

Everyday, July 4!

We celebrated in style at Christchurch on the fourth. It was exciting to see our float in the neighborhood parade and all our kids involved were having a great time. Little Abigail Garrou said to her mom when walking on the parking lot just before the parade, "Look Mommy! Everyone is smiling!" If a July Fourth parade brings a smile to our face, how much more should not our Lord and the assembly of His people do the same? As a rule, we hear very positive comments from our visitors who come to our Lord's church here on Champion Forest Drive. Would it not be wonderful if the consensus of all who come here would make comments like little Abigail, "Look Mommy! Everyone is smiling!"

There is a precedent for this happiness in the house of God. When the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon, she probably did not realize until later that the wisdom with which Solomon ministered was wisdom from the joyous heart of God. She said, "*Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom*" (I Kings 10:8). My prayer is that the only time unhappiness is present in the heart of our worshippers is when conviction from the Holy Spirit is dealing with sin or issues that we must attend to. Jesus said of the Spirit's work in the earth: "*And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*" (John 16:8). So we pray that conviction would be present, but we also pray that when the Spirit of God convinces us, we will repent and find the sweet satisfaction and peace that brings us back into the "happy zone." Yes, I want every day to have the feeling of celebration of independence from the slavery of sin, the self-life and the dog-eat-dog world of competitive life as it is lived by the strangers to God's grace.

This is a rather auspicious title to our article today and definitely a worthy, noble goal; how can we have an everyday July fourth happiness?

I. Have a living, loving personal relationship with the Lord.

"*Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD*" (Psalm 144:15). People go to church every week, even good churches, who do not have a personal relationship with Christ. Knowing Christ is not agreeing to follow a set a rules, it is accepting His finished work on Calvary and resurrected life with a humble repentant heart.

II. Read your Bible looking for God's message to you.

Jeremiah said, "*Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts*" (Jeremiah 15:16). So many times our approach to the Word of God is merely academic. We sometimes read the Bible only because we are supposed to and we go through the act without concentrating and attempting to hear the voice of God speak to us. Slow down; read with clarity. It sometimes helps if we can read it aloud to help us stay alert and focus on the words. Here are a few ways to help in understanding our Bible reading. (a) Read contextually. Who is talking, what are the circumstances, and who is being addressed? (b) Read applicably. How does what you are reading apply to you? If I read God's warning about idols, I don't simply write off personal application by saying, "Oh well, I don't have any Buddhas in my house; I'm cool." No! I ask, "Dear Lord, has materialism, love of man's praise, pride of life, etc. become my god?" (c) Read devotionally. As I read I am looking for a way to hear from God about how I can love him more and express it in such a way that harmonizes with His revealed Word. If I love my wife and I hear her say in passing, "I haven't had a chocolate milk shake in a long time." My response is to come home with a chocolate milk shake. What a joy for a wife who knows her husband is listening to her words! Even more a joy for our Lord who knows we are reading

His Word devotionally, looking for a way to express our love to Him. The Bible is the Book of God's wisdom; read it to find the happy zone: *"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding"* (Proverbs 3:13).

III. Walk in the fear of God.

"Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee" (Psalm 128:1,2). God is saying that a man who fears the Lord will enjoy his work and accomplishments; he has an overall presence of peace that emanates from his person. It is well with his or her soul!

Should you ask me the meaning of the fear of the Lord, I would answer the fear of God possesses two characteristics. It is reverential trust and awe of Who God is. Secondly, it is a healthy dread of consequences if we deliberately disobey Him. I love the definition of the Puritan John Brown who said, "The fear of the Lord is when God's frown is our greatest dread and God's smile is our greatest delight." *"Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith"* (Proverbs 15:16). *"The fear of the LORD tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil"* (Proverbs 19:23).

IV. Be Thankful.

There are so many things to be thankful for. Since our theme is a rather patriotic one, consider what Harry Moyle Tippet said, "The Pilgrims came to America not to accumulate riches but to worship God, and the greatest wealth they left unborn generations was their heroic example of sacrifice that their souls might be free." Therefore, it follows that in the spirit of the Pilgrims the most uniquely American holiday is Thanksgiving.

Charles Dickens said, "Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every man has plenty; not on your past misfortunes of which all men have some." It has also been said, "Seeds of discouragement will not grow in the thankful heart." John Bunyan said, "A sensible thanksgiving for mercies received is a mighty prayer in the Spirit of God. It prevails with Him unspeakably."

Quickly, here are some things to be thankful for that will guarantee you the happy zone:

(a) The ability to faithfully attend church, with a learning spirit. *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD"* (Psalm 122:1).

(b) The blessings God gives us in His grace and mercy. *"The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad"* (Psalm 126:3).

(c) Kind words spoken to us, that encourage. *"Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad"* (Proverbs 12:25). Mark Twain said he could live off a good compliment for two weeks. This is a good reminder to speak words that lift. *"But exhort one another daily..."* (Hebrews 3:13).

(d) The rest that God gives us in every circumstance. *"But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye..."* (I Peter 3:14). *"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified"* (I Peter 4:14). Jesus said, *"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:30).

Today I am going to do an "Abigail search" for smiling faces. Let's keep celebrating!

- Pastor Pope -

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