

Redefining Happiness

"At first, I thought he was awful, but he turned out to be a nice guy."

Think you know what that statement means? Consider the original meaning of these words:

- **Awful.** Something full of awe and inspiring awe.
- **Nice.** The word originally referred to something silly and foolish.
- **Guy.** This word used to refer to someone frightening. Guy Fawkes was part of an attempt to blow up the British Parliament in 1605. Afterwards, the people would burn his effigy—a “Guy Fawkes” or a “guy.”

Words change meaning over time. Reread that opening sentence in light of those earlier word meanings, and it says something quite different!

I'm going to give you one more example, and it will upset the churchy people in the crowd.

- **Blessed.** The Greek word means happy.

We don't like to use the word "happy," because we've all heard the sermons telling us that happiness is tied to our circumstances; God, on the other hand, blesses us with joy no matter the circumstances. "Happy" is a meal kids get at McDonalds. Besides, "blessed" just sounds more spiritual, right?

Before anymore burns me in effigy, I'm just saying that's what the word once meant. We are so used to using “blessed” in a spiritual, Christ-oriented meaning that it feels sacrilegious to use it any other way. But that's the very word Jesus used in what we commonly refer to as The Beatitudes. But why would Jesus use a word we associate with good feelings, good circumstances, and not-so-good kids' meals?

Jesus took happiness and turned it upside down. We run in all sorts of directions to find happiness,

but Jesus pinpointed the only way to any form of contentment, joy, and yes, happiness. It's as if Jesus was saying:

You want to be happy? I mean really happy? I mean live with a joy that lasts and is not tied to people, things, or circumstances? I am going to redefine happiness. It comes through being poor in spirit, mourning, being meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, being merciful, being pure in heart, being a peacemaker, and, yes, being persecuted because of righteousness. (See Matt. 5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-23.)

This flies in the face of everything TV and romcoms tell us about being happy. Just look at that list! How can anyone equate finding happiness to being poor and facing opposition?

This is where faith and trust come in. What Jesus expressed in this sermon are the words of the One who loves us deeply and knows us so well. These are the words of Jesus, the One who created us. It's safe to say He knows the best way for us to experience life, joy, contentment, and permanent happiness. But it's going to take us stepping out in faith and taking Jesus at His word.

- When we realize we are poor--spiritually bankrupt on our own--we are in a position to enter God's kingdom.
- When we hunger for the things of God, God responds and fills us!
- When we mourn over our situation—our sinfulness and spiritual poverty—Christ forgives, sets us free, and turns our mourning into laughing.
- When we face opposition because of Christ, we can still rejoice because of His presence and the reward we will receive as His children.

I much prefer Jesus's approach to happiness. It may be at odds with the world, but it's right in line with true joy. And for that, I am blessed.