

Acceptance and Happiness By Paul R. Blake

We cannot find happiness in wanting what we cannot have. Take out the negatives and the proverb is still true: We can find happiness in the things we can have. If you are thinking, "This sounds like acceptance," you are correct. One cannot find happiness in his journey on this earth until he pays the toll of acceptance.

There exists a myriad of means, religious and secular, by which people chart the pathway to acceptance. The medical profession and grief counselors use the five steps to acceptance, religionists use the popular Serenity Prayer, and psychologists use talk therapy. All of these means are based on the Bible principle that God created humankind in His image (Gen. 1:26-27), which includes the power to make reasoned choices (Gen. 2:16-17). Inherent in our design is the God given blessing of adaptability; we can adjust to nearly any environment and set of circumstances (Job 2:10). Our bodies change with age and the stages of human growth; they adapt to the changing seasons and temperatures; they adjust to handle disease processes (Psalm 139:14).

Likewise, our minds have been created to adjust to changes in our life circumstances. The single man changes his thinking, priorities, and interests when he marries, again when he becomes a father, again when his children leave home and he becomes a grandfather, and again when he retires, and yet again if he becomes a widower. The sinner who develops faith and obeys the gospel changes his manner of life, his speech, his desires, and his goals; and, all of these things change further as he grows as a Christian. We are wonderfully made, and one of the great wonders of our making is the fact that we can change; we are not pre-programmed machines.

Where people become confused in this matter is in the motivation for our ability to change. Some believe that because the source of change in the environment and circumstances is externally generated, the source of motivation for their adaptation to it should also be from outside of themselves. This is an honest mistake. Remember, we were created in God's own image with the power to choose. We can choose wisely to adjust to the change, or we can choose foolishly to believe that unless something comes along to help us change, we are hopelessly bound to be unhappy (Job 1:21).

The key to understanding this matter is whether or not the change was expected or if it was untimely. An aged man knows that he is approaching the twilight years of life and prepares himself and his mind for death. He accepts this as the natural state of things, and armed with this mindset, finds joy in his life activities for as much time as he has left in this world.

A younger man upon hearing that he has a disease process that will end his life in a few years experiences shock; the knowledge of his own impending death came in an untimely manner; he expected to live much longer. His life circumstances have changed abruptly. Can he change his mindset, adapt to the new set of life circumstances, and find happiness in the time he has remaining to him? Of course he can. The important question is will he choose to do so? He can accept the facts of his existence and look for other means to make his life fulfilling. However, he will not succeed if he keeps his focus on the thing he cannot have, a long life. If he fills the time he has left with wishing for more time, and grieving because he cannot have it, his life will be empty, sad, and purposeless. In other words, he will not find happiness in

wanting what he cannot have; he will only find happiness in wanting what he can have. He can accept the time he has remaining and choose activities important to him, and thereby make his remaining time fulfilling and pleasant.

Solomon searched for happiness in a calculated, systematic way and found it all to be “vanity and grasping for the wind” (Ecc. 2:26). A man plans out his life: he is going to marry an attractive, accomplished woman who will love him, fulfill all his expectations for a wife, and they will live together to a ripe old age. They will have children that will grow up to be healthy, intelligent, and talented, and they will live orderly Christian lives and have wonderful children of their own. He plans to build his own home, rise to the top of his field of endeavor, and leave a name that will be remembered. He has it all planned out.

Then, his wife becomes ill and he has to pull double duty in the home. Some of his children depart the faith. One of his children is killed in a school shooting. The church with which he worshiped for years becomes institutional. He loses his job and pension because some corporate raider stripped the company’s resources and left the country. Untimely occurrences all, and from the perspective of some, he has no means of happiness in this life.

Nonsense! His dream of a storybook marriage unexpectedly ended with his wife’s disorder. What can he do? Pine away wishing for something that he cannot have, or choose to accept the wife he has and learn to love her with her limited health? He lost his job. What now? Wait around yearning for the factory to re-open and spend his days bitterly lamenting the glory days on the production lines to anyone who will listen? Or could he instead simply accept that his plans of working at the same job and retiring after 40 years will not be realized, and rather look forward the challenges that lie ahead? The loss of a child terrifies me as a parent. Nevertheless, if it happens it becomes one of those things one cannot have. A father can spend his days in lamentation embracing mementos from the past, or he can accept the loss as one of the circumstances that now define his life and look for other means of fulfillment in his re-defined life.

Even changes in the local church require that individual Christians exercise their ability to choose to adapt. The Book of Acts is filled with accounts of struggles churches endured in the first century. Each time they confronted a problem, applied a scriptural response, and accepted the losses created, the same effect was produced: “And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (Acts 5:14). “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” (Acts 9:31), et al. It appears that changes imposed by untimely and unpleasant circumstances led to churches choosing the right, adapting to the losses, and finding growth, peace, and comfort in the changed setting.

Can one find happiness that has lost a spouse, a child, a home, a job, good health, or anything else that he thought he must have in order to be happy? Yes, if he accepts that if he is to be happy, he must purpose to adjust to the changes and look for happiness in what he has left to him. He cannot find happiness in wanting what He cannot have. He can find happiness in the things He can have.

In my 49 years of life and 33 years of preaching, I have discovered the following: that everyone has or has had hardships, and that there are two typical responses they

have made to it. They either accept the change forced into their lives and search for meaning in their changed lives, or they spend their days sorrowing for what they lost that will not return. In the end, we choose whether or not we will be happy.

Job said when he lost his children and all of his property, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). When Job lost his health and the respect of his wife, he said, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10). David when he lost his child: "So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food. And he said, While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." (2Sam. 12:20-23).

Perhaps Solomon put best of all: "Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor -- this is the gift of God. For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart" (Ecc. 5:18).

Take joy in what you have. Wanting what you cannot have will only make you unhappy. It may even lead to sin.

What's The Problem?

By Murray Teigh Bloom

For twenty years Professor Edwin R. Keedy of the University of Pennsylvania's Law School used to start his first class by putting two figures on the blackboard: 4 & 2. "What's the solution?" he would ask. A student would call out, "six." Another would say, "two" but Keedy would pass them by.

Several men would shout the final possibility, "eight" and the teacher would shake his head. Finally Keedy would point out their collective error. "All of you failed to ask the key question - what is the problem? Gentlemen, unless you know what the problem is, you cannot possibly find the answer."

Dr. Keedy's classroom gambit was deadly serious. He knew that in law, as in everyday life, too much time is spent trying to solve the wrong problem like polishing brass on a sinking ship.

Preparing to Teach

When we speak as ministers and not as men, as preachers instead of penitents, as theologians instead of disciples, we fail: when we lean our head too much upon the commentary and too little upon the Savior's bosom: when we eat too largely of the tree of knowledge, and too little of the tree of life, we lose the power of our ministry.

I am myself a sinner washed in the blood and delivered from the wrath to come by my Lord and Master; all this must be fresh upon our mind. Personal godliness must never grow scanty with us. Our own justification in Christ, our sanctification by the Holy Spirit, our vital union with Christ, and expectancy of glory in Him, yea, our own advancement in grace, or our own declension: all these we must know and consider daily.

A Moments Wisdom

God never alters the robe of righteousness to fit the man, but the man to fit the robe.

When a Christian stops doing, he starts dying.

A narrow mind and a long tongue usually go together.

Some people can make a cloak out of the smallest piece of religion.

A good way to forget your troubles is to help others to forget theirs.

Christ will not live in the parlor of our hearts if we entertain the devil in the cellar of our thoughts.

Nothing is harder than the softness of indifference.