

GIVING HAPPILY +++

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Well, I've got an uncomfortable relationship with the word comfort. Like if you told me Jesus is coming back tomorrow, I'd be excited about that. But then I'd also think, but I never got to play that 18 holes of that world-renowned course. Can I go do that real quick? Just get that done before he comes back.

Charles Dickens once said that minds like bodies will often fall into an ill-conditioned state from mere excess of comfort. And for whatever reason, like my mind goes to comfort so often in life. In fact, in every future version of myself, ideal version of myself, I find myself far more comfortable. And there's something uncomfortable about that.

In my future version of myself, I do, I've got a solid short game. I'm likely a country club membership. And I might even have my own golf cart with my name engraved and maybe a sports logo of my favorite team on the side. I don't know, but why does every future ideal version of myself, why am I more comfortable? And why am I uncomfortable with that?

There's a passage in Romans seven, where Paul sounds a lot like me, a babbling lunatic. He says things like, I know what I ought to do, but I don't do what I ought to do. And I do what I don't want to do. Why do I do what I don't want to do and don't do what I do want to do? And it's a really beautiful kind of letting us in on a post converted, already believing in Jesus, greatly following Jesus' mind that is still somehow, though connected to God and his purposes, but also still pulled by the world's purposes.

And like, for me, this wrestling, this tension is real, like comfort is good, but the way I crave it might not be. I know it's good because comfort is a biblical idea. Heck, even in Isaiah, there's 39 chapters of prophecy of Isaiah. That's really challenging for the people to hear. And then finally, beautiful words come in chapter 40, verse 1. Say the words that are underlined with me, comfort, comfort, my people says your God. After 39 chapters of discomfort, ah, comfort.

Even the one that sounds like a babbling lunatic Paul would write in second Corinthians one, praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of compassion and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our trouble so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. Even one of the titles of the Holy Spirit is known as the great comforter. So comfort is good.

So why am I uncomfortable with it? I think probably two reasons that I can verbalize with you in my therapy session with you right now. Number one, you can send me the bill later if you want, but number one, I think I've lived long enough in this life to know that the comfort of this world is different than the comfort that God's talking about, that there is a real difference between the comfort God promises and the comfort the world promises to provide.

But number two, I think if I really flesh it out, comfort is perhaps my greatest idol. And though comfort is a good thing, if any good thing becomes the best thing, then it's a bad thing. And that's why I'm uncomfortable with comfort. Why does every ideal picture have myself more comfortable?

If I were to continue to go into my happy place, my comfortable place, it would be far more than just the golf stuff I told you about earlier. Of course, my wife would be there. Getting that out there. I probably should have started with the wife, then the golf. But anyway, and my kids, I should put them before, although they're getting older and so golf.

Anyway, wife, kids will be there. Everybody will be happy. Everybody will be healthy. Ten years from now, I might even have a grandkid. I don't know. Grandpa Zach would be so wise at that point. And I'm looking forward to that. And I'm probably living in a nice home, driving a nicer vehicle than I'm driving right now. My retirement accounts are strong and trending in the right direction.

Likely have a few vacations baked into my annual calendar. Maybe a monthly steak night out every month, because why not, right? That's comfortable. I'm also preaching better. And my audience and platform is bigger. And King of Kings has got seven campuses a decade from now. And they're all growing. And we're only three away from our 20-year vision we embarked on just a few years ago. Everything is awesome.

And there's some spiritual good elements in that. But you know what's there in every aspect of it? My comfort. What if 10 years from now, my life didn't look like that? But I was a greater follower of Jesus. What if instead I had a smaller home? I had less possessions, still driving the same vehicle, maybe same model of vehicle that I'm driving right now.

What if I lived well below my means so that I could be generous in as many times as possible? What if, you know, I'm not saying vacation's wrong, but what if I annually was serving on a mission trip? What if I served others so that they could get a platform or a stage or influence? What if I'm still playing golf, but I don't have a country club membership? And I'm struggling to find Omaha local tee times, which are even more challenging a decade from now.

And I just find it grateful for the times I do get to play. I'm not saying that you shouldn't have nice things and you shouldn't experience vacations and steak nights. Do all that and have all those things. But I'm struggling to find Jesus at the center of my ideal future self. And for a pastor and for someone who has a life mission to be the greatest follower of Jesus and to help others be the greatest disciple of Jesus, that's not comfortable for me.

So thank you for listening. What would you do? Is comfort my greatest idol? And the reason I kind of went on that journey with you in my mind is because I bet it sounds, if you're honest, a little bit of the things that go on in your mind. That in this world where we're called to follow Jesus, we're still being pulled by the world.

And we know comfort is a good thing, but it can become a bad thing when it becomes the number one thing. And we do. We live in a world obsessed with comfort. We have beds that cool and warm to a specific number. Most of our vehicles that are made today don't just come with dual temperatures, but like three or four different temperatures in the different seats.

We have cars that park themselves and groceries that appear on our doorsteps. We are surrounded by comfort and yet the catch is this, more worldly comfort doesn't lead to more happiness. In fact, sometimes it's the opposite. We chase comfort and it ends up leaving us restless.

Anthropologists have actually studied societies with abundant comfort and those societies often report greater levels of stress, anxiety, worry, and depression than those that daily face hardships or discomfort. Worldly comfort, friends, is not the goal. Contentment in God is the goal. And that's what I want to talk about today is what if rather than always being on the chase for more, more and more comfort, we kind of learned how to live with this thing called contentment that God gives to us.

So today we're going to explore how true happiness comes through contentment. And to get there, we're going to look at three lies of the world matched with three truths of Jesus that kind of amazingly are all backed by modern day science. And then at the end, I'll tell you about a YouTube personality named Ryan Trahan. That's quite inspiring to me. So let's go.

World lie number one. This is a big one. It's a doozy. The more you have, the happier you will be. Seems logical, right? Bigger house, more happiness, nicer car, more joy, fatter paycheck, more peace, greater retirement account, more security. More you have, the happier you'll be.

And if that were true, then collectively we'd be experiencing levels of bliss and happiness that the world hasn't seen up to this point. But somewhere between chasing more and actually achieving it, we've realized that's a lie and that comfort has a ceiling.

Researchers have found that there are certain ways that you can use money to buy happiness, if you will. And one of the things they say is that for someone to achieve happiness, it can come at a certain income level. They say that when someone breaks out of lower class income into middle class income, that that does bring really great happiness to that family.

In other words, especially if you've been fighting generational poverty, and the moment you come out of that and get an income that's middle class, that's a beautiful, it's a thing that you ought to celebrate and make you happy and maybe go have a steak about. And that number in 2010 was \$75,000 a year. Adjust it for inflation today, that'd be maybe right around \$100,000 a year, a really nice salary.

You can get yourself a really great house, you can have a nice car, you can do vacations, and you can live happy. And I think because that does bring happiness, and people do achieve that from time to time, the lie then is that if I get more, then I'll be even more happier. But the research says actually at that level, the joy curve plateaus. And yet people keep chasing it.

Professor of theology at Yale, which means this guy's smart, Miroslav Volf says this, humans are never satisfied. Even when they achieve what they want, there's more to want. Our striving can therefore find proper rest only when we find joy in something infinite.

So the first truth of Jesus we'll look at today is the more you give, the happier you will be. Two researchers, Elizabeth Dunn and Michael Norton asked the question that you've all heard before. Maybe you've said, or you've heard somebody else say, can money buy happiness? To which all of us are like, I don't know, but can I be the test in that experiment?

And they've found the answer to be two words. It depends. It depends on how you spend it. And actually through their research, they talk over and over about those that spend it on behalf of others by giving generously experience more happiness in this world.

There was a Gallup poll that was done in 136 countries. That's a substantial poll, wouldn't you say? A lot of data that comes from it. And they found this to be true. It's kind of amazing that doubling your income in a year gives you the same levels of happiness that donating to a charity does.

And can I just ask a question? Which one's easier, right? One fills your soul with joy and the other fills your calendar with stress and anxiety. And I got to double my salary every year to keep these happiness levels up or, or, or I could, I could be generous.

That's amazing. Andrew Huberman is a neurologist and he's got one of the top podcasts in the world called Huberman Lab Podcast. He's a man who's also, my wife's a frequent listener of this podcast and he's actually on his own spiritual journey that kind of cool is saying yes, more and more to Jesus. So it's fascinating to watch an unbeliever kind of process and really sounds like he's turning into a believer.

But he says this, when we give, when we give our time, our resources, our effort in ways that are meaningful to others and sustainable for us, the brain's reward circuits light up. Generosity literally changes our neurochemistry, making us feel happier, more connected and more alive.

And so now scientists, neurologists are saying that giving releases the feel good chemical dopamine in the brain, which makes you happy. Now here's what I kind of find funny about all of this, that, that a professor of theology at Yale, researchers, scientists, and neurologists are basically just telling you what Jesus told you 2000 years ago. They finally caught up. Praise God. Amen.

I love it when science catches up to Jesus because there was that one time that Jesus said these words, it is more blessed to give than to receive more blessed. That word blessed in Greek means blessed, supremely blessed, happy. It's not hiding. It's not a secret, but friends are finally finding out about this.

And so Jesus's message now echoed by so many levels of science says this, true happiness isn't found in raising our standard of giving, but in elevating our standard of giving. But be honest, which one do you think about more? Do you think about your, your income and your accounts and your, and your net worth? Or do you think about how you can be generous?

Because one of them leads to more happiness than two up than the other. Why?

Number two that the world says is look out for number one, there is a time and a place to put your oxygen mask on first. Do you know when that is the airplane? And as advice in an airplane, that's good as a motto in an airplane, that's good. But if that becomes your lifestyle, it's far off.

Self-care is healthy, but self-centeredness is hollow. I know it's not always easy to see where that line is, but the world will push you more and more to self-care, putting your oxygen mask on first, secure your future, fill your cup, build your brand, gain your platform, seek your truth. You do you boo. And we chase it.

And honestly, many people have actually chased it and achieved everything that they can of this world. And yet they found that when they've become the main character in their own story and actually achieved something pretty substantial, that it's pretty hollow and empty at top.

You can build your kingdom for one and have everything this world has to offer. And yet that's the moment, sadly, when you realize it was all for nothing. And that's not the way of Jesus.

Jesus didn't climb ladders to find success. He hopped up and climbed up on a cross. And amazingly, it's not when he collected and hoarded and accumulated more that filled him up most, but rather when he was draining himself of a currency more valuable than money and sense, his very blood.

It was in that moment that Jesus found the greatest fulfillment he could on this side of heaven. You see, the truth of Jesus is not look out for number one, but he says things like deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. It's going to be hard, but worth it. That's not a tick tock trend, but it is the truth of Jesus.

Jesus' truth says don't look out for number one, but instead look out for others first. I've taught these next few verses a couple of times, but I want to revisit them. It's some little known verses in a well-known story where Jesus is by a Samaritan woman at a well.

And it's kind of cool, side note about this story, it's the longest one-on-one recorded conversation Jesus has with anybody. And you think of how many cultural barriers and boundaries he had to break to speak to this Samaritan woman of ill reputation, to restore her and redeem her.

And I love that because that shows you and me that God will spend as much time as he needs with you and as much time as he needs with me to restore us and redeem us to be the people he's called us to be.

And this woman then goes out and is an incredible evangelist to her city. The disciples, they had left prior to this conversation because they were hungry and they went out to get food. And so they're coming back onto this scene and it breaks in with verse 31, where his disciples said to Jesus, urged him, Rabbi, eat something.

But he said to them, I've got food to eat that you know nothing about. Disciples said to each other, they were confused. Could someone have brought him food? Did Jesus get Chick-fil-A on the Sabbath? How did he do that? Maybe a bigger miracle than the feeding of the 5,000, we're closed on Sundays.

And here's the Jesus truth. Do not miss this. My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Jesus says, you know, others think that by consuming, consuming, consuming, by getting more, getting more, getting more, that that's ultimately what will fill them up.

But Jesus is saying, yes, there is a time to consume, but you were made and you and I were made and wired to not just consume, but to contribute as well.

And what nourishes me and what fills me up more is when I'm contributing what God has put me here in this world to do. When I look out for others, when I'm generous with my time, my resources and my effort, we were made to contribute, not just consume.

And what's cool is psychology teaches us this. For a few decades, they taught it incorrectly through the Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. You can see that on the screen. For decades, they just taught the levels in gray there in the levels of gray, the five of them, the one at the top.

This is the more higher up you go, the more fulfillment you have on this side of heaven. The one at the top in gray that they taught for a while was self-actualization, that nothing in this world brings you more fulfillment than when you reach your potential, when you actualize yourself.

But then they added a few layers, a few levels to it a couple of decades ago. And kind of amazingly, they put one at top called transcendence needs above actualization.

And what transcendence needs teaches you is that the most fulfillment you can have on this side of heaven is you who have achieved your highest potential when you serve someone else, when you're generous with who you are, and you help them achieve their potential.

That's pretty awesome. Nothing fulfills you more than that. It's why even in my own story, I don't actually love the writing process, but it feels really fulfilling when I get my first book in the mail, like, man, that it is, it's really fulfilling to do and achieve hard things.

But what brings me more fulfillment is if one of you catches the Jesus stuff in here and is changed by that, that'll be so much more fulfilling.

Or like last week, when we had 50 people that ran a marathon or half marathon, it's super fulfilling to reach the end and to know I did it.

You finished the marathon. My family had a day this week where we all wore shirts celebrating my dad and said, you did it. And on the back of it said, my dad, the grandkids said, my grandpa turned 70 and finished a half marathon.

And it was amazing that dad was a celebrity everywhere we went. And they were asking him, they're proud of him, they were, they were, they were dabbing him up. The kids had glaze on them or something like that. I don't know, something like that.

And but what's more fulfilling is the 50 people that crossed the finish line. They did it for a reason. Not only did they do something that was awesome for them, but through their running and through their donations, we were able to build wells of water across Africa to bring clean water to those in need. And that is more fulfilling.

Pretty awesome. You guys did that. That's cool. Give yourselves a round of applause. Yeah, I didn't, I was here worshiping. You did that. That wasn't for me this year.

So two lies, more equals happier to look out for yourself. The third lie might be the most sneaky and dangerous because it actually sounds kind of wise, maybe even like good stewardship. And it's this, I'll give dot, dot, dot someday.

Once I get my savings built up, once I get that job, that's got that income. Once I get my student loans paid off, once I retire, then I'll give.

The problem someday rarely comes. And as your income grows, so do your desires. Your lifestyle inflates, your bills increase, your wants expand.

And suddenly the heart that was meant to be generous is drowned in a bunch of Amazon boxes on your porch every single day.

And you start buying into what the world tells you. In fact, I write about this on day 10 of giving challenge. If you're reading through the book that if you don't kind of know what you're going for, the world's happy to supply numbers for you.

And the numbers they supply are ridiculous. In 2024, there was a study done by Smart Asset, got to be careful how you say that. And they said for an individual in America to be comfortable, that individual needs to make \$96,500 a year.

For a family of four in our nation to be comfortable, you need to make \$235,000 a year. You could enter in your zip code. And so I did for mine and it said a little less than average American, but my family of four that I need to make \$223,891 to be comfortable.

Very specific by the way. I'm like, so if I make 223,890, I'm not comfortable. Where can I find another dollar please?

But that's ridiculous. And I, what if like, is this going to make people that see this feel less than that maybe already feel comfortable, but now they're seeing this and like, well, I should, should I be comfortable? I shouldn't be comfortable. I should be making more if I'm to be comfortable.

And my family of four has not made that. And I know people that on a half of that, a third of that, a quarter of that, or even less that feel way more comfortable than some that make more than that.

And what's noticeably missing about the way they break down what it means to be comfortable is this thing that nearly every branch of science plus Jesus teaches, generosity, it's nowhere in their study.

And again, multiple people think that, oh, the more I make, the more I'll give. Studies show that that's just not true.

In fact, a 2023 study showed that the poorest, those making \$25,000 or less gave the highest percentage, 4.6%. The middle income 50 to a hundred K gave 1.4% and \$150,000 earners or more gave 2.2%.

They keep 39 tokens and give one away. Doesn't matter the multiplier.

So Jesus never said give when it's convenient, he says, be faithful what you have. And the Jesus level truth is I can give now. I can give now.

You know, behavioral science models predicting future behavior show this truth. Generous behavior is more reliable than stated intentions.

That in other words, your actions today prove to me far more what you're going to do than what you say you're going to do.

That the intent to be generous is fine. But if you want to be a generous person tomorrow, the way to be generous tomorrow is to be generous today.

And again, Jesus tells us this, he says, whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with very much.

And that doesn't just mean with financial things that can mean that it doesn't always mean that.

But if you can be trusted with very little and be generous with very little, then you'll be trusted with very much.

So are you faithful to what you have today? Because who you are in this moment today is the best predictor of who you are becoming.

The apostle Paul, that same one that sounded crazy earlier, said these words from Philippians, powerful words.

I know what it is to be in need. And I know what it is to have plenty.

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether I was well fed or hungry, whether I'm living in plenty or in want.

I can do all this or I can do all things through him who gives me strength.

Maybe one of the most misquoted verses that I chose as my confirmation verse, because I thought it meant something different than what it actually means.

I thought it meant that I could make the NFL at age 55 if God was with me.

What it really means is I can be content in anything.

And that is the, Paul says, the secret of being content.

And I'm like, Paul, I don't know that it's much of a secret.

You put it in the Bible, bro. Plus it's not a secret.

It's in the words of Jesus.

And it's in science.

I've shown you so far that it's in psychology.

It's in neurology.

It's in anthropology.

It's in Yale theology.

It's everywhere.

Are you listening?

It's in stories and examples of people that we know, but the world just keeps shouting.

So more equals happier.

Look out for number one.

I'll give someday.

Jesus says, giving equals happier.

Looking out for others is most fulfilling and you can give now.

There's a YouTube personality that I find just incredible.

His name is Ryan Trahan and he's amassed more than 21 million subscribers on YouTube.

And so he's an influencer of the highest degree and he had early success on YouTube.

And by June, 2020, he'd already amassed more than 2 million followers, which is incredible.

And with the amount of content he was making with that many subscribers and that many watch hours, like you make bank.

And he discovered though, that everything that he was making, all the followers, the likes, the shares and the income that came with that, that at the end of it all, he was making all of this content, but he wasn't contentment, wasn't content.

And it was that year, the year of COVID, where his wife, Haley introduced him to Jesus.

And he believed in the gospel and he changed his life around and he was sitting in a church service and he was listening to a pastor preach about the type of work that people can do in this world.

And the pastor put two words on the screen and it was redemptive work.

That you can use your work, your vocation to be redemptive, to help others.

And that's when everything about his YouTube strategy changed and the type of content that he made changed.

And it was in June of 2022 that he embarked on kind of a fun project where he was trying to take one penny across the nation and deliver it to another YouTube personality named Mr. Beast.

And over 30 days, he started every day with a penny and he had to find money for food and housing and transportation.

So it was really fun to watch. How's he going to do it?

It was really creative.

He got a lot of odd jobs, but also so many people were generous along the way.

And as people were watching these videos, they also got the opportunity to be generous towards this cause because he was doing redemptive work.

He wasn't just doing this to do this.

He was doing it to raise money for Feeding America.

And so, yeah, he delivered a very large penny to Mr. Beast in 30 days.

But more importantly, he raised \$1.4 million with a penny through others' generosity.

And the closer he got to being done, the more joyful you could see everybody.

It was awesome to watch.

Fast forward three years to something he did just this past summer that I was just kind of enthralled by because I love this idea of generosity.

And he did this new challenge called 50 States in 50 Days, where he had a goal to stay in the best Airbnb that he could find in that state.

And then, of course, he was going to rank them.

But as he's doing this, he's raising money this time for St. Jude's Children's Research Project.

He had a goal to raise a million dollars, him and his wife, Haley, and they surpassed it by like day 10.

And in the end of the 50 days, they raised \$11.5 million for this charity.

Talk about doing redemptive work.

Now, the only negative thing about this whole series is where he ranked Nebraska's Airbnb on the states.

There are 50 states in America.

And guess where Nebraska's was ranked?

50th.

Which Ryan, if you're listening, Nebraska, it's not for everyone.

But I love that God is using his creativity and his platform and that after he met Jesus and was introduced to this idea that he could use his work to bring redemption and help to others that others might join in.

And that's exactly what happened.

The 50 states in 50 days, like people would give as they would watch online and they would read messages, him and Haley, at the end of every single YouTube video.

And I cannot tell you how many times there was a Bible verse being quoted.

And at least to my counting, the one that came up far and away the most often was this verse that Jesus said from the beginning today, that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

And I just think it's one of those, if you know, you know, verses because it's the secret, but it's not a secret.

If you know, you know, it's more blessed to give than to receive.

People were giving joyfully and it made a huge difference.

But the greatest act of generosity, it's not going to come from you and it's certainly not going to come from Ryan.

It's already been given to us by Jesus who gave himself fully for you, not when you had your life altogether, but when you were caught in your sin.

Jesus entered into this world.

And when you look at the moment that was probably physically the hardest moment that Jesus had ever gone through, there's this beautiful verse that Hebrews 12 verse 2 invites us to look not just at what was happening, but at the inside, the attitude, the posture, the body language of Jesus, that he wasn't giving of himself by gritting his teeth together or angry or to show you who he is, but rather it says that he endured the cross with joy, with happiness.

And I have to imagine again that in the worst moment physically of his human life, might it have been the most fulfilling moment though, because Jesus earlier said, my food is to do the work of him who sent me and to finish his work.

And so I just have to imagine that some of the joy that came from Jesus, maybe the most joyful statement that he ever made in this world, I'm using conjecture here, but I'm also made in his image and so were you.

And knowing what he said, I kind of wonder if the most fulfilling moment of his life was the three words that in Greek is just one word that he uttered, it is finished.

He generously did what God put him here to do and that while he was being beaten and tortured brought him great joy.

The generous life is the joyful life and so my challenge for you this week is what's one gift that you can give happily, cheerfully, prayerfully, intentionally.

If you missed last week, many of us are reading the 40 day book that goes along with this series.

We're on day six. The first five days are the easiest.

I made them that way so you could catch up really quick.

You can grab a book in the next step space, but if you missed last week, I said to you that we're going to challenge you to give five gifts, one each week, starting this week to kind of get your giving muscles moving a little bit, no more atrophy.

We want to grow these muscles because the more generous you are, the happier life you'll have.

I also said last week, you're never going to hear me give you a specific amount.

As your pastor, I feel like I can guide you.

I can ask the right questions, but in the end and the challenges will point you in this direction too.

I'm going to ask you to ask God, what does it look like for me to give happily this week and simply be obedient to what he puts on your heart?

That's it.

That's one gift that you can give this week that'll make you happy.

And you know what?

It'll make someone else happy too, because giving is really fun.

Pray with me.

Lord, we thank you for your generosity that you gave first.

We receive your grace today and out of that grace, God make us into the generous people you've called us to be.

With joy and with happiness, may we see lives changed.

May we see fruit that is born and may each of us step into this journey.

May we be challenged, but may we in those challenges find you.

Love you, Lord.

It's in your name we pray and together all campuses said, amen.