

Pursue Humility
April 14, 2013

How many of you do NOT want to be happy? Everyone wants to be happy. Rarely does someone choose to be unhappy when they could be happy. Sometimes, when you are unhappy, becoming happy seems so far off that you don't even try. But if we have the opportunity to become happy, or to build a happy life, most people go for it, don't they? No matter what condition our life is currently in, if we see an opportunity to make it more happy, most of us try to achieve that. Happiness is something everybody wants.

We all want, and need, food, clothes, water, and shelter to have basic happiness. Beyond that most of us also need love, friendship, purpose, and hope. All of those contribute a lot to our state of happiness.

Beyond these, most of us have some idea in our heads of other things that would contribute to our happiness. We have personal interests, hobbies, places you'd like to visit, things you'd like to learn, a home that's paid for, things like that. We choose to make these part of our happiness. They don't bring happiness in themselves. But we choose to believe that they will contribute to our being happier than we now are.

God has a heaven for us. God wants us to be happy and to pursue happiness. God wants you to be happy. In fact, He has made provision for your eternal happiness. We will have perfect happiness in heaven. It will be deep, full, deliriously joyful happiness. It will be beyond compare to anything on earth.

I also believe that God wants us to experience now, hints of that future happiness.

1 Timothy 6:17 (NIV) God... richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

God wants us to enjoy the good things He provides us. God doesn't want us to be miserable. He doesn't want us to be depressed. He doesn't want us to live in despair, without hope, without purpose, without meaning.

James 1:17 (NIV) Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...

God has blessed us all, good and bad, religious or not, with basic blessings that He wants us to enjoy. He provides all people with rain and sunshine. He provides for health and hard work. He provides the ability to think and to educate ourselves. He provides love and friendship. Everything you have now is a gift of God. Your education, job, family, and everything else God has made possible for you. You put in time and effort to bring them about. But none of that would have mattered if God did not make it all possible. So be thankful and show your thanks.

Some people make better choices with what God has provided than other people do. We are all free to respond as we wish and to pursue our own happiness as we define it.

The point of this series of sermons is to encourage you to add certain beliefs and

attitudes to your life that will contribute GREATLY to your own personal happiness now, on earth.

Now the first one of these you needed in order to gain that future happiness in heaven. You chose to do something special that made your conversion possible. You humbled yourself before God. **Salvation requires humility.** Humility was necessary for conversion. It was required in order to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

When you became a Christian you adopted the belief that you are a sinner. You adopted the belief that you are nothing before God. Your sins have earned you a guilty verdict on the Day of Judgment and you deserve to go to hell.

None of the good you have done in your life changes your "sinner" status. None of the good deeds for others benefited you before God. None of the good character in you makes up for the life of sin you have lived against God and His will.

You presented yourself to God with nothing, nothing but a desire to be saved, nothing but recognition that you have no rights before Him, no status that earns you a hearing. You came to God admitting that you needed a Savior, not a Savior to add to your good character and good deeds, but rather a Savior instead of all you use to compare yourself with other people.

You humbled yourself before God. You recognized that before God you are a sinner deserving of hell and nothing better than hell. You humbled yourself before God.

Humility was necessary for your eternal happiness. In the same way humility plays an important part in your happiness on earth. Let's look together at this humility.

When you came to God for forgiveness, you came in this truth: "I deserve nothing better than hell." This truth is the foundation of humility.

God commands us to hold on to this truth, and the humility that comes from it, in our relationships with each other.

James 3:13-18 (NIV) *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.*

This humility is not humility towards God, but towards others, as we see in the next verse.

verse 14 (NIV) *But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.*

This is the truth that we deserve hell for our sins. Envy and selfish ambition deny the truth that I deserve nothing but hell. Envy and selfish ambition come from pride. They come from sinful desire, not humility.

Pride is a dangerous attitude to adopt for yourself. The opposite of humility is pride. **Pride is like fire. It is never satisfied.**

Fire continues to burn and burn and burn until it totally consumes what is available to it. A fire never stops burning in the middle of a log saying to itself, "Well that's enough." No, it burns until there isn't anything left to burn. And if it can jump to something else to burn, it will continue to burn. It is never satisfied. It's hunger is insatiable.

Pride is like that. It is never satisfied. And if you base your happiness on things you can be proud of and arrogant about, you will never arrive at lasting happiness. Everything you pursue in pride will only bring a temporary happiness.

You've seen that when you set your eyes on some new toy and pursue that and finally get it and for a very short time you are delighted with it. But the delight fades. The happiness fades. That thing has no power to sustain your happiness. And so you have to find some new toy to pursue.

Pride is like that. The glory you get when others recognize how smart you are doesn't last. It doesn't sustain your happiness. You need further praise and attention and glory from others. It is never ending and you will never, really, be deeply happy.

Let's read on.

verse 15-16 (NIV) *Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

The wise choice for relating to each other is humility and the behavior that results from it. Let me show you that you need to choose humility. Let me ask you a question. How good are you? Are you as good as I am about to describe?

If you start the day without depending on caffeine..., and
If you are always cheerful, ignoring aches and pains..., and
If you never gripe or complain about anything or anyone..., and
If you eat the same food everyday and are grateful for it..., and
If you take criticism and blame without resentment..., and
If you resist treating one person better than another..., and
If you never lie or deceive others..., and
If you overlook it when your loved ones blame you for things gone wrong..., and
If you have no prejudice towards anyone of whatever creed, color, religion, or politics...,
Then you may be as good as a dog.

If you aren't that good, you should choose humility. No one is naturally humble. **Humility is choice.** Humility is admitting you are not important in the grand scheme of things.

To pursue humility, keep this thought in mind, "**I deserve nothing better than hell.**"

I know that sounds negative, so unhappy. How could it possibly contribute to happiness? Because it is the truth. And the truth will set you free. And freedom contributes greatly to your happiness. It frees you from the stress and effort of proving to others that you are richer, better, smarter, wiser, more clever, more capable, or more worthy than they are.

If you were standing before God, you would admit your unworthiness. If you are a Christian, you already did.

Not let's say that you and any other person (not Jesus) were standing before God. Would you change your attitude about self and say to God, "I'm thankful that I'm not as bad as him"? Would you say that? Would you say to God, "Yeah, I deserve nothing better than hell, but I'm better than he is." That would be the wrong thing to say.

You are not superior to anyone else... in any way... that matters before God. You are not superior to anyone else, in any way, that matters before God. You are a sinner deserving of hell before God. And you are still a sinner deserving of hell when you stand next to ANYONE else in this world.

To build a life of happiness for yourself choose humility as the basis of all your relationships. Keep this thought in mind, "I deserve nothing better than hell."

So there is no place for ego-competition and status games. There is no place in humility for comparing yourself to others. There is no place in humility for pride, envy, arrogance, haughtiness, or selfish ambition.

When someone insults you, whisper this to yourself, "I deserve nothing better than hell."
When someone steps on your rights, remember this, "I deserve nothing better than hell."
When you don't get your way, whisper this to yourself. "I deserve nothing better than hell."
When you don't get credit or glory for the good things you do, pray to God, "I deserve nothing better than hell."

What are the benefits of choosing humility?

James 4:6 (NIV) *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

We shouldn't need any more reason than this to pursue humility. I don't want God opposing me. I don't want God ignoring my prayers. I don't want God actively working against my pursuit of happiness.

Instead I want more grace. I need more grace. I need to be working with God, not against God.

But there are other benefits to pursuing humility. Humility gives you the freedom to admit you don't know everything, that you make mistakes, and that makes it okay to change course if necessary. Humility gives you the motivation to respond charitably when attacked. Humility is less stressful because it removes the pressure of having to impress others. Humility is peaceful because it doesn't have to take offense and get back at anyone. Humility helps you to obey Christ's command to love others.

How can you live in humility?

- Begin your day acknowledging your need for God.
- Don't insist on having your own way.

- Don't be quick to put in your two cents worth of opinion.
- Don't comment on what others choose to do, unless asked, and then only do it briefly and with respect.
- Submit to every authority.
- Be teachable. Assume that you have something to learn about everything, and a lot to learn about most things.
- Don't argue with those who offer you advice, simply thank them.
- Never start a thought or sentence with "I deserve...", or "I have a right to..."
- Don't set out to prove how smart you are, how creative, how good looking, how talented, what you have accomplished, etc. Don't seek personal glory.
- Give the credit for a team effort to the team.
- Don't get upset when someone else steals the credit. God knows who did what. Work for Him alone.
- Did you mess up at work? If so, take responsibility for it.
- Did you speak harsh and hurtful words? If so, ask for forgiveness.
- Give up trying to be right, to prove yourself.
- Give up trying to be first.
- Give up trying to be prominent.
- Give up trying to show how smart you are.
- Give up wanting recognition from others.
- Give up any blaming of others for anything, even if they are at fault.
- Ask forgiveness of those you sin against, even if they sinned against you first. Even if they don't ask your forgiveness in return.
- Cultivate thankfulness.
- When others compliment you, thank them, then give all the glory to God in silent prayer.
- Daily contemplate the cross. Nothing should humble us more than the perfect, sinless, Son of God willingly pouring out his life to rescue us from hell.

Invitation:

It takes humility to be forgiven/saved. You have to believe you have an enormous sin debt that you cannot pay. You need someone to bail you out.

God sent Jesus to do that. Jesus died so that you won't have to face hell, though that is what you deserve. Confess your sinfulness to God today. Tell Jesus you are ready to receive Him as your rescuer, and turn your life over to Him as your Lord.

Humble yourself before God today and be saved.