

The Power Of Joy!

On Sunday, we resumed our sermon series called “If we knew now what they knew then. . . . 7 Steps to spiritual power.” We looked to the example of the Macedonian Christians for Step 6.

1. Before we discuss the sermon, first a warm up question: Tell us something about your Christmas and New Year’s – the good, the bad, the ugly.
2. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the first Christian church was established in Jerusalem and grew quickly. Then persecution broke out. Many fled Jerusalem and created churches in the cities they migrated to. Meanwhile, those who stayed behind began to experience extreme poverty as a consequence of persecution. Before long, newly-forming churches across the Roman Empire began collecting money to send back to the Jerusalem Christians. In today’s Scripture passage, Paul writes to Corinthian Christians, urging them to participate in that collection. They had previously committed to participating, but hadn’t followed through. To inspire them, Paul shares the story of what the Macedonian Christians had already done.
 - a. Read Second Corinthians 8:1-9. Verse 4 tells us that the Macedonian Christians “begged earnestly for the privilege of sharing” in the collection, despite their own persecution and “extreme poverty.” Studies consistently show that poor people tend to give away a higher percentage of their income than wealthy people. Who do you suppose that is?
 - b. Corinth was a prosperous trading port, and the Christians there were not experiencing persecution. Compared to the Macedonians, the Corinthians were well off. Why do you suppose they had failed to participate in the collection? What are some possible reasons?
 - c. What lesson might we draw from verse 7 about holistic spiritual living?
 - d. What lesson might we draw from verse 9 about what it means to follow Jesus?
3. Read again verses 1 and 2. In Sunday’s sermon, Jeff focused our attention on the surprising words found in verse 2. There, Paul tells us that the “abundant joy” of the Macedonian Christians blew right through their “extreme poverty” to create overflowing generosity. From this Jeff drew a recipe for overcoming various forms of scarcity in our own lives:
 - Start with any situation of “extreme poverty” in our own life,
 - Add to it a heaping helping of “abundant joy,”
 - And the result will be “overflowing bounty.”
 - a. Scarcity can take many forms, not just financial. Other examples might include scarcity of energy, health, love, job satisfaction, etc., etc. Name an area where you are experiencing scarcity in your life right now.

- b. What do you think of the recipe described above? Do you think an intentional decision to inject joy into even the bleakest areas of our life can produce powerful transformational results? Why or why not?
 - c. Who's the happiest person you've ever know? Did that person's happiness seem dependent on circumstances? If not, where did that happiness come from?
4. Have someone Google and read the lyrics to "Coat of Many Colors" by Dolly Parton. From the example of the Macedonians, and the example of Saint Dolly, Jeff drew the 6th lesson in our 7-part sermon series on powerful spiritual living. **Lesson 6: Happiness is a choice that changes everything.**
- a. Do you believe happiness is a choice? Why or why not?
 - b. Do you believe happiness has the power to "change everything"? Why or why not?
 - c. The point of the 6th lesson is not that we should suppress or deny our pain or sickness or poverty. That would be a prescription for unhealthiness. The point is to dare to deliberately mix joy with our pain, allowing ourselves to process both simultaneously and experience the positive effects of joy. Do you think that's possible? Have you ever seen someone do this well? How did they do it?
 - d. What did you think of the footage of "laughter therapy" that we saw on Sunday? What insights (if any) do you draw from it?
5. Read Proverbs 15:15. Jeff suggested various ways we might deliberately choose to inject more joy into our lives. Options included singing, listening to praise and worship music, watching our favorite sit com, reciting what we're grateful for, putting ourselves in the presence of happy people, reciting a daily affirmation, dancing, laughter therapy exercises, remembering Jeff's best jokes ☺, etc., etc.
- a. Do you feel like you're embracing enough happiness in your life already? If not, what's something specific you want to do to inject more?
 - b. Jeff told the story of how Carol Burnett's daughter, even when very ill, would wake up each morning and say aloud, "I choose to love my life today." Suppose you began to practice that simple ritual. How might it affect you? Are you ready to commit to it?
6. Next week we'll spend a little time talking about our Soul Care Plans and personal spiritual goals and objectives for 2016. Be sure to prepare for that conversation by going to <http://soulcare.cc>. Or you can pick up a hard copy of the Soul Care survey at the Welcome Desk at church on Sunday. Bring a copy of your plan (or at least some notes about your spiritual goals for 2016) to next week's Oasis.