

Happy New Year!

Last Sunday, we began a New Year's sermon series called "Getting Myself Together."

1. Warm-up Question: Did you do anything special to mark the start of the New Year?
2. This is the time when lots of people think about New Year's Resolutions.
 - a. Have you made any? If so, what?
 - b. Pastor Vivian suggested we resolve to "make a change for the better in 2019," and invited us to consider what that might be. In your own life, where would you like to make a change for the better?
3. But Sunday's sermon focused on something much deeper than making a resolution to do this or that. On Sunday Vivian challenged us to think about where true happiness comes from. Ask a hundred people what they want out of life, and at least 75 will say, "I just want to be happy."
 - a. Sometimes we're tempted to think that we would be truly happy if only we had certain external circumstantial things like the right house, the right job, the right spouse, the right amount of savings, better health, or fame and fortune. What kind of circumstantial things are you tempted to think could make you happier?
 - b. The more we search, Vivian said, "The more we discover that happiness is not an exterior characteristic. Happiness is not dependent upon those circumstances of life that change so frequently. We soon discover that happiness is an inside job." Do you buy the notion that we are responsible for generating our own happiness? Why or why not?
 - c. Proverbs 17:22 says, "A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones." Science has documented that laughter releases endorphins that help our bodies fight disease and heal faster. Why do you think God wired us up that way? Over this past week, what kinds of things made you laugh?
4. Vivian suggested several ways we can intentionally generate inner joy, starting with **Cultivating Gratitude**.
 - a. Jean Hilliard almost froze to death stranded outdoors for hours unconscious in 22 below temperatures until someone found her and got her to a hospital, where she miraculously revived. Her survival made national news in 1980. Since then Jean has lived an "ordinary" life, which she finds disappointing. She assumed God had saved her so her life would be great, not ordinary. Sometimes we tend to be like

Jean. We overlook the blessings we do have (like being saved from freezing to death) because we get so preoccupied with what we don't have. What's something wonderful you need to remember to give thanks for?

- b. Vivian recommended we get in the habit of acknowledging five things we're grateful for each day. Do you think that would be helpful to you? What's something you're thankful for today?
5. A second way to cultivate inner joy is by **Learning to Forgive**. In his book "Five Steps To Forgiveness," Dr. Everett Worthington suggests the following process:
- R = recall the hurt.
E = empathize by trying to understand what happened from the perpetrator's perspective.
A = Be altruistic by recalling a time in your life when you were forgiven.
C = Commit to putting your forgiveness into words.
H = Hold on to the forgiveness – don't keep dwelling on the wrong.
- a. What do you think of this model? What do you like or dislike about it?
 - b. The opposite of forgiving is ruminating over a wrong. Worthington says ruminating over negative experiences is "associated with almost everything bad from a mental health perspective." In your own life experience, what are you tempted to keep ruminating over?
6. A third way to cultivate inner joy is by **Engaging in Meaningful Activities**. People are seldom happier than when they're doing something they enjoy. Vivian gave the example of Frank Walsh, who at age 94 found a new girlfriend and joined a high school marching band! Sitting around, bored and inert, is a recipe for misery.
- a. What's something you do that you find deeply meaningful?
 - b. Do you feel you have enough meaningful activity in your life? Why or why not?
7. A fourth way to cultivate inner joy is by **Staying Connected to Friends**. Research shows that companionship – simply doing things together – is the component of friendship that most makes us happy.
- a. Who is someone who plays that role in your life – someone you do things with?
 - b. Do you feel have enough people in your life who provide companionship?
8. Given all we've talked about, and remembering that happiness is an inside job, let's now read Philippians 4:10-13, as printed on the next page.
- a. What word, phrase, or concept in this passage most catches your attention?

- b. How is it possible to be just as happy with little as with much?
- c. As best you can tell, what is the “recipe for being happy” that Paul refers to in this passage?
- d. Of the four intentional ways Vivian noted that we can cultivate our own inner happiness – cultivating gratitude, learning to forgive, engaging in meaningful activities, and staying connected to friends – which one needs the most work in your life in 2019? Explain your choice.

Philippians 4:10-13 (the Message Bible)

“I’m glad in God, far happier than you would ever guess—happy that you’re again showing such strong concern for me. Not that you ever quit praying and thinking about me. You just had no chance to show it.

Actually, I don’t have a sense of needing anything personally. I’ve learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I’m just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I’ve found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.”