



*Cliff Loesch*

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*BIBLE READING: Psalm 103:1-5*

What truly makes a person happy? Of course the answer will be slightly different for everyone. Accomplishing something that is important to me, even a little thing, makes me happy. And maybe happiness is tied to our values somehow. Whatever you value most in life, when you daily express those values, then you are probably going to find happiness. Or it will find you.

These words were spoken by George Fox, founder of the Quakers:

Be patterns, be examples...wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone; whereby in them you may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.

In the 1600s when George Fox wrote these words, the Quakers were pretty serious people. But in that quote I see the way that recognizing the presence of God within us and connecting with the presence of God in others brought forth cheerfulness, helping these first Friends walk cheerfully over the world. Yet that's not all. Fox's first words are important, too. He says, "Be patterns, be examples"—let your life preach for you, and then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world. In other words, when we live by this core value of letting our lives speak, we will find cheerfulness and happiness.

May our lives come to be characterized by joy, a kind of joy that other people can actually see when they look at us.

*SONG: In Christ Alone*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, may we be a witness of you and a blessing to all those we meet.*

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*BIBLE READING: Isaiah 55:6-13*

I recently woke up in the night with lots of thoughts running through my head: worried thoughts, fearful thoughts, everything-is-going-to-turn-out-really-bad kind of thoughts. I couldn't seem to flip those voices around in any other way—they just kept coming. A long time has passed since this type of thing has happened, so I was somewhat caught by surprise.

While I was trying to turn those worries into prayer, I must have dozed off, because a little later I woke up with Isaiah 55 on my mind. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts.” My response was, “Isn't that the truth.” In fact, praise God for that! I was very glad to think about the distinction between my thoughts and God's thoughts, because at that moment, my thoughts were at a pretty low point.

I needed to get outside my thoughts. I needed to hear God's thoughts that are higher than my thoughts. I needed to be still and listen.

Have you ever sat still in God's presence long enough to allow all the fearful voices to subside? Have you given enough time in his presence so as to forget about the long lists of urgent things needing to be done? Time enough to let the tension in your shoulders completely relax? Time enough to sense that you could actually be ready to hear God's thoughts, should God choose to speak? Our worries and fears generate lots of requests, but how much better to get outside our words and to listen for God's higher thoughts! How much better it is to seek, to pray, to ask from within God's will as best we can know it.

*SONG: The Voice of Truth*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I want to hear your thoughts above my own chaos.*

—Cliff Loesch

*BIBLE READING: Luke 16:1-14*

For followers of Christ, the act of giving of money should be an act of worship. Why did Jesus spend so much time talking about money and possessions? Simply because these things were always on everyone's mind.

People think about money a lot; it's a big part of being human. Money exerts a kind of power over a person, and anyone can become obsessed by it. I am sure these are reasons why Jesus spoke about money so frequently. If we are going to talk about real transformation that reaches every part of our being—the complete transformation Christ wants for each one of us—we cannot leave out money and possessions. This part of our lives needs transformation too, and so Jesus addressed it.

Sometimes singing is just singing and it is not an act of worship. Sometimes reading Scripture is just reading and it is not an act of worship. Sometimes serving others is helpful and nice, but it is not done as an act of worship. Likewise, giving money is not necessarily an act of worship. But all of these things *can* be worship, and worship should never be seen as something done solely inside the church walls on Sunday mornings.

What is at stake in worship? *Everything* is at stake. As we truly worship, we risk transformation—the type of transformation that reaches the whole of our being.

May all the parts of our lives and all of our giving become transformed into acts of worship expressing our love, devotion, and thanks to God.

*SONG: Let Me Be a Sacrifice*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Creator God, I want to truly worship you with everything I have and everything I am.*

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*BIBLE READING: John 14:1-7*

John 14 begins with Jesus telling his disciples, “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.” In the same chapter, Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”

Inner peace is God’s desire for us. Jesus gave us peace in John 14—just handed it to us as a gift. Yet inner peace is elusive for so many. Like a mirage, peace disappears before we can catch up to it.

Did inner peace come naturally to Jesus? Or was it something that even he had to develop? Many things about Jesus’ life would have made inner peace difficult. While reading the Gospels, we see Jesus seeking times of solitude, going off by himself to pray on a regular basis. This shows us how to develop an inner life. Jesus’ times of listening prayer helped him walk through turbulent events with a sense of inner peace.

I don’t know of very many people who constantly live with a settled sense of inner peace. None of us seem to have fully received this gift of peace that was given for all of humankind. But we can experience more peace than we already do—and that is good news. I pray that each of us may discover ways to live more centered lives, that we will experience a deeper sense of inner peace.

*SONG: Jesus, I Am Resting, Resting*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: God, help me return often to my center of peace, which is you.*

—Cliff Loesch

*BIBLE READING: Mark 4:35-41*

The disciples seemed genuinely surprised that Jesus was able to calm the wind and the waves. If these men didn't wake Jesus up out of an expectation that he would stop the storm, why did they wake him up? The disciples needed some encouragement, I think, but they also seem to want what Jesus possessed: peace when things seemed at their worst, and lots of trust.

We all want the ability to remain calm during the storms. If only we could sleep peacefully through the waves, if we could just reduce our worry about money—or anything else, for that matter.

Jesus lived this kind of life, but he had power to speak to the storm and make it stop. And truthfully, most of our problems are of a different kind—economic struggles, relationship issues, or health problems with no easy or quick solution. God can give us the power to speak peace into other people's situations, and also into our own. We may not have control *over* the storms encountered in life, but we have a bit of control over our response *to* them. And we can encourage other people in the midst of their troubles.

That's what I need in the middle of the storms of life: encouragement to do the things needed to make it through, a sense of peace, and lots and lots of trust. Whenever we're in a storm and lacking encouragement, peace, or trust, that's a very good time to go wake up Jesus. Christ can help with all of those things—and sometimes much, much more—to still the storms around us.

*SONG: 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Mighty God, today I want to trust you more and be a source of peace for others.*

—Cliff Loesch

*BIBLE READING: Galatians 2:20*

A toddler's approach to life—"mine, mine, mine!"—is a phase we've all experienced. What a contrast from Christ's way! "I will give and give and give—even giving all of myself for you." We start out in the toddler phase, then spend our lives learning to move beyond the fixation on ourselves and the desire for control. This is a movement toward Christ's way, an action that requires trust.

Trust, really? What does Christianity have to do with trust? Well, let me ask you this: What are you going to do when you discover that the world around you cannot be controlled? In every phase of life we must learn not only the importance of care and concern for others, but also the reality that we rely on others. And even more than that, we rely on God.

When you and I try to direct all of the complicated situations around us, what is the usual result? Frustration. And when we try to control all the people around us, what is the usual result? Frustration!

Life requires trust, and trust is not easy. But then, neither is control. Trying to control the situations and people around us causes lots of frustration, ending in pushing people away. Neither is self-sufficiency easy. In fact, total self-sufficiency is impossible. In every sphere of life we discover our need of reliance on others, and quite often we encounter situations where we realize the importance of placing trust in God.

*SONG: Surrender (Vineyard)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: O God, help us to begin to discover what it means to allow Christ to live through us. May we grow in love and grow in trust.*

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*BIBLE READING: John 2:13-22*

In this story, Jesus definitely created a scene and shook things up. Sometimes we struggle to fully understand why Jesus felt so strongly that he cracked a whip, turned over tables, and chased out livestock and people. I think Jesus was trying to change “business as usual.” Maybe those people in the temple courts were buying and selling again the very next day, or maybe some of them were thinking about it.

Instead of trying to find a rational explanation for Jesus’ actions, perhaps we should ask ourselves why we could never imagine a circumstance where we would engage in anything so bold, risky, or confrontational. Is there nothing that brings out this much passion in us?

In times of danger people are warned to take cover. Then when the threat has passed, the “all clear” signal is given. As I considered this passage, I thought of Jesus in the temple, still holding the whip after that extraordinary outburst, giving the all clear signal: All is clear now. You can come in and pray. You can come in and listen.

No doubt there are tables that need to be turned over in our world today, problems that will not get solved through business as usual. Maybe Jesus is showing us the first step to take: clearing out some space for prayer.

But while we’re listening, lifting up needs and concerns, requesting God’s help in life, let us ask for a little of the passion of Jesus. Let us also ask for some of his boldness. To be sure, this world needs it.

*SONG: Shine, Jesus, Shine*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, pour your heart into me today and let me join you in your work.*

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*BIBLE READING: Isaiah 6:1-8*

In this text, Isaiah sees a vision of God in full splendor, sitting high on a throne as the train of his robe filled the temple, surrounded by angels. The grandeur of the scene caused Isaiah to feel small and insignificant by contrast. But then an angel flew to him, touching his lips with a hot coal, telling Isaiah that by this act “Your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” In other words, there is no need for you to feel unworthy any longer—you belong here. You should not see yourself as an insignificant intruder, but rather part of this grand vision.

This passage speaks of personal transformation. Every one of us needs to feel that our guilt has departed and our sin has been blotted out. We need to experience a sense of forgiveness.

But then God asks the question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah responds, “Here am I. Send me!” Maybe the questions were not only aimed at Isaiah. Maybe they were general questions that God was asking.

The inward, personal side of faith is wonderful and necessary. We must experience cleansing and inner transformation before we can even hear God’s call and do God’s work effectively. But we also need to respond to God’s call and go out into the world to be God’s hands and feet—to become God’s agents of transformation, reconciliation, and hope.

God still asks the questions: “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” Is anyone listening?

*SONG: Who Am I?*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, give us ears to hear your voice and courage to say, “Here I am—send me!”*

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