

Happiness Code
Secret Ingredient of a Happy Heart
May 31, 2015

Now imagine with me for a minute, what it would be like to approach a day like that. What if you and I decided that for at least one day, we were going to look on the bright side for 24 hours, and make tomorrow the best day ever. Or what it would be like if we made tomorrow a grumble free day? You know, we could declare it

“No Complaint Monday!”

That would mean when the alarm goes off tomorrow at 5:30am, no complaining. When you look in the mirror, no matter how bad it looks, no grumbling. When you get in the car and drive, or when you get on the bus, or when you go to work, or sit at your desk, regardless of what happens, no whining.

When you get on the scale, whatever numbers you are looking at, no complaining. Or when you face a cranky person, or when difficult things come your way and they will, like when your laptop takes 15 seconds longer than normal to boot up, or your cellphone coverage is spotty or when you can't find the TV remote control and God forbid, you have to get up from your Lazy boy recliner and manually change the channel...no complaining.

How different would a day like that feel?

I think most of us can't imagine a day like that. We know intuitively that every day can't be the best day ever because stuff happens. And when it does, we often start to complain or grumble or whine. But what if I told you there's a way to overcome a negative grumbling attitude? What if I told you there is a secret ingredient to a happy heart? And what if I told you that you can tap into that ingredient every single day? Would you believe me? Do you want to know what the secret ingredient is? I'm going to keep you in suspense for now but we will get to it in just a few minutes!

Review

Before we look into the secret ingredient of a happy heart, I just want to remind you that we are currently in the middle of a series called "The Happiness Code". For the past three weeks, Rick has shared with us some amazing principles about happiness and what it looks like.

Week 1: Habits of the Never Happy

Week 2: The Elusiveness of Happiness

Week 3: A Contrarian's Guide to Happiness

In week 1, we learned that people who are chronically unhappy repeatedly act in ways that prolong their misery. For example, they believe happiness is dependent on circumstances, or they compare themselves to others, or they go it alone, or hold grudges. On the contrary, happy people don't sabotage their happiness with these behaviors.

In week 2, we learned that happiness is the byproduct of a meaningful life. If you aim for happiness, you will get neither happy nor meaningfulness. Meaning (and happiness) comes when we invest most deeply in what matters most: our calling from God and our relationships. Last week, Rick taught us that happy people are those who finally discover that it's not “all about me.” They find joy in laying down their lives in sacrifice and generosity. They die to themselves and live for God and others.

A Challenging Command

Today, we are going to look at “The Secret Ingredient of a Happy Heart.” In order to provide some biblical context for this message, I want to begin by reading out of the book of Philippians. As Rick has been saying throughout this series, the book of Philippians is one of the best biblical resources for the study of happiness. In Philippians we learn how the Apostle Paul was able to maintain a happy disposition in spite of overwhelming circumstances.

So let's read Philippians 2:14-15.

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky. Phil 2:14-15 NIV

A minute ago, I asked you to imagine with me what it would be like if you and I decided for at least one day, we were going to look on the bright side and declare tomorrow a grumble free day. Maybe you thought I was kidding. But actually, I was quite serious. I was offering you a practical application for the underlying principle found in the verses I just read.

You see, Paul isn't just encouraging us in these verses to test drive a grumble free day. No, he's taking it one step further. He's challenging us to live EVERY DAY like that. He's not just saying make tomorrow a grumble-free day, but to make EVERY DAY the best day ever by not grumbling, complaining or whining.

If you are like me, your first reaction to that is: "Really Paul? Really? Do EVERYTHING without grumbling or arguing? You've got to be kidding!"

I wish Paul had been a bit more realistic and down-to-earth, don't you? He could have said, "Just try to do most things without grumbling or disputing." That's more realistic. I could give that a try. But do everything? Seriously?

Here's something interesting I discovered while studying this passage. The word translated as "DO EVERYTHING" in this passage is emphatic in the Greek text. In other words when Paul said DO EVERYTHING

without grumbling or arguing, he meant DO EVERYTHING. Paul isn't letting us off the hook!

If we were honest, we probably downplay grumbling more than any other sin. We tend to make excuses for it. But it doesn't have to be that way. In fact, the life of the apostle Paul's demonstrated that it IS possible to live without complaining and grumbling, even in the midst of the most challenging circumstances.

Now before you dismiss this whole message as nonsense or write off the Apostle Paul as being unrealistic, I want to challenge you to listen carefully to what I have to say over the next several minutes. Hang in there with me and see if God might just reveal something new to you. He did that for me while I was preparing for this message and I hope he does it for you as well.

What Grumbling IS

To set the stage for the rest of this message, I want to go back to the passage in Philippians we read earlier and examine what Paul meant when he used the word "grumbling". The word "grumbling" in this passage is the Greek word,

***gongusmōn*, which literally means "to murmur or secretly debate about something."**

In the context, Paul is primarily telling us to stop murmuring and complaining against one another in the church. But to grumble against any person or any circumstance for that matter is to grumble against God because oversees all things in our lives. So Paul's command here means that we have to confront grumbling and griping as sin, regardless of what reason is behind it.

So that begs the question: What makes grumbling, griping and complaining a sin? Why does God dislike it so much? Here's the bottom line:

Grumbling is acting like “everything sucks” when it really doesn't. When we grumble, we can't see anything good. Everything is bad -- life is miserable and we want to make it that way for everyone else. Sound like anyone you know? Maybe even yourself? At the heart of most of our grumbling is a spirit of ingratitude. One of the most vivid illustrations of a spirit of ingratitude is found in the Old Testament book of Exodus.

When you read Exodus, you discover how God delivered Israel from Egypt in a powerful way. He sent the plagues, then He led Israel to the edge of the Red Sea. He miraculously parted the sea so that Israel could march through on dry ground, and then brought the sea back on top of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army.

Then, after these mighty demonstrations of God's power and care, we read next that, just three days journey into the wilderness, they came to a place where there was no water (Exod. 15:22). Coming right on the heels of their mighty victory over the Egyptians (Exod. 15:1-18), we read how they start to whine when they lacked water. You might think, "What's the problem? If God parted the sea, he can provide water." But instead we read,

"The people grumbled at Moses" (Exod. 15:24).

Then we read how they grumbled because there was no food (16:2), so the Lord provided manna. Then they grumbled because there was no meat, so the Lord provided quail (16:8-13). Then they ran out of water again, and they grumbled again, and the Lord again provided water (17:3).

But in their grumbling and disputing against Moses, they were really grumbling and disputing against God.

Unfortunately, we are just like the Israelites. This same kind of grumbling behavior shows up in us as well. Those of us who know Christ are also God's people, just like the Israelites, and we have been delivered from the bondage of sin by God's mighty power through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We, too, have seen His power displayed time and time again. But every now and then we find ourselves in a "wilderness situation" where we have run out of some basic resource

and don't have a clue where it's going to come from, and we start to grumble or freak out. Maybe it's because of a financial setback, or the loss of a job, or maybe it's a marital conflict, or an unexpected medical diagnosis.

Whatever "wilderness situation" we find ourselves in, the question for us today is how will we respond? Will we begin to grumble and complain against God? Will we say to him, "How could you do this to me when I've faithfully followed You?" Or will we patiently wait for him and trust in his deliverance as we shine forth as lights in a dark world?

The bottom line is this: when we grumble, we are acting like "everything sucks" when it really doesn't. When we display this type of behavior, it reveals a lot about our character. And as we saw with the Israelites, God hates it when his people turn into a bunch of whiners and complainers.

Lamenting vs. Complaining

I want to clarify one thing before we continue. Not EVERY negative complaint that comes out of our mouths is sin. Not all complaining is bad. In fact, there is a word in the Old Testament that describes a positive form of complaining. That word is the word "lament." A lament is an expression of sorrow, a description of distress, or a protest about injustice. The bible makes it clear that lamenting is a good thing.

Last year Rick spent some time talking about the biblical concept of

lament – where we take all the junk you feel about your life and the losses you have suffered and then in an act of worship, literally dump them on God.

We learned that a large percentage of the book of Psalms in the bible are prayers of lament. Over and over again we read in the Psalms how King David cried out to God and poured out of of his griefs to God and was even angry at God at times for not acting on his behalf. But there is a big difference between lamenting and complaining. Lamenting is a God-focused spiritual encounter that purifies and strengthens the heart.

Complaining is not.

You see, once you've gone through with the process of lamenting, there is a sense of relief because you've gone to God and dumped your junk on him. Sometimes you may have to go back to God and lament several times and pour it all out again, but the process serves to build you up. It makes you stronger.

On the other hand,

complaining is an unfocused negative ongoing commentary that accomplishes nothing. Instead of being God-focused, it's unfocused. It just pours out of me on everyone and no one in particular.

Whoever is unfortunate enough to be around me in the moment I'm complaining gets to hear it. Instead of being spiritual it's negative.

Instead of being a short-lived, directed encounter with some closure to it, it's a persistent commentary that just goes on and on and on. Instead of purifying and strengthening the heart, complaining accomplishes nothing. While the Scripture gives us room for lamenting, it warns against complaining and grumbling. As we have seen already, we are **COMMANDED** to stop being complainers. So how do we stop all this complaining, grumbling, murmuring, and whining? What's the secret ingredient to a happy heart?

The Secret Ingredient

When we take look at our passage once again, it is clear we are told what **NOT** to do.

Do everything without complaining or arguing...

But the obvious next question is what **SHOULD** we do instead? I think the answer to that question is found in what is **IMPLIED** in this passage as well as what can be found in other writings of the Apostle Paul on the subject of happiness. Let me read just a few of Paul's other thoughts on this subject and see if you can guess what's the secret ingredient to a happy heart.

Be joyful in hope, Romans 12:12

Rejoice always! I Thess. 5:16

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.1 Thess 5:18

In its simplest form, the secret ingredient of a happy heart is:

An Attitude of Gratitude

Throughout his letters, Paul expressed this “Attitude of Gratitude” in many different ways. Be joyful, give thanks, rejoice...all of these are just other ways to describe an attitude of gratitude. If there ever was an antidote to a complaining spirit, it is this idea of gratefulness.

Gratefulness is the secret ingredient to happy heart. If you want to be happy, start by being grateful.

Now our tendency when we hear something like this is to say, “Ladell, I think you have it backwards. Once I am happy, then I will be grateful”.

But here’s what’s interesting about that. Psychologists are discovering that gratitude and happiness are linked in a way you might not expect.

The more grateful we are, the happier we are – not the other way around.

We think we will be grateful once our circumstances change. We think that gratitude is a byproduct of our circumstances. But that’s incorrect.

Increased gratitude does not come from increased gratification. That’s what the Apostle Paul has been trying to teach us:

Happiness is not a product of the circumstances I inhabit, but the person I become.

Just look at circumstances Paul found himself in. If ever a person had a reason to grumble, whine and complain, it was Paul. Listen to the litany of “circumstances” he encountered in life:

Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with a rod. Once I received a stoning. Three times I suffered shipwreck. A night and a day I spent adrift in the open sea. I have been on journeys many times, in dangers from rivers, in dangers from robbers, in dangers from my own countrymen, in dangers from Gentiles, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the wilderness, in dangers at sea, in dangers from false brothers, in hard work and toil, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, many times without food, in cold and without enough clothing. Apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxious concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast about the things that show my weakness. 2 Cor 11:24-30 NIV

If anyone had a reason to complain and grumble, it was Paul. Yet after all of that “boasting” about his difficult life, Paul concludes by saying, ***Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor 12:9,10 NIV***

What Paul is saying is that happiness is not about the stuff you accumulate or the circumstances you inhabit, but the person you are becoming. We are called to become people whose lives are characterized by gratefulness.

Now before I give you some practical ways to develop an “attitude of gratitude,” I want to show you some of the fringe benefits of a grateful life.

Benefits of Gratitude

If you weren't already convinced of the importance of developing a grateful heart, let me show you a fascinating diagram.

Benefits of Gratitude (leave diagram up through “other findings”)

Now we don't have time to dissect every aspect of this diagram, but let me just say that SECULAR research is full of evidence that developing a grateful heart will reap tons of benefits for us. This diagram alone lists 25 benefits of gratitude in the areas of our health, career, personality, social and emotional life.

In addition, here are a few other findings:

- During one scientific study in 2007, patients with high blood pressure were instructed to count their blessings once a week. As a result, they experienced a significant decrease in systolic blood pressure.

- In another study, gratitude correlated with improved sleep quality, less time required to fall asleep, and increased sleep duration.
- In a 2003 study, keeping a gratitude journal caused participants to report:
 - 16% fewer physical symptoms
 - 19% more time spent exercising
 - 10% less physical pain
 - 25% increased sleep quality
- Multiple studies show that levels of gratitude significantly correlated with vitality and energy.

These are just a few of the many positives benefits reaped from a grateful life.

Developing an Attitude of Gratitude

After seeing the chart, I think you'll agree that the development of gratitude pays huge dividends. But let's spend that last few minutes of our time together talking about how to develop an "attitude of gratitude".

There are three principles that you must know if you want to develop this "secret ingredient" in your life.

Principle 1: Gratitude is a learned behavior.

One of my biggest "a-has" while preparing for this message was that gratitude isn't a product of your personality types, or your

circumstances, but rather it's a learned behavior. We can develop an attitude of gratitude in spite of our personality or our circumstances. When you read Paul's letter to the Philippians, you soon discovered that he had to "learn" to be content in all things. It didn't come naturally.

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:11-13

Paul's says contentment is something he learned. If contentment can be learned, then gratitude can be learned as well. That's principle #1.

Principle 2: Gratitude must be expressed, not just felt.

In Luke 17, we read about a time when Jesus miraculously cured ten lepers of their disease. What's interesting about this story is the fact that only one of the ten came back to thank Jesus. Here's what it says the book of Luke:

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”
Luke 17:15-19 NIV

John Ortberg makes an interesting observation about this account of the lepers. He says,

If you would have stopped any of those other ten lepers on the street that day and asked them, “are you grateful for what just happened to you?”, I guarantee you every one of them would have said, “Are you kidding, of course I feel grateful!” But only one of them came back and threw himself at Jesus’ feet and said, ‘thank you’. There’s an enormous difference between “feeling” gratitude and “expressing” gratitude.

None of us in this room thinks of ourselves as ungrateful, do we? I didn’t until I read Ortberg’s comments. Most of us FEEL grateful for all of the blessings we enjoy in life. The problem is that all the people in your life like your family, your friends, your neighbors, your co-workers, they all experience unexpressed gratitude as ingratitude.

(repeat) That was Jesus’ main point about the lepers. Ten were healed and nine felt grateful but only one expressed gratitude to Jesus.

So here’s the question for us today: Are we going to be like the nine who went on their way feeling grateful or like the one who expressed a heart of gratitude to Jesus?

You see, it turns out that

one of the best ways to experience more gratitude is to express more gratitude.

The more gratitude we express, the more gratitude we experience and the happier we become. Which leads me to the final principle and that is,

Principle 3: Daily, tangible expressions of gratitude build a happy heart.

This is the main application to today's message. This is the secret of a happy heart. Express your gratitude in as many ways as you can as often as you can if you want to experience more happiness in your life.

To be totally honest, I was deeply convicted about my ingratitude as I was preparing for this message. I felt just like I was one of the nine lepers who didn't express gratitude to Jesus. Even though I often feel grateful, I don't often express it. So one of the ways I've begun developing an "attitude of gratitude" has been to create a "gratitude journal". For the past few weeks, I've made it a priority as part of my morning routine to write down three things I'm grateful for. But I don't just write down what I'm grateful for, but also WHY I'm grateful for each item on my list. Here's an example of some of the things I've been grateful for lately:

My Gratitude List

If you don't laugh at my list of gratitudes then I won't laugh at yours!!

Now you may want to develop an attitude of gratitude differently than I did. Maybe you will want to write a thank you note to someone who has made a difference in your life, like your parents, or a friend, mentor, or coach. Or maybe you will begin by making a phone call or verbal affirmation to someone you love.

But whatever you do, begin to express your gratitude one way or another on a daily basis. As you do, you will not only experience more gratitude, but happiness will be a byproduct as well.

Closing

In closing, I just want to say that developing an “attitude of gratitude” is a choice. Happy people choose an attitude of gratitude for they HAVE instead of grumbling about what they have NOT. Happy people learn how to be grateful and they express their gratefulness early and often. As we learn to express our gratitude, happiness is sure to follow.

After I pray, we are going to get an opportunity to express our gratitude to God during our closing song. But before we do, I want to close by reading one of the most meaningful lines from the song. It says, “For all your goodness I will keep on singing, 10,000 reasons for my heart to find.” That’s my prayer that each of us would learn how to have an attitude of gratitude. For if it is true that we have 10,000 reasons to be grateful, then we have a lot of praising to do. Let’s pray.