

- The Miserable Life –

Ice-Breaker:

- Share a childhood memory of something you really wanted and finally received (maybe for your birthday or Christmas). Did the item really bring you true joy and contentment? Why or Why not?

Discussion:

1. Discuss *The Happiness Illusion – "I believe I'll be happy if I get the circumstances I desire (if the things that happen to me are the things I want to have happen to me)."* Why is this an illusion?

2. Pastor Bryan said: *"The fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.) are not feelings, they are conditions - that is, a person's character."* For instance, ***to <u>love</u> is to will the good of another*** regardless of how they feel about that individual. Joy is also a condition***. <u>Joy</u> is a pervasive sense of well-being*** that comes from trusting God loves me and is in control of my life, regardless of how I feel in the moment.

   Based on the above definitions of love and joy, explain how they are conditions (states of being) and not simply feelings or emotions.

3. Read Philippians 1:15-17. Why is envy and comparison an enemy of real joy in life?

4. Read Philippians 1:3-8 and Hebrews 3:13. Paul expresses deep love, concern and emotion for the people in Philippi. Why is it so important to practice encouragement in our relationships?

5. Read Romans 8:28 and Philippians 1:20-21. Paul was not a pessimist. He said: *"To live is Christ and to die is gain."* He eagerly expected and hoped that God was going to bring about good, even in the midst of his trials. How can we adopt an attitude of optimism in the midst of difficulties in life?

Application:

For Paul, life was summed up in one word - Christ. He was inspired by Christ, loved by Christ, and guided by Christ. He loved, trusted and lived for Christ. Christ was the center of his reality. Therefore, whenever he faced problems (in chains, in prison), he asked this great question: ***"But what does it matter?"***

When you face problems this week, practice backing up, looking at the big picture (that Jesus loves you and has a plan in all things), and saying: ***"But what does it matter?"***