

Monday, October 9 - "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Matthew 5:4 Do you remember the Pharrell Williams song, "Happy?" It quickly became the number one song in the country. It seemed to be everywhere: radio, parties, movies, weddings, commercials (and even at one church :) Maybe the reason so many people liked that song is because our culture is obsessed with being happy. It seems like people's actions are motivated by a desire to remain happy. We have believed the lie that the key to a good life is to be happy all the time. Not only has our culture mislead us to believe that we should be happy all the time, but even the idea of what makes us happy has been falsified. The things that we believe will make us happy end up either being temporary or not making us happy at all. One of the very first things Jesus does after he begins his earthly ministry is to correct our earthly thinking by teaching us how things work in his kingdom. Through the beatitudes, Jesus takes everything we know about living and happiness and turns them upside down. Jesus often does this throughout his ministry. When it comes to happiness, Jesus tells us it is not found in many of the things we are seeking. He tells us that it is found in relationships, forgiveness, growth, sacrifice, serving, others, maturity, and ultimately following Him.

Tuesday, October 10 - Read Genesis 28:16-18. We have heard and probably said, "What have you done for me lately?" (Which by the way is said about every college football coach). But more and more people also say this about God. It's one of our failings as humans - we tend to have short memories. It's nothing new. It has been this way for thousands of years. Many times in scriptures, we will read about a person who has an encounter with God. Immediately after this encounter the person would build an altar to represent their encounter. The altars were usually made up of some rocks and would normally be a couple of feet high. The reason they did this was as practical as it was spiritual. The people of that time would often travel from one town to the next to trade goods. Therefore, the routes they walked were common, repeated at least a couple of times a month and throughout the year. So these altars would be something they would see from time to time as they traveled. And immediately they would be reminded of the time God showed up in their lives. God's people had a tendency to forget what God had done in their past and have a "what have you done for me lately?" attitude towards God. Therefore, they would build these altars as a reminder. We too have short memories. This not only hurts our attitude towards God, but makes it more difficult to get through times of mourning and suffering. In times of mourning, one of the greatest comforts and encouragements is the fact that God has delivered us through difficult times in the past. Think of those times and give God thanks today!

Wednesday, October 11 - Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. One of the greatest tools God has given us as we follow him is his word. Through his word, God describes his love for us, his plans for us, his character, and so much more. Through his word, we are given hope, peace, encouragement, purpose, strength and so much more! Unfortunately, for many people, those same scriptures that are meant to give us encouragement and hope are very distant. It is easy to think the scriptures are about other people who lived a long, long time ago. We misunderstand that although the stories are based on people in history, they are meant to be intimate, personal expressions from God to each of us. The Bible is such an encouraging and hopeful resource for us when we are dealing with times of suffering and mourning. However, we need to experience the scriptures in a very personal way in order to truly gain that hope and encouragement. Psalm 23 is one of the most encouraging pieces of scriptures that people turn to during difficult times. Read and re-read it and insert your name when you see me/my/I. Thank God for His presence in your life.

Thursday, October 12 - Read John 12:24. As you look around and observe the way the world and our lives work, it does not take long to realize that there is a certain rhythm and cycle to life. There is a cycle to our days, weeks, months, years, and so on. We see this cycle in our seasons. We see this cycle in the basics of life. This rhythm teaches us so much about life. One of the truths we learn in this cycle is the fact that in order to have new life, other things must die. There is no greater example of this than in Jesus. We know it is through Jesus' death that anyone who puts their faith in him will have life. Without God there is no life. This concept is true in our eternal lives, but it is also true for our lives here on earth. As God continually prunes us and molds us into the image of his son, Jesus, there are things in our lives that must die. Although this may be a simple concept, it is still difficult! Dying to self is not an easy thing. Coming to the end of ourselves is often painful. However, it is much more appealing when we start realizing that God wants to create something new in us through the death of our flesh. What things need to die in your life?

Friday, October 13 - Read Philippians 3:10-11. In Genesis we learn that we are created in God's image. Since then, sin has entered the world and distorted us; but we still resemble God in many ways. One of the ways we resemble God is in our parenting. Parents have plans for their kids. They have hopes and dreams that their child would grow up to be the best they can be. This is also true of God. God has plans for each of his children. Through his word, God tells us that he has good plans for us. His desire for us is to grow to become more like Jesus. As God transforms us into the image of Jesus, we become the best version of ourselves. Now this all works well until God's goal for us goes against our desire to be free from pain. All of us have a desire to be free of pain. All of us have a desire to be happy. God wants this for us as well. However, God knows that growth does not always happen in this kind of environment. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Most growth happens in times of mourning and suffering. God's greatest goal for us is to grow and transform in the image of Jesus and this means He will allow us to go through times of pain and suffering. Will you allow these times to mold and shape you into the image of Jesus?