

## Cultivating Joy and Gratitude

On Sunday, we continued our sermon series based on Brené Brown's book called *The Gifts of Imperfection*. This week we focused on cultivating joy and gratitude . . . by letting go of fear.

1. Warm-up Question: Think about a moment in your life when you experienced pure joy. Tell us what happened.
2. We wish we could consistently live in a place of great joy, but then we're confronted with the stress of survival. In our Gospel passage this week (Matthew 6:25-34), Jesus begins by saying: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. . . . Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?"
  - a. Based on what Jesus says, what kinds of things were people in his audience worried about?
  - b. What are a few of your most frequent worries or fears?
  - c. On a scale of 1 to 10, what is your average stress level in this season of life?
3. Jesus challenged his stressed-out listeners with these words: "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. . . . Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these." Matthew 6:26-29. When Jesus challenges us to be more like the birds and the flowers, what do you think he means? What's he asking us to do?
4. Most of us long to live more like the birds and flowers, but the stress of survival kicks in, and we go into our frantic worried mode or our paralyzing fear mode, causing us to wonder, "How will I ever get to that place of contented restful receiving that Jesus calls me to?" Based on her extensive research, Brené Brown says that getting there begins with a single word – gratitude.
  - a. Brené says, "I always thought joyful people were grateful people." In other words, she thought that people experience good fortune, which then produces joy, which then generates gratitude for that good fortune. But her research convinced her the opposite is true – that gratitude generates joy which then generates its own unique kind of good fortune. Do you agree or disagree? Does gratitude really have the power to generate joy and create a sense of good fortune? If so, how does that work?
  - b. The Bible says, "Give thanks in all circumstances." I Thessalonians 5:18. Have you ever tried to express gratitude during a real down time in your life? How did it affect you to express gratitude during your crisis?

- c. The key, Brené says, is not an attitude of gratitude, but rather the practice of gratitude. In other words, gratitude is a primarily a verb (something we do), not a noun (something we feel). In her studies, people who thrive in life almost always have some kind of regular practice of gratitude like: (a) a gratitude journal; (b) daily gratitude meditation or prayer; (c) gratitude art; or (d) sacred pauses in the midst of hectic stress to say, “I’m grateful for \_\_\_\_\_.” Do you have a regular practice of gratitude? If so, what is it? If not, do you think you should? What gratitude practice might best fit you?
5. According to Rev. Anne Robertson, there’s an important distinction between the New Testament Greek words for “happiness” and “joy.” Happiness is *makarios*, which means the freedom of the rich from normal cares and worries – good fortune. *Makarios* is the way you feel when everything is going great, which means happiness is situational; it comes and goes. We need to build our life on something more enduring – joy. The Greek word for joy is *chairō*, which the Greeks described as “the good mood of the soul” that is the “culmination of being” that results from consistent spiritual practices, especially gratitude.
- a. There’s nothing wrong with happiness; take as much as you can get! Tell us about something that’s happened lately that made you happy?
- b. Jeff described a “good mood of the soul” as a perspective that says, “It is well with my soul. I am so blessed. I have so much to celebrate and be thankful for.” Have you ever known someone who had a “good mood of the soul”? Tell us about them.
6. The ancient Greeks said that the opposite of joy (*chairō*) is not sadness, but fear – fear of scarcity, fear that there won’t be enough, fear of loss. Fear eats joy for breakfast. Jesus seems to be teaching us the same thing in our Gospel lesson. Read Matthew 6:25-34.
- a. What phrase in this passage most speaks to you – and why?
- b. The only way to avoid the risk of loss is to have nothing. To experience the intensity of joy, we have to be prepared to risk great loss. The only way to have a child is to risk losing a child. The only way to have a spouse is to risk losing a spouse. Etc., Etc. Suppose God gave you a choice: you can experience a life of the highest highs and the lowest lows, or you can live life in a steady middle with no high highs or low lows. Which would you choose and why?
- c. Read the excerpt from Lynne Twist’s book “The Soul of Money” on p. 3 and answer the two questions listed there.

## Excerpt from “The Soul of Money” by Lynne Twist

For me, and for many of us, our first waking thought of the day is “I didn’t get enough sleep.” The next one is “I don’t have enough time.” Whether true or not, that thought of *not enough* occurs to us automatically before we even think to question it. We spend most of the hours and days of our lives hearing, explaining, complaining, or worrying about what we don’t have enough of. . . . We don’t have enough exercise. We don’t have enough work. We don’t have enough profits. We don’t have enough power. We don’t have enough weekends. Of course, we don’t have enough money – ever.

We’re not thin enough, we’re not smart enough, we’re not pretty enough or fit enough or educated or successful enough, or rich enough – ever. Before we even sit up in bed, before our feet touch the floor, we’re already inadequate, already behind, already losing, already lacking something. And by the time we go to bed at night, our minds race with a litany of what we didn’t get, or didn’t get done, that day. We go to sleep burdened by those thoughts and wake up to the reverie of lack. . . . What begins as a simple expression of the hurried life, or even the challenged life, grows into the great justification for an unfulfilled life.

We each have a choice in any setting to step back and let go of the mindset of scarcity. Once we let go of scarcity, we discover the surprising truth of sufficiency. By sufficiency, I don’t mean a quantity of anything. Sufficiency isn’t two steps up from poverty or one step short of abundance. It isn’t a measure of barely enough or more than enough. Sufficiency isn’t an amount at all. It is an experience, a context we generate, a declaration, a knowing that there is enough, and that we are enough.

Sufficiency resides inside of each of us, and we can call it forward. It is an . . . intentional choosing of the way we think about our circumstances.

- a. If you were to complete the following statement instinctively, without censoring yourself, by saying the first thing that pops into your mind, what would you say?  
***I don’t have enough*** \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. What might it look like to re-frame the foregoing statement through the lens of abundance, gratitude, and sufficiency?