

"The Pursuit of Happiness"

The Declaration of Independence is probably the most famous and revered document in our country's history. In the second paragraph it says, **"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."**

The pursuit of happiness — have you pursued happiness lately? How is that going for you?

Happiness is a transitory thing. Happiness depends on circumstances, and it lasts only until the next event comes along to replace it with pain or anxiety, difficulty or frustration. Frankly, happiness is not worth pursuing.

The Bible teaches us about three conditions that are truly worth pursuing: Peace, Contentment, and Joy. And the very good news is this: While God isn't much concerned about our happiness, which at best is temporary, He very much wants us to have lasting peace, complete contentment, and eternal joy.

Peace. The word "peace" occurs over 300 times in the Bible. It is used to describe the state of being in right relationship, in harmony, with other human beings or with God. We have peace with other people when we are operating in love, rather than selfishness. We have peace with God when we embrace our role as His adopted children, eager to do His will and to please Him.

We can't achieve that peace on our own. Jesus spoke of that in *John 16:33*: *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace.*

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." What things had He said to His disciples, so that they might have peace? Lots of things, but, in particular, that they were to love each other as He had

**My Peace
I give to
you**

loved them, and that He would send the Holy Spirit to be their Helper and Guide as they went onward without His physical presence.

The Apostle Paul had much to say about peace in his letters to the early Christian churches. This piece of advice is from *Romans 12:17-18*. *Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* Paul says that getting even, or having the last word, is not what we should care about. Instead we should be peace bringers, peace makers.

This is Paul's formula for personal peace: *Philippians 4:6-7 ... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*



In 1988 Bobby McFerrin sang, "Don't worry; be happy." Paul says, "Don't worry; turn your cares over to God, and He'll give you peace."

Contentment. Contentment is the ability to say, and mean it, "Here I am in this situation (whatever it is) and I'm okay with it."

Are you in jail or in prison, and are you content with that? Do you look for ways to serve God and please Him where you are? Or do you spend your time and energy hoping He will miraculously intervene and set you free?

Or are you carrying some different burden? Are you sick, or do you have the responsibility of caring for someone who is? Are you stuck in a job that you must have in order to survive? There are lots of difficult situations, but in almost every situation there is a way to find contentment.

Paul learned how to be content in trying circumstances. He wrote, in *Philippians 4:11-13*, *I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Paul wrote several of his letters while he was in jail in various places. Even in jail he could be content, because he knew God was with him and the Holy Spirit was guiding him. That's the way we are to seek contentment.

I said above that we can find contentment in almost every situation. The exception is when we're in pain. When we are physically or emotionally hurting, we want relief. It takes great faith to find contentment when that is the case — though some have been able to do it.

Peace and contentment are closely related, obviously. God wants us to have both of them together.

Joy. Sometimes the words "happiness" and "joy" are used interchangeably, as if they were the same thing, but they are different.

People talk about that difference in many ways. Here's my version:

Happiness is self-centered. It's all about me. When good things are happening to me or for me, that makes me happy. When things are not going my way, I tend to be unhappy.

Joy, I believe, is other-centered. When God is pleased by something, that is a cause for joy. When a child is healed of cancer, or a homeless family finds a home, or a lost soul comes to salvation, there is joy not just in being part of that, but even in seeing it. Joy is an inner sense of feeling, "Yes! That is as it should be!" It has to do with recognizing and being glad about what is right and good.

In John 15 Jesus talked about His disciples being as branches, connected to the true vine (Jesus) and thus bearing "much fruit." He summed up that simile by saying, (*John 15:11*) *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

Jesus was obviously not happy about having to suffer horribly and die on the cross, but, as

Hebrews 12:2 says, *for the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross ...*

That joy was the accomplishment of God's purpose, as He gave it in *John 3:16-17*: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

Here's the bottom line: God did not create us to be at war with Him, constantly struggling to be our own god, to have our way, to be happy by having nothing but happy circumstances to deal with. He created us to be at Peace with Him, living in the correct relationship with Him — He is God; I am not, and you are not.

God intends for us to be content with what He provides for us. We do our part — we work, using our God-given brains and talents, to earn a living and provide for our families; we strive to make good choices rather than bad ones, with the help of the Holy Spirit if we're wise. As the Apostle Paul wrote, (*1 Timothy 6:6*) *godliness with contentment is great gain.*

And God intends for us to have joy — to worship Him with joyful hearts, to serve Him by doing His will joyfully, to take joy from pleasing Him; and to gain more joy by bringing joy to others.

And the ultimate realization of the joy God intends for you and for me is to join the Father and the Son in their heavenly home, to share in their godly joy forever. What a blessed hope we have — the gift of eternal, joyful life with God, given us by the gift of Grace, because of Jesus' punishment for our sins on the cross.



Thank you, Heavenly Father! Thank you, Lord Jesus!

God bless you, my brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ, and give you His peace —

Brother Roland

Bible questions? I'll help if I can.

Brother Roland

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Have You Ever Wondered?

By Mary Carothers

Have you ever wondered why you are on the earth? In the so-called "Grand Scheme of Life" do you know what your role is? For many years I asked myself these questions, but never had any answers.

Then one day after some folks prayed for me, God started working in my life. He began to make Jesus a living reality to me. As I studied God's love letter to us – the Bible – God began to teach me that His eternal plan has always been to bring us to Himself through what Jesus did for us.

God wanted us to become His very own children, but we were separated from Him because of our sin. What could we do? We certainly couldn't earn our way into God's Family. We could never be good enough. We had no hope.

So, God sent Jesus to do what we could never do. He took away our sins. What wonderful, blessed words! With His blood, Jesus purchased us and gave us to God the Father as gifts. **Ephesians 1:18 tells us we are God's glorious inheritance. God actually delights in us. We are His special treasure.**

We are not here on earth because our parents decided they wanted a child. Neither are we here because they had an "oops." We are here because God decided long ago He wanted to have loving fellowship with us. When we accept the wonderful gift of salvation from Jesus, we actually become a dearly loved child of Almighty God. He has promised us that He will never, never, never leave or abandon us. He is closer to us than the very air we breathe.

If you are lonely or afraid of the future, I pray that you will be comforted by the truth of these words. You are not alone. You are being held in the mighty hand of your Heavenly Father. In John 10, Jesus was talking about being the Good Shepherd, and He gave us this wonderful promise in verses 27 through 30: ***My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.***

Sand and Stone

(Author unknown)

Two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey, they had an argument; and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, he wrote in the sand: "Today my best friend slapped me in the face."

They kept on walking, until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath.

The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but his friend saved him.

After he recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone: "Today my best friend saved my life."

The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand, and now you write on a stone. Why?"

The other friend replied, "When someone hurts us, we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

Learn to write your hurts in the sand and to carve your benefits in stone.

They say it takes a minute to find a special person, an hour to appreciate them, a day to love them, but then an entire lifetime to forget them.

**BE PATIENT –
GOD ISN'T FINISHED
WITH US YET.**

Peace

There are forces and circumstance that can hinder or destroy peace; and there are decisions and actions that can support peace and the possibility of contentment and joy.

Puzzle:

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J N L F S B L S R N T D E A R N O T R S I S H E O O B I N N Y L
E E U U H L T E M E H N X N U T A N F E T S S R N N M W Q E Y E
R V B L I O Y L O M O H E S L S I S T N C E C T C S E J S I S T
P I Z N P R B F I T U Y I M S U T Y E C L N Q R I I F A P T R S
U G U E E T E I L A G M W I T R F M A K Z H U O L D E R T A H V
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Y E A C U S U R W W E N O I T A R T S U R F T S S N G E I I F R
P I H S D N E I R F S S L C N I W X P L V C U R M Y N N T B I N
P O V L E F D Q M V S Y T L E U R C A M G L A M U C G E S L L A
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H U M I L I T Y T J E B O T F O K R F S V D F V M W T S T K G L

Words:

Against Peace

AGITATION
ANGER
ANXIETY
ARGUMENTS
BULLYING
CONFUSION
CONTENTION
CRUELTY
DISOBEDIENCE
DISSATISFACTION
DISTRUST
ENVY
FEAR
FIGHTING
FRUSTRATION
GRUDGES

HATRED
IMPATIENCE
INSULTS
JEALOUSY
MEANNESS
MISTREATMENT
MISUNDERSTANDING
NEGLECT
PAIN
PREJUDICE
PRIDE
SELFISHNESS
SPITE
STRESS
STUBBORNNESS
TURMOIL
UNCERTAINTY

For Peace

UNFORGIVENESS
VENGEFULNESS
VIOLENCE
WICKEDNESS
WORRY
AFFIRMATION
AGREEMENT
BLESSING
CALM
CARING
COMFORT
CONSIDERATION
CONTENTMENT
COOPERATION
ENCOURAGEMENT

FAIRNESS
FAITHFULNESS
FELLOWSHIP
FORGIVENESS
FRIENDSHIP
GENEROSITY
GENTLENESS
GOODNESS
GRATITUDE
HELPLESSNESS
HONESTY
HUMILITY
KINDNESS
LOVE
LOYALTY
MERCY

OPENNESS
PATIENCE
PRAYER
QUIET
RECONCILIATION
RESTFULNESS
SECURITY
SELF CONTROL
SMILES
TENDERNESS
THOUGHTFULNESS
TRUTHFULNESS
TRUSTWORTHINESS
UNSELFISHNESS
WISDOM