



***WK.5 - GROUP DISCUSSION
HAPPINESS: CHOOSE IT***

Message by JB Powell

START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer this question:

Think about something you bought as a child/teenager/adult that you were sure would make you happy (shoes, toys, cars, products...) How long did you enjoy it? Where is it now?

SHARE

Welcome back to our ongoing series entitled, “Happy.” In this week’s message we spent our time talking about the root of discontentment and how, with God’s help, we can actually choose to be happy.

It’s scary how quickly we can become dissatisfied with things, situations, or our lives isn’t it? Just when you think you finally got the car, the job, the girl, the house, or the (insert word here), something or someone comes along and plants the seed of discontentment. In fact it feels almost like everything around us is designed to make us discontent and unhappy with our stuff and our lives. On top of that, society has plenty of ideas on what we need to do to be content and happy. The problem is that their solutions aren’t working and they’re actually making us more and more discontent.

Read Ecclesiastes 6:7

With Solomon writing about it in Ecclesiastes, it’s clear that our tendency to be discontent has been with us for a long time. that He can give us life to the full.

Is there anything about this passage that stands out to you?

Why do you think we struggle with this “hunger” so much?

Why is it so easy for us to recognize what we don't have or what's wrong with us and so hard for us to see how blessed we are?

Think deeper than simply accumulating things, what do you think is at the heart of our dissatisfaction with our situation or our self? Where does this come from?

GROW

In his message, JB talked about how as we feed our "appetite," rather than being satisfied, we find ourselves wanting more and more and the fact is, we all know this to be true on varying levels. The good news is that we don't have to live our lives in this never-ending cycle of temporary satisfaction followed by a need for more.

In his message JB referenced a quote by Jonathan Edwards, an 18th century theologian, stating: **"The kind of happiness I am most interested in is the kind that intersects with contentment."**

You see, this search for happiness isn't bad. In fact the Bible repeatedly tells us implicitly and explicitly to find happiness and contentment in this life. So how do we reconcile this notion that we'll never be content while simultaneously knowing that God is most glorified when we are happy and content with the lives he has blessed us with?

Read Philippians 4:11-13

The New Bible Commentary has this to say:

Their gifts had been a joy and encouragement to him, but he was not relying on them, nor, by writing like this, was he soliciting further gifts... In writing these things, Paul uses a word that had significant religious and philosophical use in those days. The word translated content means 'self-sufficient.' It was regarded by the stoics as high virtue to be detached from outward circumstances and to have resources in oneself to meet every situation. Paul uses the word in the sense of his being independent of circumstances, but his all-sufficient resources were, he said, through him who gives me strength, the living Lord Jesus.

Through this, it becomes clear that it isn't the search for contentment and happiness that is the problem but rather what we have come to believe will make us happy and what we consequently search for. It also becomes clear by Paul's wording that contentment, like many disciplines, is something that can be worked on and learned.

What are your thoughts on the passage in Philippians?

How does the thought of 'practicing' contentment sit with you?

Think of the area you feel most discontent. Why do you think that is?

How could practicing contentment change things for you?

MOVE

Paul shares that the secret of contentment can be boiled down to a practice of focus. If we are struggling to be happy and content with our current lives and situations, all we need to do is simply evaluate what we are focusing on.

Re-read Philippians 4:13

Read 2 Corinthians 9:8 & 12:9

In his message, JB gives us two practices to help us learn contentment:

First, we need an eternal perspective. We need to recognize that our existence is so much bigger than the short time we spend here on earth. When we spend our time looking up, it's hard to look around. A big part of this is adopting a posture of prayer. Rather than using prayer as a last resort, we ought to pray first and let that filter how we see things around us.

What would your life look like if prayer were your first step in everything?

Would that change things for you?

Second, we need to be thankful. In his message last week, Shawn spent a little time putting things in perspective for us, living here in the United States. We have so much to be thankful for. A truly thankful heart has a really hard time being discontent. If we could get to a place where thankfulness took precedence, our happiness and contentment in this life would reach new levels.

If you were to get to a place where thankfulness was your first impulse in anything, what would have to change?

How have these two 'steps' challenged you?

We all have that one area where this really hits home. How will changing your perspective and focusing on being thankful change this? Would you share it with the group?

Conclude with any final thoughts or questions.

PRAY

As a group, spend some time praying for each other and the struggles that we all face. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men and women's groups to talk more freely.

TO GO

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Happiness is such a tricky topic. A great resource that tackles this in great depth is John Piper's book *Desiring God*.