

Urban Legends 2

God Wants Us To Be Happy

We're in week two of a series we're calling Urban Legends. There's a lot of urban legends floating around. You probably get them in your inbox regularly.

They range from the false claim that George Washington said, "The Jews were a dangerous scourge who should be hunted down," to multiple Charlie Sheen death reports.

Apparently some people have way too much time on their hands and keep thinking up new ones.

Before you forward something to all your friends you can go to a site like snopes.com and find out if it's even true.

But what about those spiritual urban legends that are floating around? Where do you go to check those out? Where do you evaluate the accuracy of spiritual opinions that float around as freely as urban legends, but are believed by way too many people.

Fortunately we have a source of authority to go to. That source of authority is the Bible. It's a book that claims to be the Word of God and is filled with just what we'd expect if it actually did come from God.

We'd expect it to be different from other books, and it is. There's a number of unique characteristics that set the Bible apart, one of them being clear, specific, fulfilled prophecy.

There are literally hundreds of predictions that form a pre-written history of Israel, of the nations of the world, and ultimately of Jesus Christ. These are specific prophecies that have been fulfilled. They can be verified.

If you doubt the accuracy of the Bible I'd challenge you to check out the evidence. And while your doing that check out any other religious book from the Holy Koran to the Hindu Vedas and find me one other that has clear verifiable prophecy like the Bible.

The Bible is the accurate, unfailing, authentic source of truth. So that's where we're going in this series to dispel these spiritual myths. We're going to use the book that declares itself to be God's word and backs up those claims.

Last week we dispelled the myth that says there are many ways to God.

This week we want to look at another urban legend, and it's this: God wants us to be happy.

We have a whole cadre of preachers and teachers on the radio and TV who perpetrate this urban legend. They say things like, God has good things in store for you. God wants to bless you and make you prosperous in every way. God wants you to enjoy your life. God wants you to be fulfilled.

The problem many times is that there's a ring of truth to what they're saying. There's biblical truth of God's love and care for us that gets distorted and turned around to make us the center of everything.

Open your Bibles this morning to 2 Timothy chapter 4 page 1168

If you want to know what's really important to someone, read what they say or write when they know that they're at the end of their life. All the other distractions just melt away and what's significant really comes into focus.

II Timothy contains words written by a man of God who knew he was at the end. His name was Paul and he was writing to a young first century pastor named Timothy.

Look how he prefaces what he's about to say... **Read verse 1**

"Timothy this is heavy stuff I'm about to say to you. Listen carefully."

Read verse 2

"Don't give people your own ideas. Don't fill your sermons with a bunch of cute stories. Preach the word. Preach from the Bible. That's your source of spiritual authority."

Here's why... **Read verses 3 & 4**

"Live by the Bible. Challenge others to live by the Bible. Don't waver from the Bible because..."

"Because people aren't going to want to hear the truth. It makes them feel

uncomfortable. People want to be told things that make them feel good. And if you're not careful they'll just go out and find teachers who tell them what they want to hear."

"Stick with the truth because people would rather hear fables that make them feel good than truth which rocks their boat."

Think about what you're reading here. The Apostle Paul is telling Timothy to stay faithful because this spiritual defection was coming. That means that it started 2000 years ago in Timothy's day. The betrayal of truth has been going on throughout the history of Christianity and it's just snowballed over time.

People willingly turn away from the truth to follow myths if it makes them feel better.

God forbid that I should base my beliefs on what I think will make me feel good. God forbid that I should plan messages based on what I think will make you feel all warm and fuzzy. God has our ultimate good in mind but the road to get there isn't always easy and fun. Sometimes it's hard and painful.

Here's the danger. We read passages in the Bible about God's love. We realize that Christ died for us. Then we conclude that if God loves us He'll make life go the way we want.

If we believe that we're the center of God's world then what happens when life doesn't go the way we want? What happens when our plans fall apart? What happens when our agenda gets dashed on the rocks of life?

Craig Groeschel writes, When we believe that God revolves around us, we reduce a holy God of the universe into a cosmic Coke machine. What we do is, we put our quarters in, and we say our little prayer, and we press the button choosing which we want, and we expect God to deliver. And if what we pray for doesn't come out of a slot, we blame God, because there's something wrong if God wants me happy, and yet, I'm not.

Think about how we can twist around the truth of God's love. If God wants me to be happy and I'm not, then God must have failed. If God wants me to feel fulfilled and I'm not, God must have let me down. If God promised to always be with me but my life feels out of control the God lied.

This morning were going to look at some times that God doesn't want us happy. Fasten your seat belts here, hopefully were going to undo some misconceptions.

I. God Doesn't Want Us To Pursue Happiness Through Sin

We can really develop some distorted ideas about how we find fulfillment in life. We can totally misunderstand God's purpose for us.

Look back a book to I Thessalonians and I want you to see a couple of scriptures. **Page 1159**

There's over 600 references to the words "holy" and "holiness" in the Bible. You kind of get the idea holiness is an important topic with God!

Read 3:12,13

4:7

I Timothy (2 books over)

2:8

We're called a holy people. God's spirit is the holy Spirit.

It doesn't say be happy in everything you do it says, be holy.

In God's spiritual economy our happiness is never the bottom line. God never calls us to sacrifice His standards in the name of happiness.

Now don't misunderstand. The Bible tells us that God is a good God. It tells us that He loves to give good gifts to His children. I have no doubt that He enjoys seeing His children enjoy life just like I enjoy seeing my children enjoy life.

Now my children are all grown and live on their own but when they were growing up we tried to do things with them that they enjoyed. One of the things that was a real sacrifice of love for me was to take them to Chuck E. Cheese's.

Any parents can identify with that? It's loud. There's kids running all over the place. The pizza's expensive. But we went at times any way. Why? Because it made my children happy. Because it made me happy to see my children happy.

But now just suppose I found one of my children pushing some other kid out of a ride because they wanted to be first? What if one of them strong armed a littler kid and took his tokens? (My kids never did that, by the way.)

All of a sudden I wouldn't be happy anymore. Why not? What if it made my children happy to act like thugs and take over Chuck E. Cheese's?

I wanted my children to be happy but not at the expense of others. If it wasn't the right thing it wouldn't have mattered how much they wanted to do something. Their happiness wasn't my primary concern. I would not want them happy if they pursued happiness by sinning.

Guess what? It's the same with God. As soon as we say, "I can't be happy unless I'm high," God says, that's not my way. As long as we say, "I'm going to cut corners and not pay people what I owe them so I can have money to spend on things that make me happy," God says, no your not.

When a couple is dating and they get physical thinking, "How can something that feels so right be wrong, this makes us happy it must be OK with God." God says, no way.

God's commands and principles are for our good. They're the train tracks of life that He's laid down so that we won't crash and burn. Listen to this promise: *For I know the plans I have for you,* declares the LORD, *"plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* (Jeremiah 29:11)

God's goal for us isn't that we go through life being miserable, but He wants holy children, not children who grasp for happiness through sin.

If you think about it, the whole reason Jesus went to the cross was because of our sin. The Bible says, *For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.* (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

We've all violated God's laws. Some of us have been more open about it than others but we've all violated God's laws.

In fact, it's through God's laws that we really understand our sin. The Bible says, *I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."* (Romans 7:7)

That was written by a man who originally was a member in the strictest sect of Judaism. He was a Pharisee and Pharisees prided themselves on keeping the laws of God down to the smallest detail. But he says that commandment got me. It showed me that God wasn't just concerned with actions but He cared about the heart even more.

Coveting is something that's easy to hide but it's just as much sin as stealing or adultery. We've all sinned in thought, words, and deed. We're sinners by nature and by choice and that sin separates us from our Creator.

That's why Jesus Christ went to the cross. The Bible says, *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.* (I Peter 2:24)

If sin separates us from God then you can understand why God hates sin. He paid for our sins by the death of His Son because it's the only way of forgiveness and so *Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.* (Acts 13:39)

If you place your faith in Jesus Christ you will receive eternal life from God. Now see why sin is such an affront to Him? See why God doesn't want us to pursue happiness in sinful ways?

I. God Doesn't Want Us To Pursue Happiness Through Sin

II. God Doesn't Want Us To Pursue Happiness Through Circumstances

The way most of us operate is this: if things are going our way, we're happy. If things aren't working out the way we want them to, we're not happy. Isn't that true?

Our natural response to life is to base our happiness on the situations of life. That's true of me and it's true of you. But now listen to this...

Turn to Ecclesiastes 7 page 654

Ecclesiastes is part of what we call Wisdom Literature. Now listen to this attitude adjuster from Ecclesiastes. **Read verse 14**

When life is fine and you got the good job and all is going smoothly, rejoice. You don't have to feel guilty about it. God has given us all things richly to enjoy.

We don't have a problem with that part of the verse. We have no problem rejoicing when life is going the way we want it to.

But what about when the bottom seems to drop out? If you belong to God just remember, He's still in control. He's appointed the one as well as the other. God's up to something exciting through the events of life.

If we only rejoice when life is smooth we've totally missed the truth that God is our source of joy. See God wants us to experience something a whole lot more substantial than some fleeting happiness based on circumstances. God wants us to know His joy and peace.

How many people here try to do some sort of exercise on a regular basis? It could be going to the gym, it could be walking or running, it could be exercising at home. How many try to do that?

Now think about it, why do you exercise? What's your end goal? It may be to get rid of that muffin top. It may be to get that blood pressure down. It may be to reduce your cholesterol levels.

Whatever, you're doing it because you know there's a physical benefit to that exercise. You know that if you just sit around and watch TV and don't get moving you're going to suffer for it. No pain, no gain.

Well God knows that's just as true spiritually as it is physically. That's why He uses adversity in our lives to keep us looking to Him. He stretches us through hardship.

When we really catch a hold of the truth that God wants to fill our life, we stop the rollercoaster.

Again, if we think that happiness all depends on our circumstances, think what we'll be willing to do to create those peaceful circumstances. All of a sudden we'll find ourselves saying, "I know that God doesn't want me to (you fill in the blank) but, this is what I need to do for my own personal happiness."

What we're really saying is, "God doesn't have a clue about the way my life should be going, so I'm going to take control."

Listen to this: *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.* (Proverbs 14:12) You know what? That's such an important truth that God repeats it again verbatim in Proverbs 16:25.

We don't see the end from the beginning. We're locked into our little niche of time. If we make decisions based on our microcosm of knowledge about anything, we're fools.

"Looks good to me. Hey, that's what I need to make me happy. I'm not going to consult God on this one, He just doesn't understand. He'd keep me from doing what I want."

That's sheer stupidity dressed up to look like we've got it all together. That's like a redneck's last words. You know what they are? "Watch this!" You know what a redneck's brother's last words are? 'Aw, that was nothing.'

That's us when we say that we're willing to disobey the clear commands of God to try to make ourselves happy.

God doesn't want us to settle for some surface happiness. He wants to give us a deeper gift, the gift of joy and contentment.

Listen to this. This is the Apostle named Paul writing about what he'd learned from God... *I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.* (Philippians 4:11,12)

Just to put some context to this Paul was in prison for his faith when he wrote these words. He didn't know whether he'd go free or be executed at this point.

How could he make such a confident statement. He said, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* (Philippians 4:13)

Think about what he is saying. "I've had it all, and I've lost it all. I've been healthy; I've been hurting. I've been blessed, and I've been cursed, but I have a secret that most people miss. I have a joy and a divine contentedness that's not based on events. It is based on something internal that no one can see, and that is, that I can do everything. I can make it. I can make it through this. I can make it while being locked up in prison. I can make it if they kill me. How? I can do it all through Christ who gives me strength. There is something internal that sustains me. It is not external events."

God wants you more than happy. He wants you to have a joy no matter what is going on on the outside.

Does God want us to be happy?

I. God Doesn't Want Us To Pursue Happiness Through Sin

II. God Doesn't Want Us To Pursue Happiness Through Circumstances

III. God Doesn't Want Us To Settle For Happiness At The Expense Of Blessing

Who is blessed? **Turn to Psalm 1 page 526**

We're going to hang out in the Psalms for a while so keep your Bible open when you get there.

Read verses 1-2 We're blessed when we let God teach us.

Psalm 32 read verse 1 We're blessed if our sins are forgiven

Psalm 34 read verse 8 We're blessed when our confidence is in God

Psalm 112 read verse 1 We're blessed if we fear and reverence God and if we take pleasure in His commands.

We get things so turned around sometimes. I can remember all the way back when I was in Bible college. Sandy and I were newly married, we packed up and moved a thousand miles away from family and went to study the Bible.

I was brand new in the faith but something struck me as odd right off the bat. When you're in school much of your life is focused on paying tuition and scraping up enough money for food.

And I watch when someone would find out that an anonymous donor had paid off part of their school bill or they'd receive a monetary gift, and these people are just thrilled. They're telling everyone how God blessed them.

And I'm looking around thinking, "What about the other students that didn't get the gift? What about the ones who are struggling to pay off their bills and no one's coming

to their rescue? Aren't they blessed? Has God passed them up when it came to blessings?

We can think that way so easily. Some one gets up here and says "God really blessed our family. My child was so sick and we prayed and today they're here with us in church and they're completely well. God is so good."

We rejoice at news like that. We should rejoice at news like that. We want to celebrate at news like that. But how about the person who's child doesn't get better? How about the person who doesn't get the job or whose house goes to foreclosure? Aren't they blessed? Has God forgotten about them?

See, the biblical truth is, we're blessed if we reverence God. We're blessed if have confidence in God, and are being taught by Him and take pleasure in His commands.

Listen to these amazing statements from the lips of Jesus Christ Himself:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3-10)

You know what's really interesting about the word *makarios* that Jesus used for "blessed?" On at least 5 occasions the New Testament translate that word as "happy."

Does God want us happy? He does, but not the way we so often want to define happiness. We so often have this incredibly shallow definition of happiness. God wants us to be fulfilled in ways that we couldn't even imagine.

How does that happen? It happens when we stop pursuing happiness and start pursuing God.

There was a time in my life when I knew that Christ died for my sins. I had honestly put my trust in Him and His death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of my sin.

But I wandered away from the knowledge I had.

I didn't read the Bible. I didn't spend time with the God who loved me so much He sent His Son to die for me. I filled my life with all kinds of destructive things.

Yet in the middle of it all, God was at work in my heart. I was miserable but I just kept on pursuing happiness instead of pursuing God. It makes absolutely no sense when I look back on it now.

Maybe that's you today. You know a little bit about God's truth. You might have even trusted Christ as Savior, but you're still pursuing your own agenda. You're still pursuing this elusive dream of happiness.

Let me challenge you today as one who's been down that road. It's a road to nowhere. Are you ready to get off that road this morning? Are you tired of just slamming up against the wall over and over again?

Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who delights greatly in His commandments.