

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: Psalm 119:1-8  
Sermon Title: "More than Just Feeling Happy"

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA  
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**{SLIDE 1}** We all would like to be happy. We would all like to have a smile on our faces. We don't want anything to trouble us, right? Even if somebody tries to trouble us, we would want to remain unbothered, unaffected. If bad news came our ways, we would want to keep that smile on our faces. No frowns allowed. We would want to remain happy, pleased, cheerful. If only we could do that all the time. We could face the bad news with contentment. We could take on those who bother us with cheer. If only we could open something, like a Coke, and just be happy.

**{SLIDE 2}** The psalm for today says, "*Happy* are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. *Happy* are those who keep [God's] decrees, who seek [God] with their whole heart."<sup>1</sup> What does the psalm mean? Does it really mean having a smile on our faces all the time? Does it mean being in such a state that we are dancing and laughing and nothing ever bothers us at all? When the psalmist talks about

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 119:1-2, italics mine.

happiness, he really means blessedness. It is more than just having a smile on our faces. There is a sort of smile in our hearts. When Jesus teaches the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, some Bible translations say, “Happy are those who...” Our Bible say, “Blessed are those who...,” which is closer to the point. The words used in both Matthew 5 and Psalm 119 speak of a deeper contentment, a more solid understanding of peace. There is more than just having a smile on our faces. Even if we do not wear smiles, there are smiles on our hearts that do not fade easily.

**{SLIDE 3}** When we speak of a blessing, we understand that it comes directly from God. God blesses us. God places his hand on our heads, and God’s hand rests on us, and we know we are claimed by God. But it is more than just God’s hand resting on us. It is God’s peace resting on us. It is God’s courage resting on us. It is God’s love, God’s resolve, God’s protection, God’s sympathy, God’s power, all of God’s good graces resting on us. God claims us as his own, and the hand of God does not leave us for anything. When God blesses, God remains.

**{SLIDE 4}** So that’s why the word *blessed* is used. Blessedness runs deeper than happiness. We tend to view happiness as a feeling. It is a good feeling. It is a feeling we want to have all the time. But feelings do

not remain. Our feelings are up and down, depend on the weather or the news or the day's activities. C.S. Lewis once said, "[No] feeling can be relied on to last in its full intensity, or even to last at all... feelings come and go."

Blessedness does not come and go. God's blessed hand resting on us is not lifted with the weather or news or day's activities, whether we do the right thing or the wrong thing. God continues to claim us. God continues to add his good grace upon our lives. Whether we have good or bad feelings, God remains close by. Whether we wear a smile or a frown, God will leave the smile of our hearts, and we know God will be with us in every situation. We possess a deeper contentment because of God, a more solid understanding of peace because of God's hand.

So we notice the blessed hand of God when we walk in the law of God. We feel the weight of God's hand on our lives, when we seek the Lord our God with all our hearts. We choose to do no wrong, we confidently walk in God's ways, and we keep the Commandments of God close to our hearts.<sup>2</sup> It is a great feeling, because the feeling stems from that deeper confidence, that more solid understanding of

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Psalm 119:1-4.

God. It is deep within our core and infiltrates every cell in our bodies.

**{SLIDE 5}** Yet, the psalmist inserts this sentence in the middle of our reading today. It is a concern that we all have now and then. “O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!” The psalmist feels such a concern for not keeping God’s statutes that he puts an exclamation point at the end. It is like he is saying, “Hey, I had better keep God’s statutes. I need to be diligent in doing so. I don’t want to be put to shame.”<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes we fall away from God. Sometimes we don’t do it intentionally, and sometimes we know what we are doing. Maybe we listen to the feelings. When we feel bad, we follow that emotion. When we feel crummy, we go with it. Maybe we believe that there is a better way to live. We know God’s way is better, but then another path opens to us and it look enticing. It looks fun. We walk down that path and ignore God altogether.

**{SLIDE 6}** I was reading a book about Karl Barth, who was a Swiss Reformed theologian. I came across a comment that summarizes Barth’s beliefs: “In and of ourselves we are not ready for God and we are not open to grace. We are rather opposed to God and

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 119:5, 6.

hostile to grace. We are not subjectively open but closed to divine revelation, and we stand not in truth but in falsehood. If there is anyone who is ready for God, it is not we ourselves.”<sup>4</sup> Yikes, that is unsettling. In and of ourselves we are not ready for God. I have not heard it put that way. I have heard it said that we are not open to God, that we tend to reject God, ignore God, and go our own ways. But to say that we are not ready for God puts a new light on it. If I am ready for something, that means I have prepared myself to accept it. I have taken the steps necessary to receive whatever comes my way. If I am ready for a test, that means I studied for it. If I am ready for worship to start, that means I am in the sanctuary and paying attention to the bulletin. If I am ready to go to the store, that means I have dressed, combed my hair, put on my shoes, and have the car keys in hand. Those are easy things to get ready for, but not to be ready for God? Not to place ourselves in a position to at least see God, listen to God, wait for God to come close to us? That is unsettling.

To use the words of Psalm 119, in and of ourselves we are not ready to walk the way that God gives us. We are not open to keeping his statutes and decrees. We do not stand on the way with God but stand on the

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<sup>4</sup> George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology*, 99.

way to doing something wrong, something damaging. No wonder the psalmist used an exclamation point in verse 5. Because he felt it. He felt the desire not to remain steadfast, resolute, committed to the life God unveiled for him. We feel it to. We may go with the negative thoughts and the miserable emotions. We may choose a path that makes us look good and offers all our desires. And then we are ashamed. We wish to reverse all we did and get back to being with God.

**{SLIDE 7}** However, Karl Barth says there is an answer. In and of ourselves we are not ready for God, but Someone is. We may not be open and we may be hostile, but there is One who is always open and is never hostile to God. There is Someone who fits the description and he is Jesus Christ. Jesus is ready for God, and Jesus makes us ready for God.

He is our “missing center.”<sup>5</sup> He is the One who fills in the gap, when we want to go with the negative thoughts. Christ is the One who heals us, when we want to go with the miserable emotions. Christ always did as his Father did. He was always blameless, because it was his heart’s desire to walk in the law of God. He was always pure, because it was his heart’s desire to seek the Lord God with his entire being. He

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 100.

could do no wrong, because there was no need to do wrong. All Christ could do was the right, and he did the right all the way to the cross, where he died for our sin and then rose for our salvation.

He is our missing center, the One who fills us with love and grace, the One who gives us the life, the pure and blameless life, to do God's will. Christ makes us open to God's way of life. Christ makes us ready to receive God and to be with God forever.

**{SLIDE 8}** That takes us full circle, back to the blessedness we were talking about before. Blessedness runs deeper than happiness. It is a deeper contentment, a more solid understanding. Christ gives us that deeper contentment, more solid understanding, that blessedness that he can only give.

Christ reminds us that we are his, and he is ours, and there is no separating that fact. It doesn't matter what is going on around us, good or bad, we are Christ's and he is ours. It doesn't matter if we have a smile on our faces or not, we are Christ's and he is ours. The hand of God is upon us, Christ reminds us, and we may go through life with his loving and powerful blessing.

And so in Christ we can walk the way of the Lord and remain blameless. In Christ we do no wrong, we

seek the Lord with our entire being, and we are not put to shame. We learn to keep the Commandments of God. We praise God for the upright hearts within us. We remain steadfast in our faith, in our relationship, with God, and all of it done in Christ.

We may be poor in spirit, we may mourn. We may be meek, we may seek righteousness every step of the way. We may try to be merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers in all our dealings. And we may be persecuted for all we do for God's kingdom.<sup>6</sup> We know that we are blessed. The hand of God is on us because of our Lord Jesus Christ. The hand is never removed. The hand grants us all the blessings of God, and those blessings run deep into our very core and infiltrate every cell in our bodies. We may smile on our faces (we definitely have smiles on our hearts). We may rejoice and feel free. We may live abundantly.

**{SLIDE 9}** Yes, we all would like to be happy, to have a smile on our faces. It is better, with smiles or with frowns, that we would be blessed, and we are through Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Matthew 5:1-10.



## Assurance of Pardon

Hear this good news from Psalm 16, “The Lord is our refuge, and so we have no good apart from him. The Lord gives us counsel, instructing our hearts even in the night. The Lord will not give us up to the Grave, but will always show us the path of life. In his presence there is fullness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Rejoice and believe the good news. You and I are forgiven through Christ our Savior, amen.