

Habits of Happiness

“Live Like Citizens of Heaven”

Part 3

Intro: Lisa and I love to travel internationally. We both enjoy being in different cultures. Experiencing another culture is simply fun for us. One thing is true, no matter where we travel, residents from the country we are visiting immediately know we are from the US. We can be in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Europe, and it's obvious we are not from that country. WHY? We don't look like, act like, or sound like the citizens of those countries. We couldn't blend in even if we wanted to. It's just obvious we're citizens of another country. Sometimes the qualities of Americans have been a bit embarrassing. (Share – Vacations in Mexico - meeting people from Europe who say we are the nicest Americans they've ever met)

It is this imagery that we are left with from the word of God. As followers of Jesus, we are to identify more with being citizens of heaven rather than citizens of our earthly country. In fact, learning to live like citizens of heaven is another habit of happiness.

Phil. 1:27 “Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News.” (NLT)

What does it mean to act like a citizen of heaven? How do we make this a habit?

1. Daily identify with our heavenly country

“Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven...”

- We will never live like citizens of heaven until we identify more with our heavenly country more than our earthly one. If I am a US citizen who happens to be a believer, then I will act like it. BUT, if I know I am a citizen of heaven who happens to be temporarily assigned in the US, I will live like this.
- Most followers of Jesus need a radically different mindset when it comes to this issue. Our struggle is a result of identifying with the wrong country. This transfer of citizenship is another major theme of the NT.

I Peter 2:9-11 “But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God’s people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God’s mercy. Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners...” (NLT)

- Notice this? We are God's people of His Kingdom. We are temporary residents and foreigners in this life. What country we identify with will be connected to our happiness. WHY? It's tough to be truly happy if we are having an identity crisis. It's tough to experience joy if we're trying to blend into a country we don't belong to!

So how do I identify with being a citizen of heaven?

- Choose to value your heavenly citizenship more than your earthly one

Do you value being a US citizen more than a citizen of heaven? Which influences your identity more; being an American or being a believer in Jesus? Are you an American believer or a believer who happens to be living in America?

- Every day we need to remind ourselves who we are and where we belong.
- Traveling has caused me to value the privilege of being born in America. Here in a few weeks, Lisa will be taking another team to Guatemala. (Poverty / brokenness / lack of opportunity / the malnutrition of children / lack of medical care / crime)
- What about Europe? We have more freedom than Europe folks! (EXPLAIN)
- As believers we're from a heavenly country that is perfect not broken; it's built by Jesus with us in mind / there's no sickness, disease or death / it's eternal /
- I think the problem is we really don't know much about the country we're from so it's hard to identify with it and value it. (Book – HEAVEN – by Randy Alcorn)

- Embrace the values of your heavenly country more than your earthly one

The values of heaven are radically different than this world. Which values do you live more? We might be able to describe the values of being an American...things like freedom and liberty, and the rights of each individual. BUT, do you know the values of the heavenly Kingdom you are a part of? They are radically different.

- The Declaration of Independence is a very important document for our country. It forms the foundation of our values as a nation.
- God's word is the document for the citizens of heaven that forms the foundation of the values in God's Kingdom. To not know God's word is to not know the values of the country we belong to. (Are you reading God's word daily?)
- This is the only way to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy" of the Kingdom you belong to.
- One of the key values of being a citizen of heaven is UNITY. This is one of the most important values in God's Kingdom.
- In John 17, it is one of the major themes Jesus prayed for before His crucifixion. "Make them one just as We are one Father."

Do you daily identify yourself with the right country?

2. Daily practice unity in our relationships

"you are standing together with one spirit"

- One of the most distinguishing qualities of being a citizen of heaven are the relationships we experience. We practice something the world cannot do...relational UNITY. To not get along with one another is to act just like this world. Too many believers today identify with the wrong country when it comes to their relationships.

- Walking in unity with one another is probably one of the most joy producing experiences of this life. We all experience the stress and discomfort when relationships are not right; when there's conflict; when there's mistrust and heartache. Wrong country!
- Unity is one of the major themes of the NT. To not make it a habit to walk together in unity is to ignore what Jesus taught and deny what country we are from completely. Unity is our testimony. Unity evokes God's blessing. Unity results in tremendous power for the Kingdom of God. Unity = Happiness.

How do we make this a habit?

- Choose to focus on what we agree on

The simple truth is more unites us than divides us. It's our choice what we decide to focus on that will create unity or not. Illustrate with our staff: We have a multi-generational staff. The oldest is in their 70's and the youngest is 23. Of course there are tremendous generational differences. BUT, we choose to focus on the common ground we have and our common purpose and the unity is amazing. This is the best team I have ever had. I love coming to work because of the unity. Unity = JOY!

- Stop magnifying what we don't agree on

We have to stop magnifying minor issues. We have to stop getting worked up over different methods, different practices and even different ideas and opinions. We can all find reason to not get along /to not work together / and to avoid each other. BUT how does this bring God glory and how does make us happy? The more we focus on what divides us relationally the more unhappy we become. Divisive people are the most unhappy people I have ever encountered. Choose never to be one of them!

- You all can focus on things about Foothills you don't like. We're not perfect. Music too loud – not your style of songs – don't like the parking – wish we had a specific class or program we don't offer – wish it was easier to connect – don't like my speaking style. Don't like the coffee.....
- BUT, can you focus on what you do like and what you see God doing here? This church is filled with amazing things-opportunities-results-people-blessing. It's always a choice.

- Stand together with others who are different than you

If you refuse to stand together / work together / participate together with people that have differences than you then you are rejecting unity. If someone has to agree 100% with your opinions and your beliefs before you will "stand together" with them, you will be standing alone most of your life! AND you will be unhappy most of your life as well!

- Our culture lies to us. Society demands agreement before unity. That's not unity. That's uniformity. That's control. That's manipulation. Unity values the differences and embraces an interdependence on one another. Differences make us better, stronger, more complete. Don't confuse unity with uniformity.

- This is why the bible uses the human body as an example of unity. All the different, necessary pieces all working together to make an amazing whole.
- This is what the church should look like. The more diverse we are working together the greater our witness to the world. “Why do you guys all get along?”
- The person who is irritating you just might be the person you need.
- Are you daily practicing unity in relationships? It’s not optional for the believer!

3. Daily practice unity in our purpose

“you are standing together with... one purpose”

- God not only has an individual purpose for our lives, He also has a corporate purpose for His church that He expects His followers to stand together in. God calls His followers to practice unity of purpose.
- When churches do not rally people around Godly purpose there is chaos. Unity of purpose is essential to experience happiness together as a church. It’s the difference between a rocket and a bomb. (Explain)
- Foothills has been chasing after the same purpose since 1998. (On screen) Reach – Equip – Transform Explain
- We submit our decisions to this purpose. Explain
- Living like a citizen of heaven is not only coming to church to grow, be fed, be challenged, be encouraged, enjoy the worship and eat the food. It is choosing to stand together with one another in ONE PURPOSE. This is the purpose God has given us as a church.
- Everything we do as a church is connected to this purpose. Our parking lot project is not about pavement; it is about our purpose. We want to remove obstacles so people can attend. (People have left of Sundays). We want to love our older saints – physically impaired people better. We want a good witness to our neighbors and community (by taking care of water drainage.) It all purpose.
- There is so much power, blessing and happiness as we have pursued unity of purpose over all these years. It’s one of the key reasons this is such a joy filled place.
- When God’s people stand together in unity of purpose they are an unstoppable force for the Kingdom of God. How do we daily practice unity of purpose?
 - Get personally involved with this purpose
 - Financially accept purpose – give towards the needs of the purpose. Purpose is not free. Stop expecting it to be free.
 - Relationally accept purpose – choose to walk in unity with each other. Personally accept responsibility to keep Foothills a relationally sweet place.
 - Personally accept purpose – Time: I serve it with my time / I use my gifts / abilities / talents – I personally get involved. I get out of the blue chair and link my shield with others.

To live like a citizen of heaven is to daily practice unity of purpose. It’s understanding that it’s more than just Jesus and me...it’s also Jesus and US! This is what = happiness.

4. Daily practice unity in our battle for the faith

“you are standing together... fighting together for the faith...”

- Too many followers of Jesus are fighting each other instead of fighting together FOR the Faith! People seem to be oblivious to the fact that we are engaged in a spiritual conflict with a spiritual enemy.
- If Satan can get us distracted and divided, how effective can we be for the Kingdom of God in this life? Not very! The Bible is very clear about this battle.

Eph. 6:10-12 “A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. ¹² For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.” (NLT)

So how do we practice unity in this spiritual battle?

- See divisiveness as demonic

We must understand that divisiveness is one of the greatest strategies of the devil. If we view it as no big deal, then we are playing right into the hands of the enemy. If we all understand that anything divisive is evidence Satan is attacking us, we will respond different. The Christian community has failed in this area for years. Not us...not here...not now! Divisiveness is one of the characteristics of our community God wants to transform. It begins here.

- Pray together for unity

Can I ask every one of you to include this in your daily prayers? Will you pray for your church and will you help defend your church by praying for unity? With all that we have before us, we will never accomplish it without supernatural unity.

- When things are difficult, pull together rather than pull apart

What do we do when things get tough? What do we do when things get turbulent? Some of you are on the brink of pulling apart. You’re on the brink of pulling apart something good...maybe your marriage / a friendship / a ministry / a dream / your church / Yes, things are tough right now, but is pulling apart what God wants you to do? NO!

- Because the enemy is not flesh and blood...It’s not the person you can’t get along with, the need is to come together, link the shields and fight the real enemy.
- Citizens of heaven come together...they pull together...they withstand the hardships together, and they fight the battles together for the faith. This is what will produce the most joy in your life.

So which country do you identify with more? The one you temporarily live in now, or the one you will be spending eternity in? Paul says; *Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven.* Are we?

- Can you choose to daily identify with your heavenly citizenship?
- Can you daily choose unity in your relationships?
- Can you choose to practice unity in our purpose together?
- Can you choose unity in our battle for the faith?

This is what it looks like to live as a citizen of heaven. This is a habit that will produce joy in your life. We don't belong here. The more you try to identify with this broken, evil world the more lost you're going to feel. You were made for more. You were born into a heavenly Kingdom because of what Jesus did for you. It is time to behave where we belong. It's time to show the world what citizens of heaven look like.

How is God asking you to grow in your heavenly citizenship?