspiritual or not a Christian because you're going through difficulties and discouragement. But what he is saying is that when our perspective moves away from ourselves and Godward then that is when God begins to do something great in our lives. The reason we experience sorrow, sadness, difficulties, discouragement, depression,

despair ultimately is because of sin, even though many other things can contribute but all of our frailties and difficulties in life come directly or indirectly from being in a sin-cursed world, and one in which we feel much brokenness. For the Christian we feel sadness, difficulties and discouragements because the sovereign God in His great providence allows it in our lives for our good and that's true but it's a God who rules, reigns and overrules in our sin-cursed world to bring about what we need in our lives.

Jonathan Edwards in his book *Charity and its Fruits* talks about the ruin that took place with us because of our sin as it entered into the world. He says "The ruin that the fall brought upon the soul of man consists very much in his losing the nobler and benevolent parts of himself. At the very moment Adam transgressed God's law and sinned, his noble principles were lost. He shrank into a little space. Sin, like a powerful astringent, contracted his soul to the very small dimensions of selfishness and God was forsaken. Fellow creatures were forsaken and man retired within himself and became totally governed by narrow, selfish and principle feelings. Sinful self-love became absolute master of his soul." Sinful self-love is the same thing as man-centeredness where we are turned in on ourselves and that's what God wants to deliver us from.

There is a saying that Randy Alcorn has in his book *Happiness* that I use a lot and it is; 'sin sabotages happiness.' He says that sin is the ultimate killjoy and God wants us to realize this is all related to man-centeredness where we try to do things our way. That is what leads to great brokenness, pain and discouragement but we begin to see in Psalm 43 that the Psalmist is beginning to come out of this.

Psalm 43:4 says *[4] Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.* He is beginning to get his eyes off of himself and his circumstances and to place them where they belong, on God, his exceeding joy which leads us to the second part of Psalm 42:11 and is happiness and God-centeredness. Psalm 42:11b says *[11b] Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.* The NAS says in Psalm 42:11b, *[11b] Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.*

There is in a sense when God is doing a work in our lives that is joyful and happy that it should come out in our expressions and what is going on in our lives. One writer said 'happiness can be sought in thousands of places but it is found only in one, the Lord Jesus Christ.' It is in our hope in God and in God alone. This statement 'hope in God' totally corrects the falsehood and lies in this world and from Satan about sin and happiness. It clears it up completely to help us understand where our hope is found – in Christ.

It would be easy for me to say I wish we would never choose to do those things that are wrong but that's not the case. As Christians we experience great sorrow and sometimes directly related to our choices of going our own way in a man-centered approach but isn't that exactly what Jesus came to deliver us from? He came to save us from our sins, from ourselves and from turning our own way and He wants to do that. Happiness is found in the hope in God but unhappiness is always due to a person being without God.

So how do we in a practical sense hope in God? That is what I want to share with you in this study. Alcorn has a phrase in his *Happiness* book that says 'habits of happiness.' It reminded me of our theme last year here at the church of being led by the Spirit. Pastor Reeder encouraged us to read J.I. Packer's book *Keep in Step with the Spirit*. In Packer's book he has a phrase that says 'habits of holiness.' As I thought about those two phrases it made me think about the way God works in our life to help us grow in Him in joy and happiness is by

developing the disciplines of the Christian life. We are to develop these habits of happiness and holiness in our life.

It is what the Westminster shorter catechism says when it talks about sanctification which is a slow, tough process throughout our life that says 'we are enabled more and more by the Holy Spirit to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness.' So we do the living and the dying but it's the Holy Spirit who is empowering and enabling us to do so. So I want to give you seven practices or habits of holiness and happiness that we can develop in our life flowing from these two Psalms, to help us in this regard.

The first practice is to change our perspective. To change our perspective in life in any circumstance has to be because of our focus. Where is our focus? We need to get it off of ourselves and our circumstances and onto God. There are two ways we can change our focus and our perspective. The first is we have to talk to ourselves instead of listen to ourselves. Martin Lloyd Jones wrote a book titled Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cures. In his book he discusses Psalm 42:11 and this idea of talking to ourselves, not listening to ourselves. He says 'As I suggest the main trouble in the whole matter of Spiritual depression in a sense is this; that we allow ourself to talk to us instead of talking to ourself. Have you not realized that most of your unhappiness is due to this fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?'

So what do we say when we talk to ourself? We don't just say 'Self be happy.' We say what God's Word has said and that's why the second way we change our focus and perspective is to meditate on and listen to God's Word over and over again. Rehearsing the truth of God's Word in our life is what we need to do. We see that with the Psalmist in Psalm 43:3 which says *[3] Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling!* People today are unhappy because they listen to the thousands of voices in this world that are trying to tell them how to become happy instead of listening to the One voice that will tell us what life is all about. That is the One who said 'My sheep hear My voice and they listen to Me.'

Pastor Reeder says this a lot; now in the evangelical church we have kind of won the battle on the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture but we're losing the battle on the sufficiency of Scripture. It is God's Word that is sufficient. God's Word is our only infallible rule of faith and practice in life. I get frustrated when I hear people say to me 'just don't tell me to go read the Bible more.' The Bible is what gives us wisdom and direction to maybe do other things that are needed, maybe more than that but it's never less than that. It has to be filling our hearts and minds with the truths of God's Word and rehearsing that over and over again. In Bridge's book A Lifting Up for the Downcast he repeats over and over again to read God's Word. He says if you can't read it because you're too down or discouraged then get someone else to read it to you, to talk about it and explain it to you.

The second practice is to lower your expectations. Rosaria Butterfield in her book titled Openness Unhindered said "Sometimes I wish that birthday and Christmas presents had a warning sticker on the outside of it that said 'lower your expectations, increase your joy.'" It is very important that we do so. There was a fascinating study that Alcorn lists in his book Happiness from the Medical Journal of American Genetics that had to do with a certain group of people that really aren't characterized by worry and high expectations.

In that study it said among those surveyed nearly 99 percent indicated that they were happy with their lives, 97 percent liked who they are, 96 percent liked how they looked, 99 percent liked their families, and 97 percent liked their brothers and sisters. So who is this

extraordinary group of people. They were people with Down syndrome. These are the people that when 80 to 97 percent of the people who find out they are going to have a Down syndrome child aborts them and these are people that are most likely going to be happy. It goes on to say that a number of people with Down syndrome report happier lives than us “normal” folk, even happier than the rich, good looking and intelligent people.

Alcorn says in lowering your expectations to have more modest dreams instead of the falsehood that you can do or be anything you want. He says to get happy with the middle ground of Biblical realism. That means there are degrees of happiness. I get that not everyone is going to be completely happy all the time. There is a continuing contentment. One of the great books on contentment is by Jeremiah Burroughs titled The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment. He has a summary of that book that is titled Learning to be Happy. Contentment and happiness go together.

My wife and I are complete opposites and early on in our marriage we were sitting at a Michael W. Smith concert in the second row right in the middle. My wife who was a former cheerleader was standing up, dancing and singing. She loves it as she is going crazy and it’s fantastic to her. I’m sitting there listening to it and watching and she looks at me and says ‘Why don’t you stand up, relax, have some fun and enjoy this?’ I looked up at her and said “I’m having a great time. This is a great concert. I love this and am enjoying this a lot.” So we are different and we experience happiness differently but we do experience it and there is joy there but you need to lower your expectations.

The third practice is to place your happiness in the man of sorrows. This is what I call being a happy mourner or the sad side of happiness. Jesus in His estate of humiliation when He came to earth, was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief because He was coming to bear the weight of our sins on Himself. Don’t ever forget for He was a Man of joy as well. In fact it says in Hebrews 12:2, for the joy set before Him He endured the cross, despising its shame and sat down at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. The hardships of life are where we learn joy and happiness and this means that learning from the Man of sorrows that both can coexist together. It’s odd the way the Scripture talks about that in the Sermon on the Mount when it says ‘blessed are those who mourn.’

Paul said in Philippians 1:29, [29] *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.* Then what does Paul say while he is in prison later on in the book of Philippians? Philippians 4:4 says [4] *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.* They coexist and only God can cause that to happen in our life as we place our hope in the Man of sorrows. Please do not think that I’m telling you that if you or someone else is experiencing great heartache, sadness and difficulties that you’re supposed to say ‘don’t worry be happy, get over it.’ No, the Gospel, the Word of God says to weep with those who weep, grieve with those who grieve and Paul says in I Thessalonian 4:13, [13] *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.* Our hope is God.

The fourth practice is to cultivate gratefulness and thankfulness in our lives. The ungrateful will always be unhappy. Gratitude, thankfulness, joy, and happiness go together. This has to be cultivated in our life. In Alcorn’s book Happiness he tells a story about a great Bible teacher M.R. DeHaan. DeHaan said “The most cheerful people I have met, with few exceptions, have been those who’ve had the least sunshine and the most pain and suffering in their lives. The most grateful people I have ever known were not those who had traveled a pathway of roses all their lives, but those who were confined to their homes, some to their beds,

and had learned to depend on God as only Christians could do. The grippers, on the other hand, are usually those who have excellent health. The complainers are those who have the least to complain about. The men and women who are the most cheerful and the most grateful for the blessings of Almighty God are often those who have gone through the greatest trials.”

Dennis Prager said “We tend to think it’s being unhappy that leads people to complain but it’s truer to say that complaining leads people to be unhappy.” We need to cultivate a heart of thankfulness and gratitude. Christians of all people ought to be thankful and grateful. Alcorn says in his book that’s the problem with atheism. They have no one to thank. They have no one to be grateful to. Christians do, and it is the God that they hope in.

The fifth practice is to learn happiness by hating. Jesus loved righteousness but hated lawlessness or wickedness. This is combining holiness and happiness. God has so twisted His holiness and happiness together that we really can’t Biblically seek one without the other. If we Biblically seek happiness it will be through holiness and if we Biblically seek holiness we will gain happiness. John Owen teaches on overcoming sin and temptation and he wrote three books on this subject but he said ‘The first act of Divine pleasure concerning us was the choosing us from all eternity unto holiness and happiness – combining both of those together.’ The thing I love about that in the Christian life is it’s holiness and happiness not just in spiritual and religious things. Paul said of the most mundane things in life in I Thessalonians 10:31, *[31] So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

Alcorn tells a story of a teenager who came to see him in his book Happiness. This teenager was struggling with his faith and had a lot of doubts. Alcorn decided to talk with him about holiness and happiness. He asked the young man ‘what does God’s holiness mean to you?’ He responded ‘God is perfect and without sin.’ Alcorn said ‘Absolutely right, so do you desire to be holy one hundred percent of the time?’ Sadly the young man responded ‘no, I don’t.’ Alcorn said ‘Neither do I, but I should but do you know what you do want a hundred percent of the time? It’s happiness.’ The young man said ‘yes.’ Then Alcorn talked with him about how God designed a world here, even though it’s sin-cursed, to give us joy, happiness and a taste for the world to come. He said that God could have made food without flavor but He made it to taste good. God didn’t say after creating everything ‘It’s functional’ but He said ‘It’s good.’ He has given us good things and we can glorify God and enjoy Him if you are eating macaroni and cheese or playing ping pong.

He said the problem with this young man, and I think it is the problem with most of us, is that he had seen Christianity as a list of things he should do that wouldn’t make him happy and also a list of things he shouldn’t do that would make him happy. This is man’s perspective but we have to have God’s perspective that helps us understand the truth of God’s Word. So we can learn happiness by hating sin and loving righteousness/holiness. The sixth practice kind of sums up all of the five we have just covered.

The sixth practice is choosing the hard path of happiness. The Christian life is hard. On more than one occasion this past year I’ve going into my office thinking how hard it is to be happy all the time and I’m not happy all the time. It is hard work and it’s choices of realizing that in this world even as we’re trying to increase our joy and happiness, we walk with God through pain and suffering. Tim Keller says in his book titled Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering, “While other worldviews lead us to sit in the midst of life’s joys, foreseeing the coming sorrows, Christianity empowers its people to sit in the midst of this world’s sorrows, tasting the coming joy.” God empowers us to do that, not perfectly but progressively in our sanctification.

The seventh and final practice is to set your mind and heart on the hope of heaven. When we hope in God we get the Hope of heaven. It is what I call when heaven works backwards and forward. In the song 'Come As You Are' it says 'Earth has no sorrow, That heaven can't heal.' Heaven works backwards where Jesus left His throne above in heaven and came to the earth where He suffered horribly, ridiculed, beaten, spit upon, and suffered the wrath of God on the cross for us. Why? It is because He came from heaven to earth to destroy the works of the devil, to atone for our sins, to begin to make things right by reversing the effects of a sin-cursed world and by making all things new as He says in Revelation 21:5.

So it works backwards but it works forward for it helps us. It is the Hope of heaven that helps us grow in happiness. Colossians 3:2 says [2] *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.* It is what gives us the motivation to fight sin. I John 3:2–3 says [2] *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.* [3] *And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

This is the Hope of the Gospel and that's why Paul could say in Romans 8:22 and II Corinthians 5:17 that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth (the effects of sin) until now we ourselves groan but in Romans 8:18–19 Paul says [18] *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* [19] *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* This is the Hope and Glory that will be revealed to us. It means that one day our groaning will give way to glory and that is what we want to understand and think about. One day we will have resurrected bodies and not these imperfect bodies. We will live on a new earth and we will do all kinds of things. It will be real and whatever we build there will be much better than here, far superior and we will be with the One whom we hoped in, in this life forever. We will see the face of God. He is the ultimate satisfaction, joy and happiness, the blessed happiness of the human soul and that's what we have to look forward to.

As we conclude, change your perspective, lower your expectations, place your happiness in the Man of sorrow, cultivate gratefulness, learn happiness by hating sin and loving holiness, choose the hard path of happiness, and set your mind and heart on the Hope of heaven. Repent of happiness killers and use happiness builders in your life. Trust Christ and hope in God. Go out today and tell someone to hope in God.

If you are reading this and you're not a Christian, what should you do? You should come as you are. The words to the song 'Come As You Are' says;

*Come out of sadness  
From wherever you've been  
Come broken hearted  
Let the rescue begin  
Come find your mercy  
Oh sinner come kneel (at the feet of Jesus)  
Earth has no sorrow  
That heaven can't heal*

Sinner, come as you are. What if you are a struggling saint that has strayed away from Christ and His ways? The lyrics continue in the song 'Come As You Are' and says;

*So lay down your burdens*

*Lay down your shame  
All who are broken  
Lift up your face  
Oh wanderer come home  
You're not too far  
So lay down your hurt  
Lay down your heart  
Come as you are*

*There's hope for the hopeless  
And all those who've strayed  
Come sit at the table  
Come taste the grace  
There's rest for the weary  
Rest that endures  
Earth has no sorrow  
That heaven can't cure*

Oh sinner come home and come back. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we thank You so much for Your incredible love for us. We thank You for Christ who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising its shame. We thank You Father, for the Hope one day that there will be no more sorrow, sadness, or tears, only joy and happiness increasing forever. Father if there is anyone reading this that does not know You then pray simply in your heart 'Jesus I want to come as I am, I want to come home. Come into my life, forgive me of my sins and make me the kind of person You want me to be so that I can live for You.' Father for those that know You but are struggling, help them to come back because there is always a Father who loves them. Help them to repent and turn their life back over to You. For those who are walking for You imperfectly in this life and loving You, give us greater joy increasing even in the midst of difficulties of life and help us to go tell others of the Good News of Jesus Christ and for all He has for us, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

### Power Point

I. Unhappiness and Man-Centeredness

II. Happiness and God-Centeredness

**HAPPINESS KILLERS • HAPPINESS BUILDERS**

Anger/Impatience • Humility/Kindness/Patience

Fear/Anxiety • Faith

Worry • Dependence

Anxiety • Trust

Impurity • Purity of heart and life

Ingratitude • Gratefulness/Thanksgiving

Complaining • Contentment



Hopelessness • Hope  
Selfishness • Selfless/Serving/Giving  
Unholy/Ungodly • Holiness/Godliness  
Bitterness • Forgiveness  
Hatred • Love  
Desires of the Flesh • Fruit of the Spirit  
Unbelief • Believing  
Lovers of self • Lovers of God