



PURSUING HAPPINESS

Life. Joy. Pleasure.

PURSUING HAPPINESS: LIFE.

“YOU MAKE KNOWN TO ME THE PATH OF LIFE;
IN YOUR PRESENCE THERE IS FULLNESS OF JOY;
AT YOUR RIGHT HAND ARE PLEASURES FOREVERMORE.”

PSALM 16:11

What's up everyone! My name is Stephen Johnson, and I'm the College Pastor at Summit Church and IGNITE. Like you, I'm extremely excited for this school year. As we begin, I want to tell you a couple things about me, especially if you're a Freshman or a new student who may not know me or IGNITE super well yet.

1. The most important thing about me is that I love Jesus. He changed my life. When I was a junior in high school, I started reading my Bible for myself, and started falling in love with Jesus through the message of the gospel, and that has never changed. Without him, I was and would be a messed up dude. But he saved me, he rescued me, nothing I did on my own-he did it-and I owe him my life.
2. Second thing about me is that I have a wife, Ashley, who I am crazy about. We got married in 2015 after I spent all my money on a diamond ring. It's amazing what \$100k will buy... Now, five years later, we have a little boy named Walker and a little girl named Victoria, but we call her Scottie.
3. Another thing that you should know about me is that I love that FGCU. I was student there, graduated from there with an undergrad in Finance as well as my Master of Business. I walked those halls, sat in those seats, ate at the old Taco Bell on campus (RIP), and was there during the OG Dunk City days. I love that school. And I desperately want to see FGCU students love Jesus.
4. And lastly, I care a ton about you and this ministry a ton. Maybe you and I don't know each other yet, but let's not keep it that way. Some of you may have walked in here tonight because college is already a little scary, and you already had a professor scare you into thinking that the first exam was going to be really hard so you just came here to pray. Some of you are away from home for the first time and wanted something familiar, so you felt like church was probably a good idea. Some of your parents have your iPhone on find my friends to make sure that you came to church. Whatever the reason, I want you to know that I care about you, IGNITE cares a ton about you.

As you settle in here and try to figure out what you are going to make your college career about, let me tell you why IGNITE is here. *We exists to glorify God by making disciples who represent the gospel to every college student.* Real simply, we want every single college student on that campus to know about Jesus and the life that he offers. You see, there are 15,000 students on this campus, and about 96% of them don't know Jesus and the life he gives. I would submit to you that your primary responsibility for these four years, while you get your degree and rush your sorority and play on your sports' team, is to grow in your love for Jesus and to tell everyone in your sorority, everyone in your classes, and everyone on your sports' team about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why is the gospel so important? It is the ONLY way of salvation. In a world that tells us that there are many ways to heaven-that Jesus is just one way to get there-we look to the Bible which says something drastically different. In it, you'll read about a rebellious people facing the judgement of God. But you'll read that God actually loves the rebellious people and saves them from his judgement by dying in their place. The only way to life is faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus on your behalf.

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But now you're in college-surrounded by a world that rejects that message. It casts it off as silly, childish, fairy-tail stuff not meant for the real world. Well... most of the message. They can't reject the part about searching for life-everyone is looking for life. Ultimate happiness. This world, this campus, your major, your professors are looking for happiness and are following the promise of finding real happiness just around the corner.

And where do we look to find happiness? How does this world define happiness?

- Life – as in more than breathing; exhilaration; fulfillment
- Joy – that elated feeling when things go right for you! First date butterflies.
- Pleasure – able to swim in fun; always something exciting to see and do and experience

College drips with the prospect of life, joy, and pleasure—even in the COVID era. The allure is that you get four years to pursue happiness in the moment, every day, with no reason to look back! Every night something fun to see and do that will make you feel alive! And then, while you're experiencing happiness right now, your professors tell you, they are getting you ready to make lots of money so that you never have to take a break from life, joy, and pleasure. Your future is dripping in an endless supply of happiness. Just keep pushing! You are almost there!

Except... our experience so far in life probably tells us a different story. If college and careers and families and traveling and money is oozing with the prospect of ultimate happiness—life, joy, pleasure—why haven't our parents found it? Why is there so much fighting in the world? Why do I still wake up with a pit in my stomach? Why is it that the amount in my paycheck is never enough or crave traveling when I'm home but miss home when I'm traveling?

Everyone on that campus is pursuing happiness, but the life they experience is fleeting, the joy you're offered is unfulfilling, and the pleasure you experience is fleeting. It's there for a moment, then, it's gone.

But remember the gospel story. The Bible speaks about man's quest for happiness, satisfaction, and fulfillment as well. Except it promises much more than what your college experience or degree offer.

Psalms 16:11 – “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

That's right. How does the Bible define true happiness?

- Life (16:11a)
- Joy (16:11b)
- Pleasure (16:11c)

The same words, but totally different payoffs. The world gives you the knock-off version of Biblical happiness. Whereas the world offers you a momentary adrenaline spike, God promises you real life (lasting satisfaction). Whereas the world offers you temporary goosebumps, God promises lasting joy. Whereas the world offers short-term pleasure, God promises the type of pleasure that never fades!

Life, Joy, Pleasure. Happiness. Where are you looking to find it?

For the next three weeks, we are going to look at the promise of Psalm 16:11. Stick around to find how you can pursue happiness, and actually experience it.

THE PATH OF LIFE.

This week, let's tackle the issue of life. Psalm 16:11 is pretty cool because it actually tells us that life really exists and that there's a way to get to it! In fact, it actually goes so far that it tells us that God has made the way known. In other words, do you want life? Look here! For all of us, whether you're a Christian or couldn't care less, it's worth a listen. How do you get to life? Look at what the Word says...

1. The path leads to life.

All of our steps are leading somewhere. Even those of you who don't know what you want to study or what you want to do for your job in the future have hopes and goals. Our lives are leading somewhere, to some aim or end.

Illustration: I've never met anyone who is hoping for a merely average, adequate life. You may be the type of person who wants a “average” life, but that's because, to you, average sounds pretty awesome. No, when Josh asked you to describe a future that would make you feel fully alive or satisfying...

Some of you wrote down **money** -
Some of you wrote down **adventure** or **traveling** -
Some of you wrote down **boats** or **cars** or a **house in the Keys**
Some of you wrote down a **family**
Some of you wrote down **the American dream** - no stress, no worry, white picket fence
Some of you wrote down **power, career promotion, respected status** -
Some of you wrote down **the high life** - fun forever, a life filled with partying and sex
... and some of you ruined my game by writing down the Christian answer.

But the thing about all of those things are that they are temporary. Sure, you do get to enjoy them for a little bit, but not forever. They all end. It doesn't mean they are bad or you need to avoid all of them, but we all need to do some recalculating in our head. Hoping for lasting satisfaction and real life from owning a house in the Keys is like trying to put smoke in your pocket. It's there for a moment, but eventually, you realize it couldn't give you what you were looking for.

Explanation: There's something beyond those hopes and dreams that we have to think about. And it's the ultimate aim of our life. What do we experience our steps ultimately end here?

This passage teaches that there is a path that leads to a life after this one, and that it's a real life-a life of total satisfaction; a life where we are all alive all of the time; a life with no more sorrow, no more death, no more COVID; a life where a good King Jesus rules and reigns forever; a life of no more sin struggles, injustice, or abuse; a life without family disfunction, depression, or anxiety.

But life itself isn't our God. No, the reason the path is so good is that it leads us into the presence of Christ. And in his presence, we can breathe a deep soul satisfaction. No sin or struggle will stand in his way. Real life is found in the presence of Christ.

How can you get on this path? The Bible is clear. Place your faith in Jesus Christ. Why? It goes back to that rebellion conversation we had at the beginning. The Bible teaches that God created this world in perfection, including humanity. He was to be our King, leading us in harmony. Except humanity rebelled against God's rule, deciding that we could pick a better path than the one he laid out. But instead of leading to life, the paths we choose for ourselves lead to death. Death because our paths always involve hurt and pain, and death because rebellion against a King must be punished. The punishment for our rebellion is death. Except, God offers forgiveness for our rebellion, an opportunity to get back on the path of life. He sent his Son, Jesus, to die in the place of those who rebelled. Getting in on this path is simple: place your faith in Jesus Christ by submit your life to him by loving him and obeying him. If you'd like to do that, you can do it tonight. Let's talk.

2. The path is life.

This path is obedience to Christ, following his leading and guiding. And there's actually a double promise in this passage! This path doesn't just lead to life; real life can be experienced on the path right now! How can a man or woman truly live? By loving and obeying God. Obedience to Christ leads us to experience real life, real satisfaction, true joy and lasting pleasure in the here and now.

That might sound good, but what does that really mean?

There will be times when obedience to God's Word is the opposite of what we want to do.

This passage teaches that in those cases, we experience real life by obeying God. Often, obeying God means that we must deny our natural inclination toward sin.

In that case, it is better to experience Christ's comfort for sadness than momentary pleasure.

It is better to experience Christ's love when you're hurt than to pursue sinful lifestyles and relationships.

It is better to experience Christ's hope for the future than your hope for right now.

Here's the thing, the Bible never claims that the life of obedience is Christ is easy. What it claims is that the path of obedience is the most life-giving life you could ever experience. Here's how Jesus describes happiness and the path of obedience:

Matthew 5:3-10: The Beatitudes

"You're **blessed** when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

"You're **blessed** when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

"You're **blessed** when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

"You're **blessed** when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

"You're **blessed** when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

"You're **blessed** when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

"You're **blessed** when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

"You're **blessed** when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom."

If this seems upside down to you, join the club. But don't let it stop you from taking part. When you pursue Christ, you will experience a life too satisfying to describe.

AIM FOR THE HEART.

- 1.** To the one who hears these words, but still thinks your way is better, look beyond tomorrow.
- 2.** To the Christian whose path doesn't seem happy right now, trust in God's good guidance.
- 3.** To the one who wants to get on the path, trust in Jesus.