

I. Introduction

- A. For 28 years, researchers have been tracking how happy different nations are. In the last survey, the U.S. ranks #16 out of about 100 countries surveyed. That's according to the World Values Survey, funded by the National Science Foundation.
- B. I have to say that I can't agree with all the assumptions used to set up the study, but they did make some good discoveries.
- C. Want to know what countries have the happiest people? Denmark, Puerto Rico, and Columbia—other countries that ranked above the U.S. are: Ireland, Switzerland, and Canada.
- D. Do you want to know what they all have in common? Good coffee! Yeah, good coffee is the secret of happiness.
- E. Actually, not.
- F. Happiness is a spiritual thing, and Jesus talked about it. *He said, "I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).
- G. He said, *"But now I come to You [Father], and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.* (John 17:13, NKJV). He's talking about you. He's talking about you, having His joy overflowing in you. He's talking about you, living in the 21st century, and literally sharing the happiness of God.
- H. That's the life. That's the life that surveys don't measure. That's the great promise. That's what we're after—the life of God in the soul of a human.
- I. And the cool thing is that Jesus didn't invent this concept. The mind-blowing thought that humans can share God's happiness runs from the beginning to the end of God's big story. It's all over the Bible in stories, promises, illustrations, symbols, and rituals.
- J. And one of the greatest symbols of all is right here in the Book of Joshua. It is the Promised Land. That is the place where you live a God-blessed life. That is the place where:
 - 1. You experience maximum grace from God, and
 - 2. God receives maximum glory from you.
- K. Because happiness is a spiritual thing.
- L. God has a Promised Land, the abundant life of Jesus, and it's just hanging there, waiting for you to take it.
- M. Just like 3,400 years ago, Joshua and his people had to take their Promised Land.
- N. But there's a catch—in order to enter the Promised Land, we have to do a few things right. And they're outlined for us right here. Let's look.

II. Bond with God

- A. *6 "Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses, My servant, commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go"* (Joshua 1:6-9, NKJV).
- B. When Margi and I got married, I asked Tim, the pastor who married us, to use these verses in our service. I think it's an incredible promise from God.
- C. Joshua had the first five books of the Bible, the Book of the Law. This book was the secret of his success. It encouraged him, it strengthened him. It guided him. Because when you take in the Word of God, you don't just get information, you also get power.
- D. And with that power comes a promise: that you will make your way prosperous and you will have good success.
- E. Anybody here want a life that is prosperous?
- F. Anybody here want a life that has good success?
- G. Then you need to meditate on this Word "day and night." This, to me, means "a lot." By the way, to meditate doesn't mean to sit in the dark and think of nothing. In the ancient language, it means to study, to think through, to discuss, to chew on God's Word. That's one of the things so many of our small groups do every single week—communal meditation on God's Word.
- H. In my first ministry, I was a children and Jr. High pastor at the church that started Awana. If you know anything about Awana, you know that its main thing is to help kids memorize Bible verses.
- I. I was in urban Chicago, and we had a lot of kids from a lot of different schools, all ages, all kinds of families, and even a lot of messed up families.
- J. Even still, over and over, I had parents coming to me and saying that when their kids started memorizing the Bible, they started doing better in school. Their grades went up. Over the years, I heard this over and over.
- K. Because God blesses His Word. God told Joshua, "Meditate day and night, and you will make your way prosperous, and you will have good success."
- L. That's why I'm always emphasizing the Bible. It's the key that unlocks the door to the Promised Land. There's a reason.
 - 1. Yes, the Bible maps the terrain of this treacherous realm called earth, and guides us safely home, but there's more.
 - 2. Yes, the Bible also brings God's power into your heart so that you can observe to do all that it says. I taught on this a couple weeks ago: when you take in the Word of God, you don't just get information, you also get power. God's power to live the life God has designed for you.
 - 3. So the Word guides us, and the Word empowers us, but there's one more quality, and to me, it's the most important quality of all:
 - a) **THE WORD BONDS US TO GOD.**
- M. It's not just about facts.
- N. It's not just about power.

- O. It's about you, loving God and God loving you. You bond with God pretty much the same way you bond with your boyfriend, or girlfriend, or husband, or wife, or car, or buddies, or dog, or cat.
- P. You talk, you listen, you touch, and you speak. Why do we worship? Because God is worthy, and because it creates a bond of affection between you and God. You can FEEL attached to God, but you have to bond to Him.
- Q. God designed your heart to commune with His heart, and that doesn't happen apart from the Word. The worship doesn't stop when the music stops; the worship continues in the word.
- R. God designed your heart to be happiest when you are in communion with His heart, and that doesn't happen apart from the Word.
- S. So, right here, on the edge of the Promised Land, God says, here's a book—plant it right smack in the middle of your life, and you're going to have a good life.
 - 1. Even if you have enemies.
 - 2. Even if you're going up against giants.
 - 3. Even if the people on your team are whiners or worse.
 - 4. Even if anything.
- T. This book of God's take on reality shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night. Get tight with God, bond with God. Do that right, and nobody can steal your happiness. That's the first thing you have to get right if you want to enter the Promised Land.
- U. Here's the next one:

III . Bond with God's People

- A. *10 Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, 11 "Pass through the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess.'" 12 And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, Joshua spoke, saying, 13 "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is giving you rest and is giving you this land.' 14 Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side of the Jordan. But you shall pass before your brethren armed, all your mighty men of valor, and help them, 15 until the LORD has given your brethren rest, as He gave you, and they also have taken possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and enjoy it, which Moses the LORD'S servant gave you on this side of the Jordan toward the sunrise."* (Joshua 1:10-15, NKJV).
- B. Background: It's a little tricky to count the tribes of Israel. Yes, there were twelve, but the Tribe of Joseph was actually split into two half-tribes named after his sons. So that's why verse 12 talks about the half-tribe of Manasseh.
- C. To really get the story, let's look at a map.
- D. I just want to show you a little feature here. The Promised Land spills over both sides of the Jordan River. That's all I want to say with this map. The Promised Land spills over both sides of the Jordan River.
- E. Aaaaand the 2.5 tribes of verse 12 are already in their share of the Promised Land. They have arrived. They are on the right side of the map, on the East side of the Jordan River.
- F. They have finished their wilderness wanderings. The whole nation fought to conquer the enemies on this side of the Jordan, so that now 2.5 tribes have their share.
- G. These tribes were ranchers. They ran cattle, and this was excellent land for cattle. And so the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, were happy campers. They're getting their homes in order, their businesses going, and they are starting to enjoy the Promised Land.
- H. BUT there's one little problem—their brothers and sisters in the other tribes of Israel need to go fight for their share of the land west of the Jordan River.
- I. So Joshua comes and says,
 - 1. "Hey, 2.5 Tribes—remember that your brothers and sisters fought with you to conquer your part of the Promised Land, and now you are super-tempted to hunker down, and enjoy what you have.
 - 2. "But listen, 2.5 Tribes who have what you want—remember this lesson:
 - 3. "Nobody wins until we all win.
 - 4. "Because we are one! We are united! We're brothers and sisters in the Lord. IN Christ, we are one People of God! You didn't win without help, and they can't win without your help.
 - 5. "So, you need to send your soldiers to help the other tribes conquer their share of the Promised Land just like they helped you get yours!!!!"
- J. One thousand four hundred years later, Jesus prayed:
 - 1. *"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one."* (John 17:22, NKJV).

IV . Nobody wins till we all win.

- A. And one of the great temptations for our lives as Christians is to forget that just because some of your battles are over, that doesn't mean that the war is over.
 - 1. Because the war isn't over till every person in our church has stepped into the full possession of the Promised Land and is well on their way to spiritual maturity, and a solid life with God.
 - 2. And even then it's still not over, because we have to reach beyond our own church doors.
 - 3. IN fact, while we live in this world, the war will never be over. Yes, your battle may be over, but the war still rages on.
- B. You have brothers and sisters who are fighting for their lives every single day. They are fighting for their birthright, their rights and privileges as God's dear children, and when the grand story of cosmic history is finally told, I hope that the story includes YOU, fighting shoulder to shoulder with them.

- C. Nobody wins till we all win.
- D. We are one. We stand in community with one another. We're on the same team, and we need to act like it.
- E. Neighborhood Church is a huge salad bowl. We have all kinds of people mixed together. A whole lot of you have been walking with God for a very long time. You have spent a long time learning the Bible. Some of you have spent many decades in Bible study, and you have these beautifully worn out Bibles to show for it. Even more important, you have **TENDER-HEARTED SOULS**, because of your time with God in the Word.
- F. And because of your long walk with Jesus, you have left behind the craziness of a dysfunctional family. You have overcome the mess of divorce and fatherlessness and addictions and bankruptcy and abuse and all that stuff is way deep in your past.
- G. And God has begun to heal you.
- H. And you are so grateful—so appreciative of all God has done for you. Many of those struggles that used to plague you are over. You are beginning to enter into your rest. You are at peace with God and peace with your crazy, dysfunctional past. The Holy Spirit has ministered so beautifully in your heart, and all that stuff just seems like a distant memory. It was a lifetime ago.
- I. The great temptation for you is to forget that right now, today, sitting one row away from you, are brothers and sisters who are totally overwhelmed with the craziness of life, today. They are blown away. They are ready to throw in the towel.
- J. Sitting in our church is a generation of young adults raised on relativism in an age of terrorism, and a culture of cynicism. They don't have anything solid to hang onto. No anchors. No solid ground. They're afraid.
- K. They are wandering in wilderness, and they can't even begin to believe that the Promise Land is possible for them.
- L. They are facing giants every single day. They have huge battles ahead of them, and they are going to lose.
- M. **UNLESS YOU STEP ALONGSIDE THEM AND SAY I'M HERE FOR YOU. AND I'M HERE TO TELL YOU, YOU CAN WHIP THOSE GIANTS, BECAUSE I HAVE BEEN WHERE YOU ARE, AND I'VE SEEN GOD WHIP THOSE GIANTS IN MY LIFE, AND I KNOW HE CAN DO THEM IN YOUR LIFE TOO.**
- N. Just because you got yours doesn't mean the war is over. We are a church, and we are one. And nobody wins till we all win.
 - 1. Deut 7:17-22

V. Veteran Christians

- A. I am speaking especially to our veterans right now, and saying we need you. Right now, there is someone in our church who needs to hear you say:
 - 1. I have been through the war with addiction, and I can tell you that God will set you free.
 - 2. I have walked through a dark wilderness called divorce, and want you to know, with God, there is life and love after divorce.
 - 3. I have even gone through the valley of the shadow of death, and I know what it's like to suffer loss, pain, and illness and God's grace was there for me, and it will be there for you too. Stay with Jesus. Stay with God.
- B. We need your voice. Dear Veteran follower of Jesus Christ, there are hundreds of rookies right here at Neighborhood Church who urgently need **YOU** to come alongside them, and step back into the crazy noise and dysfunction of their lives, and to help them fight their battles for the Promised Land, just like, years ago, someone helped you fight yours.
- C. Remember? Do you remember?
- D. Look at the first word of verse 13: what is it? "Remember!"
- E. Our problem is we forget how hard it is to turn a life around. And we forget how many people spoke into our lives and were there for us when we were messed up.
- F. And now it's your turn. Don't forget. Remember God's call on your life.
- G. Because your Promised Land isn't just about you, it's about us. It's not just about the Word in us, it's about the Word oozing out of us, and coming out our pores, and making us into one, united, invincible army of grace.

VI. Remember

- A. As I was getting ready to preach this message, I thought back on my life, and how at every stage in my life, God had pre-positioned a key person to encourage me in my battle.
 - 1. Emotionally, a man named Marty took me, a young pastor out for lunch every Wednesday, and just encouraged me.
 - 2. Financially, a friend whose name I won't say kept me alive when I could barely pay my rent.
 - 3. Relationally, a group of wonderful friends who fed me, and hung out with me, and let me be me.
 - 4. Professionally, a man named Vern found me wandering in a career wilderness, and said, "Bill, how would you like to come and work with me in church." And another friend, a pastor named Wayne, taught me how to do a baptism and not drown somebody, and how to do a child dedication and make it special.
 - 5. Spiritually, an older man named Lance B. Latham taught me the gospel of grace and encouraged me to plant a church.
- B. I could go on. But at every key point of my spiritual journey as a rookie, God had pre-positioned a veteran to guide me, encourage me, and bless me, and I wouldn't be standing here today if it weren't for them.
- C. Because it's one thing for me to stand here and to preach the importance of God's Word—and you can amen that.
- D. But the middle of Joshua 1, which is about the Word in you, leads to the end of Joshua 1, which is about the Word through you to others.
- E. And I'm wondering, dear long-time, veteran follower of Jesus, can you amen this? Can you shed whatever sanitized bubble you've built around your faith, and get back into the trenches?

VII. Joshua

- A. Joshua challenges the 2.5 tribes who have their share of the Promised Land, and this is one of the high points of Israelite history.
- B. Because you know what they say?

- C. *16 So they answered Joshua, saying, "All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. 17 Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the LORD your God be with you, as He was with Moses. 18 Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage"* (Joshua 1:16-18, NKJV).
- D. Chapter four says they sent 40,000 armed men, prepared for war, veterans, into the battle for Jericho (Josh 4:12, 13).
- E. Joshua called. They answered.
- F. And they discovered something: they discovered that happiness isn't about avoiding the hard stuff; happiness is about wading into life's hard stuff by the power of God.
- G. Joshua called; they answered.

VIII. Conclusion

- A. And here am I. Calling you, veteran. Calling you, long term Christian with most of your battles behind you.
- B. And I'm asking you:
 - 1. Will you remember what God has brought you through?
 - 2. Will you remember all people who sacrificed for you?
 - 3. Will you burst your sanitized Christian bubble, and come along side the messy families, and wounded spirits, and needy children, and immoral stories of the brave men and women who are part of our church today?
 - 4. Will you join your brothers and sisters who still have a battle to fight?
- C. People's lives can be messy, broken, confusing, offensive, and crazy, don't you think?
- D. What are you going to do with the Prodigals at Neighborhood Church?
 - 1. You can either be like the older brother, resenting the crap in their lives and wishing they would go away.
 - 2. Or like the Father, embracing them, and easing their re-entry into the family.
- E. Your choice.
- F. I'm not asking you to do anything today.
- G. I'm asking you to think about something, to pray about something. To reflect on the meaning of God's Word in Joshua.
- H. Today, I'm issuing the call to arms.
- I. And next week, we'll move out. I'll tell you exactly how you can get back into the fray.
- J. Joshua called. They answered. I'm calling. Your turn.
- K. (Source for happiness survey: National Science Foundation. "Despite Frustrations, Americans Are Pretty Darned Happy." Science Daily 1 July 2008. 2 October 2009 <<http://www.sciencedaily.com/#/releases/2008/06/080630130129.htm>>.)