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### **Don't Worry Be Happy?**

When Erin graduated Magna Cum Laude from San Francisco State University we were all excited to go and celebrate her achievement. My parents and brother drove down from Vancouver. A big dinner celebration event was planned. Graduation day brought a sparkling blue sky. We stood in the packed stadium stands straining to see Erin, somewhere amidst the black robed sea on the football field. We were also waiting to hear the words of wisdom from a well known speaker. What would he say to hundreds of graduates ready to embark on a new life and careers? What would he say to those graduates at this pivotal point in their lives? His inspiring message of challenge and hope?...Don't worry Be Happy. His admonition to the graduates was; it's tough out there, and worrying doesn't solve a thing...so don't worry be happy. Happiness is a choice. Happiness is more fun than worry, and worry does you no good...so why worry? No matter the circumstances, even though things are bad...don't worry, be happy. Bobby McFerrin tells us that even when our land lord says the rent is late, when we might be forced to litigate...don't' worry be happy. Even if we got no friends and got no style, don't' worry be happy. All your worries they make you frown, you got to turn them upside down. Don't worry be happy.

The problem is there is no motivation to be happy. He says that happiness is more fun than worry... but I know quite a few folks that enjoy worrying, they get great pleasure being in a state of worry even if it isn't healthy for them. They have no motivation for happiness so why be happy. Don't tell me to be happy...you don't know my life. I could only be happy if...my husband would start meeting my emotional needs. I could be happy only if my wife would engage my physical needs. I could be happy if my children would start listening to me. I could be happy only if we were able to have a child. I could be happy if my house looked more life that picture in the magazine. Or if my body looked more like that picture. I could only be happy if I could carry myself and speak

like that guy. I could be happy if my parents would stop fighting...I could be happy if I had just one good friend.

Have you been in the black hole where it seems nothing could bring you happiness? How do you get out of the hole when every circumstance around you says, stay depressed, don't open the curtains, keep your robe on and go back to bed. What are the first steps toward true happiness? I'm not talking about just a lot of giddy exuberance, although that may come too. How can we move closer to true happiness? Would happiness be a worthwhile commodity getting closer to? Anybody interested in true happiness today? If you could somehow bottle happiness and sell it... you could name your price. Ask the wealthy ask the poor.. you can't buy happiness.

But, happiness can be contagious can't it. If it were a disease nothing would be more virulent than happiness. If you are happy, if your the person who's laughing with a smile on you face, you will find yourself infecting people all throughout your day. You will never be short of friends. The truly happy hairdresser's have ladies lining up out the door to get their hair done. The happy teachers have students pulling strings to get enrolled in their classes. The happy salesman gets a cramp in his hand from writing up orders. Why? Because happiness is so rare. It's a commodity that everyone is searching for but few ever find. Have you taken a look at the faces as you commute into Portland. They look as though they were run over before they ever got into their car. What do they have to be happy about? Home prices are less and less affordable, the gang violence is moving out further and further. Drug are as available as candy and our homes are empty carcasses with people together, yet all alone. In spite the circumstances, God wants His children to be happy. This is not a blind stick your head in the sand and sing type happiness, but a true happiness that has been prepared and motivated.

The times that Nehemiah lived in were filled with depressing circumstances as well. But, as we turn to Nehemiah 12 we hear about something that will lighten your load. I hope it brings a spring back to your step next week at work and fresh new life in your homes. Turn with me to Chapter 12 in Nehemiah. In the first 26 verses the names of priests are listed. The first section lists those who came back from

captivity with Zerubabel. The second list gives the genealogy of five generations of the high priests, from Jeshua to Jaddua. Then the names up to verse 26, include those sons of the Zerubabel priests who were still in the ministry. We see a progression of sons who have continued with God. Priests who have kept worship alive in Jerusalem. Fathers, would it not bring you great happiness to have your children loving God and living for Him? Evangelist Luis Palou said, "My prayer for my boys is not that they make lots of money, or get degrees or honors at university, but 'God make my boys holy!'" What a great prayer and desire. How would it feel to know that your children were heading down the right road, the road toward holiness. It just may also be a road filled with happiness.

Back to Nehemiah 12, The people are gathering to dedicate the new wall. In the midst of food shortages and the abundance of rubble to unbury in Jerusalem, there are signs of life. People are moving in, new homes are going up, businesses are beginning to line the plazas. There is an enthusiasm and feeling that things are beginning to move in Jerusalem. The city is coming back to life and they want to celebrate. READ v. 27-30. These people of Jerusalem are infected with the disease of happiness. In verse 27 you read the word gladness. They are wanting to get as many priests and Levites and people to come and be a part of this great celebration characterized by gladness. This word in Hebrew describes an anticipated happy result. Awaiting a celebration of massive mirth. These people are going to celebrate and be happy no matter the circumstances. They have got a band together that's going to play, as well as the best singers in the land. It's quite an interesting little combo they've assembled, trumpets and cymbals, some string instruments. They even throw in a few harps. That's one instrument I've never seen in a parade.

But they make sure to put first things first. Did you catch what happened in verse 30. Read it there. The priests purified themselves. They separated themselves from uncleanness as they anticipated the party and singing and sacrifice that was to take place. Point number one. Holiness comes before happiness. Purification proceeds the parade. Can we experience true happiness without first moving toward holiness? Can we be burdened down with the guilt of our own sin and

still be happy? No, if you want to experience happiness make sure you are pure before God. It says in verse 30 they purified themselves and the walls and gates. Back in the time of Old Testament Law, even walls and gates could become ceremonially defiled. It doesn't say here, but they probably cleansed the walls and gates by sprinkling the blood of animals that were sacrificed. Because Christ has paid the penalty of sin, we no longer need to sacrifice animals. Christ can provide forgiveness of guilt to those who ask because He's the one who paid the price by His death on the cross. We no longer worry about defiled buildings, now we're more concerned about our own hearts becoming sick with sin and defiled. A happy man must first have a pure heart before God. Holiness precedes happiness. Purification proceeds the parade. Are you right with God?

Some of us want happiness without the righteousness bit. We think we can cruise through life and be happy without the holy part. We think we can happily march in the parade without purifying our soul. Imagine a man up on Garner road has been in a terrible accident...it's ugly. One of his legs is twisted and pulled out of it's socket..the bone has a compound fracture sticking through the skin. He's rushed down to St. Joes and tells the doctor in the emergency room. "Just give me some drugs so I can smile again and get some sleep. Give me some drugs and leave me alone". He'd be crazy. Who would want drugs without getting his leg fixed? Yet, millions of people today want peace without purity, they want happiness without holiness. This man's broken leg must first be set and placed back into it's socket. Then nature can take it's course and healing will come. But you must first let the doctor do his work. If you're not going God's way, if your not allowing Him to shape righteousness in your life, how can you possibly gain true happiness. Holiness comes before happiness. Purity precedes the parade.

Lets take a look at this parade they were planning. Read with me this celebration in verses 31 to 43. What a great time. Can you picture what's happening? They all gather at the east side of the city. Probably at the Valley gate. Remember that's where Nehemiah began his midnight inspection of the broken down wall months earlier when he first arrived. Now the wall is built, well engineered, strong and broad. The enemies around Jerusalem had taunted the wall builders saying that a light weight fox could jump on the wall and break it down. Nehemiah says,

"Well, then let's have a parade on top of that wall. That's what they do. They get out the ladders and Ezra leads one group up on top of the wall. Banging cymbals, blasting trumpets, singing and playing and marching south and then east around the city wall towards the temple. Nehemiah, takes the second group and heads north and East praising God and singing as loud as they can.

Look at verse 43. I can't imagine it being a solemn long faced straight laced march. Everyone was getting into it. This was probably like a Disneyland light parade. This parade was characterized by joy. The men the women and the children were all rejoicing to God. They were even loud. Gasp. Loud? Yes they were rejoicing loudly. I would venture to say these folks were happy. Look at verse 43. The joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar. Notice it wasn't the antiphonal singing or quality of sound that was heard. It wasn't the loud noises of random screams. There were people a long way off who could tell that the people in Jerusalem were filled with joy. They were happy.

Have you ever gone late to a football game? Just outside Tiger stadium, You can hear the anticipation of those already in the stadium. It infectiously drawing you to come inside and cheer. When you hear the roar of the crowd, you ask...What did I miss? I want to be inside. I've got to see what's happening. Those outside Jerusalem could see and hear those two parades walking along the top of the walls. Singing back and forth to each other and playing instruments. First came the purification and then came the parade.

But notice what motivated the happiness. Verse 43. They rejoiced and sacrificed because God had given them great joy. They were happy because of what God had done for them. Against all the odds makers in Judea they had completed the wall and in record time at that. God gave them a reason to rejoice.

Are you searching for true happiness? Holiness comes before happiness. Our motivation for true happiness is not contrived by some blind ideal that happy people are better than worrisome people, so don't worry be happy. Our motivation for happiness comes because God has given us a reason to rejoice. In verses 44 to 47 we see the people filling up the storehouses and packing the offering plates full. Why? Because they were worshipping and rejoicing in the Lord. It's the joy of the Lord

that crowds the churches, fills the offering plates and inspires songs of praise and thanksgiving. The joy of the Lord springs from a pure and holy heart. Where is your heart? Is there some business that you know you need to do with God? Have you been searching for happiness and coming up empty? You can't begin to find true happiness until you allow God to purify your heart. You have to give up the pride of trying to make life work on your own and begin a life of dependence on Him. Christ died on the cross so that we didn't have to carry the baggage of guilt around. He paid the penalty of our sin that we should be doing time for. He died and rose again so that we could have life and joy and peace. What does He ask? What's the catch? All we have to do is ask him to enter our life and take away the sin, take over the controls. Maybe God has been tugging at your heart for a while. Are you ready to take that step of commitment. Not to a church, but to Him. If you are pray this prayer with me.

God I'm a sinner. I realize the consequences of sin is death. I've felt the effects of that sin in my life for a long time. I've been running my life on my own, but I seem to always come up short. There's been something in my life that's missing...God I've never let you come into my life and take control. I accept what Jesus did for me when He died on the cross to wipe out my sin debt. You have promised to purify me. I ask you Jesus to forgive me from all my sin and purify my heart. I want to experience the joy and happiness of a personal relationship with you, living in dependence on you and not my own strength or intellect. Jesus please come into my heart.

While everyone is still bowed, those who prayed that prayer with me go ahead and just lift your head and make eye contact with me.