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 Psalm 16

A Simple Plan for Happiness

Intro: If you listened carefully, you heard a lot of talk about happiness in that Psalm. It's unmistakable. David uses words like joy, gladness, rejoicing, and pleasures. Happiness is everywhere.

He says "my heart is glad...my whole being rejoices." And, "the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places." He's saying, "I finally found true joy and real happiness." This psalm is his *simple plan*.

Now...full disclosure. I chose that title with a double-meaning in mind. I'm suspicious of anything that smells cheap, trite, and self-helpish—sermons included.

This psalm really does offer a simple plan for happiness but it's going to challenge you to examine whatever plan you're following and compare it with God's. I'm not claiming this plan is easy, or cheap. But it is simple. It is clear. It is glorious. Now...

This Psalm is only 11 verses, but it's packed full of rich, truth. It's called "A Miktam," that is, a "golden psalm," or "The finest gold of David." We don't have time to mine out every piece of fine gold in this passage. But we'll explore **Three realities about happiness**.

SLIDE: Sermon Outline. 3 pts. Everyone Seeks Happiness. Few Find Lasting Happiness. God offers true happiness—on *His* Terms

Pt. #1. Everyone Seeks Happiness: We're all on a joy quest of some kind. I suppose this is more of an implied point in this psalm.

David acknowledges that people are chasing something. He says he has found no goodness beyond God. God is David's chief good. The end of the search. Then he says those who chase after another god multiply their sorrows (more on that in a minute).

SLIDE: We're chasing something we believe will make us happy. WE should. It's in our DNA. I stumbled across this quote years ago that still gets me: "All men seek happiness. This is without

exception...This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves." The author, Blaise Pascal was saying something profound. We're all on a quest for happiness.

Is he right? Of course he is. We all want to be happy, don't we? David begins this psalm with a confession and a request.

You are my Lord. I have no good apart from you: In Heb ("My good is not beyond you.") In other words, "I've finally found what I'm looking for." I don't think you can say that without some personal reflection. U2 *Still Haven't Found*. 1987. I was 12 years old and driving a tractor for hours a day on our farm. That song dominated the radio. First song that resonated with me. U2 fan.

I have climbed highest mountains. I have run through the fields only to be with you. I have run. I have crawled. I have scaled these city walls. Only to be with you. But I still haven't found **happiness**.

U2 called that a gospel song, but it was more of a *preparation* for the gospel song.

David's Prayer: "**Preserve me, God!. Protect me. Keep me**" Now this is the **David, the giant slayer** and killer of tens of thousands of the Lord's enemies, asking the Lord to hide him. He's the equivalent of a Navy Seal in the OT. What scares *him*?

I think this Psalm is David checking himself—examining his plan. He's taking inventory. His speech alternates from God, to himself, to us. He's preaching a sermon while praying. He's reminding himself: Stay on this simple path. It ends in pleasure. I get God!"

He asks God to protect him, to be his refuge. In doing that, he admits that he needs it! But what does the giant slayer need to hide from? Enemies out there? Not in this Psalm. Enemies in *here*... A fickle, insecure heart that will get seduced and misled.

He is saying, "Lord, **you are both the giver and the gift. Psalm 73** says the same thing. "**Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth I desire besides you.**" The quest is over.

So **the one who secures our highest good is our highest good**. Our joy is as secure as God Himself. He is the all-satisfying object. The highest good. The final source!

So David reminds us. We're all seeking happiness. *He* found it. And he's not the only one. Verse 3 tells us we're not alone in our discovery of joy. "The excellent ones..." We'll come back to that.

Pt. #2. Not Everyone Finds Happiness: "The **Counterfeit** **some** people concoct their own personal plan for happiness?"

SLIDE: Vs. 4: Many sorrows follow idolatry. The word for sorrow comes from the Hebrew word for **pain or wounds**. There is a distinct echo here from Genesis 3 and the fall. "**Multiply their sorrows.**" Similar words were spoken to Eve after she chose sin.

Choose anything for your refuge but God, and you **choose pain**. Self-inflicted wounds. Idols are grim reapers for joy. They kill it.

SLIDE: In 1993 a man named Scott Smith wrote a novel that he titled, "A Simple Plan." It was a runaway bestseller because the author chose ordinary, decent characters and demonstrated what happens when they look for happiness in the wrong place.

Hank Mitchell is a man in his early thirties. He's the accountant at a local feed store in the small Northern town where he grew up. He's married to his high school sweetheart and their first baby is on the way. Hank's life is simple, but he's happy. He loves his wife. He enjoys his job. His friends and family respect him. Life is good.

Until...one snowy afternoon on New Year's Day, he and two friends stumble upon a small airplane that crashed in the middle of a wildlife preserve. Inside the plane, they discover a duffle bag filled with money. LOTS of money. 4.4 million dollars.

Hank wants to hand the money over to the local authorities, convinced that's the right thing to do. But his companions persuade him otherwise, calling his discovery "The American Dream in a duffle bag." Eventually Hank agrees to keep the money, provided they follow his *simple* plan.

It's a simple plan. But it gets very complex...as plans often do.

There's a telling part in the story where Hank argues with his wife about whether or not they "need" the money. He says to himself: **She was right, of course... But just because we didn't need the money didn't mean we couldn't want it, couldn't see it as a salvation of a different sort, and put up some struggle to keep it.**"

Before the book ends, that "struggle" translates into Hank murdering 6 people. **The American Dream in that duffle bag drives him to do things he never thought himself capable of.** Lie. Cheat. Still. Kill. Conspire. Greed eats him alive on the inside.

At the end of the story, Hank is miserable. Most of his friends and family are dead. And the real irony is that the FBI has recorded the serial numbers on the large bills of money he stole. So the moment he spends the first \$100 bill, FBI agents will swarm him like bees. What a cruel ending.

Hank goes home and burns the money in his fireplace. It takes 4 hours to watch his American dream turn to ashes. It's tragic. vs. 4

Why in the world am I telling you about this book? Because I think the author is on to something. To write a best seller, you gotta tell the truth. You gotta spin a plot that resonates with *normal* human beings. And he nails it.

I think everyone in this room would agree that we are really all just like Hank Mitchell—if we're honest. We don't shoot our friends and family so that we can hold onto 4.4 million dollars (I *hope*). But we do chase happiness. Don't we? We chase after it like kids after an ice cream truck—just like every other human.

We would probably even admit—if pressed—that we have our own simple plan too, just like Hank Mitchell. And yet, so often we're miserable. We didn't set out to be sad. But it just didn't work out

SLIDE: That book opens with a quote to pique the interest of the reader. It says, "**No man chooses evil because it is evil. He only mistakes it for happiness...**" —**Mary Shelley** (idolatry)

Augustine and Calvin said that idolatry was **misplaced affections, inordinate desires**. Misdirected Worship.

“The man who rings the bell at the brothel, unconsciously does so seeking God” —**Bruce Marshall**

When Paul describes idolatry and its effects in Romans 1, he used the word *epithumeo*. Over-desires. That word is often translated evil-desires, but it's not always a desire for bad things. It's an over-controlling, misplaced, and idolatrous desire for good!

Idolatry is the sin that drives all other sins. That's why the first commandment. “**Have no other Gods before me.**” Worshipers!

SLIDE: David Foster Wallace was a brilliant novelist and English professor. He was also a postmodern philosopher who ended up taking his own life. In a famous commencement speech he said: *In the day to day trenches of everyday life there is no such thing as not ... worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of god or spiritual thing to worship.... is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough. Worship your own body and beauty, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you.... Worship power – you will end up feeling weak and afraid.*

Some idols: (1) fame and approval; (2) power and control; and (3) comfort and security. Why can't stop checking social media. Those desires—those restless waves (*epithumeo*)—surge at root.

Don't settle for lesser joys...they will turn into multiplied sorrows. C.S. Lewis compared that to settling for making mud pies in the slum when God offers you a holiday at the beach.

Chasing after idols produces misery. But not every story ends like Hank Mitchell's. Sometimes our simple plan *seems* to work. We get the money. We get the girl. We get the six-digit salary, the fit body, the respect and admiration we sought. Our candidate...

The short pleasure is there, like a credit card, but the pay-off will still come and it will come with interest.

Taking some incomplete joy in this world and building your entire life around it will only lead you to misery in the long run...

The Bible teaches us that. But so does history and experience.

SLIDE: Jeremiah 2 contains another graphic description of idolatry. “**Has a nation changed *its* gods, Which *are* not gods? But My people have changed their Glory For *what* does not profit...My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, *And* hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.** (like sand).

What broken wells have you dug to satisfy yourself? Maybe, if you were really honest, you'd have to admit that it's money. Or the acclaim of others. Or power. Or family. Friends, even church.

Michael Jordan. The most decorated NBA player of all time. He led the Chicago bulls to win 6 national championships, received the NBA most valuable player award 5 times. Now, he is over 50 years old, has retired over three times from basketball, and by his own admission is miserable.

In his 2009 Hall of Fame speech, Jordan called the game of basketball his “**refuge**,” the place he went to find comfort and peace. Now he's as restless and miserable as he's ever been. He asks, “**How can I find peace away from the game of basketball?**” He claims that his self-esteem and identity have always been tied directly to the game of basketball.”

John Cheever wrote, “*The main emotion of the adult American who has had all the advantages of wealth, education, and culture is disappointment.*”

SLIDE: John Coltrane, a very successful jazz musician in worldly standards battled heroine addiction and alcohol abuse for years. He found freedom from those, but the idol of his career hamstrung him. He would overwork. He would obsess about how he was perceived. He thought, like so many other professionals, “When people applaud me, and appreciate me, then I'll know I'm somebody. Then I'll be significant. Then I'll be happy.” He put the weight of his meaning on his performance as a musician. Since he enjoyed music too much, he didn't really enjoy it at all.

But night, Coltrane claimed to have had an experience of God's love that liberated him from his idolatry of music and praise. He had been given God's power and had felt God's pleasure.

Suddenly he started to enjoy music again. Why? Because he realized music was just music. *It ceased to be a devil when it ceased to be a god.* He stopped looking at music, and started looking through it. It was no longer an end in itself, and therefore he could truly enjoy it. Don't you want to live this way?

I'm not a connoisseur of fine jazz music. I'm sure I'm missing out. But I do understand the dangers of making a career bear the weight of your worship. Not only is that a dead end, it's a tragic dead-end.

"It ceases to be a devil when he ceases to be a god." ministry too

"Nearly all that we call human history is the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy." **C. S. Lewis**

Pt. #3. God's offer for complete happiness: vv 8-9, 11.

SLIDE: vv 8-11. This half of the Psalm was quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost. He quoted it in proof that Jesus had risen from the dead and that his resurrection was prophesied by David.

Peter's helps us to understand what it means to "set the Lord before us." in the way he quotes that verse. His quotation reads, "**I SAW the Lord always before me.**" That's it! Setting the Lord before you is to look to Christ continually—in every situation.

How do we do that? **Word, Prayer, Worship.** One of the ways is to show up at church—like you're doing now. To recalibrate. Back to vs. 3 **As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight** (vs. 3). That helps set our perspective.

They are the majestic/holy ones (Heb). All my delight is in them.

The others? I'm not buying what they're selling. I'm not believing their lie. I'm not advocating their lifestyle. I'm not supporting their idolatry. I know where it's headed...Me? I set the LORD first.

Because God was at David's right hand, David would one day be at God's right hand. Christianity is a fight to believe God's promises of happiness over the false promises of happiness. It often involves denying ourselves pleasure, but only denying ourselves a lesser, viler pleasure in order to have a much higher.

God's nearness. Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Confidence. What does "not being shaken" consist of? Fundamental confidence in God.

"I have set the Lord always before me; Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope."

Do you hear the cause and effect? Do you see the unshakeable confidence that the psalmist has? What produces that kind of confidence? "**I constantly trust in the Lord**" Not only do you get joy when you set the Lord always before you. You get security. Stability. You're solid. Good to go. Not because you are in control, but because HE is.

"*Your world is not out of control. It's just out of YOUR control.*" — **Paul Tripp**

Because he is at my right hand... What is at a person's right hand? **The most important thing to them.** In a courtroom, an advocate. In a throne room, the heir. In a battle, the general. It's also where the action is happening.

Nurse - In the ER
Soldier - In the Foxhole
Boxer - In the ring
Preacher - In the pulpit

I shall not be moved. Are you moved?

What do we DO to gain this confidence? Set the Lord before you at all times and in all places. He is our reality/lens. Worldview.

There is an unmistakable connection between putting your trust in God and possessing an unshakeable joy and confidence.

The storms will come, but you'll be fine. Jesus...sand/floods.

When the Holland Prime Minister believed Hitler's lies about honoring their neutrality on the radio, Corrie Ten Boom writes about her father's anger and turning off the radio. He said:

"It is wrong to give people hope when there is no hope. It is wrong to base faith upon wishes. There will be war. The Germans will attack and we will fall." Then his voice grew gentle again. **"Oh, my dears, I am sorry for all Dutchmen now who do not know the power of God. For we will be beaten. But He will not."** She writes, "He kissed us both goodnight and in a moment we heard the steps of an old man climbing the stairs to bed. —**The Hiding Place**

This Psalm says I will not be shaken. Why? Because he has an anchor and it goes deep. He's as stable as the tethered object!

Often, my kids will unbuckle their seat belts and get out of their seats before we pull into our driveway. I try and always take those opportunities to remind them of Newton's first law of motion: inertia. I tap on the brakes. It's my way to remind my children that they are unsafe, unstable, vulnerable, in danger. Unstrap yourself from the steel frame of the car, and you're on your own.

The Secret: Jesus. The Kingdom. The Pearl of Great Price.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. —**Mt 13:44–46.**

Do you know what this parable is teaching? Do you know what this PSALM is teaching? For us to give us whatever counterfeit we've found that is holding us hostage and come to the real thing.

When you finally catch what you're chasing and discover the end of the rainbow, you don't find a pot of gold—you often find disappointment. Then comes depression, regret, resentment.

SLIDE: Is. 55. A holiday at the sea awaits those who can hear the music. Idolatry is exhausting—and expensive. It promises us a good time but leaves us tired, broke, and hungry. We're dried up. Empty. Done. If we're thirsty, God is ready...

And that's the secret of change, really. If you haven't yet faced your failure, you're not ready. If you still have hope of success in the slums, you can't receive this appeal. You won't. There's only one qualification: desperation. That's why God begins with the strange condition of thirst.

If you are longing for change, you qualify. God sees you in your misery. And he comes with hope and promise.

Open yourself up to God.

The thirsty may come and drink
The broke may come and eat without money or without price
In other words, happiness is not as elusive or complex as we may think. It's at the feet of Jesus. He's waiting for you right now.

Final word: How can an idolatrous, sinful man like David find himself in the presence of God, where there is fulness of joy and pleasures forever more? And how can we?

The only man who was righteous enough to stand in God's presence was banished from it so that we could be brought back in. Jesus Christ was forsaken so we could be forgiven. We can enter God's presence through His broken body and shed blood.

In Eden, God stationed angels wielding a flaming sword of justice that any potential re-entry effort would have to overcome. In other words, if you try to get into God's presence again, you're looking at a bloody slaughter. God's justice will cut you to pieces.

But the Lamb of God was gladly slaughtered for us so that we could enter God's presence with joy and confidence.

That's what communion reminds us of and assures of us. God is on a mission to seek and to save that which was lost. Communion is our celebrating and remembering what it cost him. Let's pray.