

## Series Slide

There are two ways to think about achieving happiness.

The first way, is that you need to reach out and grab it.

That if you are going to be happy, you've got to go get it.

- I mean, Its written into the Declaration of Independence, right?
- It's a right you have. To chase down happiness. To tie it up, and take it home with you.

Happiness is a angry bull, that wants to buck you off.

- And you are a Rodeo cowboy.
- If you can just go 8 seconds on the happiness bull, you will have mastered it, and then it will be yours.
- So, you tell yourself every morning...off to the Rodeo, to ride the bull.
- Because if you are finally going to be happy, you've got to go get it.

That's the first way to go about finding happiness.

But there is a different way.

- This way sees happiness not as something that you can go get.
- Its not a bull to be ridden, or a task to be accomplished.
- In fact, its not even something that you can achieve.
- See the second way sees happiness as something that surprises you. Something that sneaks up on you.
- This way is different.
- Happiness is unplanned, its not sought after, it...just kind of shows up.
- In fact, you don't even really see it coming. You just look up one day and there it is.

So, who's right?

- Is happiness a bull to be mastered, one that intentionally tries to buck you off, but if you can just stick with it, you'll finally master it...
- Or is happiness some sneaky byproduct of something else?

Today, again...as I have all year as we've talked about "The Good Life"- I'll argue the latter

- ...and leads us to another question...
- if happiness is some pleasantly surprising, unexpected houseguest... how in the world do you put out the welcome mat and turn the porch light on?

### **Title Slide- "8 Seconds or a Shower: How to Find Joy by Ending the Search for Happiness"- Nehemiah 5**

Well, first let me give you a picture of how this works, then, Nehemiah will show us.

Here's my personal experience with this:

- Its no secret to any of you who have been around City Church for any length of time that my wife and I went through an excruciatingly difficult time in our marriage 17 years ago.
- At the heart of it, was a belief that Happiness was like a bull in a rodeo.
- I remember we would have these moments where we both knew something wasn't right. We both knew something was more than off. We would shed tears,... well...she would mostly. I'd just try and figure out how to help her get back on the bull.
- ...and time after time, for 10 years that's exactly what we did.
- She was the cowgirl, I was the Rodeo clown.
- She'd fall off the happiness bull, I'd try and distract it long enough for her to toughen up, lick her wounds, and climb back on.
- We'd have these conversations where I'd give her a pep talk, and she would say, "OK, I'm just going to **choose** to be happy."
  - And then we'd sweep it all back under the rug convinced she could do it!
- But She couldn't. She kept falling off. And I kept acting like a clown.
- Thankfully, one cold day in December, happiness showed up- after the darkest and most difficult 6 months of our marriage- while my wife was in the shower. (it was a little awkward, but effective)

- ...The day my wife quit the rodeo- in the shower she said in a desperate prayer "I'm done trying to be happy, God, if you are going to do something with me, you have to do it all..." And that was the day where deep, lasting, content, joy suddenly moved in with us."

Now, we are in the OT book of Nehemiah. Working our way through this summer. And Chapter 5 is up next for us. But before we read chapter 5, I want you to see the day happiness moved in for the people of Israel.

Because you won't find that in Chapter 5. Chapter 5 is a lot of people Rodeo riding. Chapter 5 is a lot of pain. Its dark...with a little stream of light.

Just so you can know that Happiness does eventually move in with Israel, lets start today in **Nehemiah 12:43**

- **On that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy. The women and children also celebrated, and Jerusalem's rejoicing was heard far away.**

Did you see that? God had made them rejoice with great joy.

- Happiness moved in.
- But before they got there...somebody had to die.

See, like happiness...if you try and grab hold of life...if you try to steal it away from someone or something...you always lose it. Its like trying to hold oil in your hands, it just slips right through your fingers.

But if you are willing to give your life away...if you are willing to die for the sake of someone else...so that they can live...well...you that's right when you find life. And happiness moves in with you.

So, now that you've seen the happy ending, you can rest assured knowing that after we read this chapter...that there is hope.

And as we read this chapter, you'll see 2 kinds of death.

- One is the death caused by people grasping for happiness.
- Because there is always collateral damage when people think happiness has to be achieved. Someone always gets trampled by the bull.

- But, the other death you see in here, is beautiful. Because it's the the kind of giving away of a life that leads to what is going to happen in Nehemiah 12.

...and I hope, it will lead you today to quit the rodeo and head to the shower.

Lets go. **Nehemiah 5.** The whole darn chapter.

**There was a widespread outcry from the people and their wives against their Jewish countrymen.**

**2 Some were saying, "We, our sons, and our daughters are numerous. Let us get grain so that we can eat and live." 3 Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, vineyards, and homes to get grain during the famine." 4 Still others were saying, "We have borrowed money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. 5 We and our children are just like our countrymen and their children, yet we are subjecting our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters are already enslaved, but we are powerless because our fields and vineyards belong to others."**

**6 I became extremely angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints. 7 After seriously considering the matter, I accused the nobles and officials, saying to them, "Each of you is charging his countrymen interest." So I called a large assembly against them 8 and said, "We have done our best to buy back our Jewish countrymen who were sold to foreigners, but now you sell your own countrymen, and we have to buy them back." They remained silent and could not say a word. 9 Then I said, "What you are doing isn't right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God and not invite the reproach of our foreign enemies? 10 Even I, as well as my brothers and my servants, have been lending them money and grain. Please, let's stop charging this interest. 11 Return their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses to them immediately, along with the percentage of the money, grain, new wine, and fresh oil that you have been assessing them."**

**12 They responded, "We will return these things and require nothing more from them. We will do as you say."**

**So I summoned the priests and made everyone take an oath to do this. 13 I also shook the folds of my robe and said, "May God likewise shake from his house and property everyone who doesn't keep this promise. May he be shaken out and have nothing! "**

**The whole assembly said, "Amen," and they praised the Lord. Then the people did as they had promised.**

**14 Furthermore, from the day King Artaxerxes appointed me to be their governor in the land of Judah — from the twentieth year until his thirty-second year, twelve years — I and my associates never ate from the food allotted to the governor. 15 The governors who preceded me had heavily burdened the people, taking from them food and wine as well as a pound of silver. Their subordinates also oppressed the people, but because of the fear of God, I didn't do this. 16 Instead, I devoted myself to the construction of this wall, and all my subordinates were gathered there for the work. We didn't buy any land.**

**17 There were 150 Jews and officials, as well as guests from the surrounding nations at my table. 18 Each day, one ox, six choice sheep, and some fowl were prepared for me. An abundance of all kinds of wine was provided every ten days. But I didn't demand the food allotted to the governor, because the burden on the people was so heavy.**

**19 Remember me favorably, my God, for all that I have done for this people.**

**TRANSITION:** These 19 verses expose two common misconceptions about happiness, two disappointing bull rides, I'll show you those first...but then, I'll show you how happiness comes in subtly. I'll show you how to put out the welcome mat for your unexpected visitor...how to get in shower and give up.

### **1) Happiness is not the immediate result of doing the right thing.**

- Maybe you remember from the last couple of weeks that the people of Israel are doing a great thing.
- Their city was completely devastated...and nobody was doing anything about it.
- ...Until Nehemiah came on the scene. Nehemiah showed up and he was passionate about rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem so the City would be protected...it would be safe from the people who had ransacked the Jews and taken them off into exile.
- and because Nehemiah had read the scriptures and knew that God had said that his blessing was going to be on Israel, he was confident that what he was doing was God's work.

- In other words, he wasn't only doing this for his people, he was doing it because he knew God was doing it.
- In fact- a couple of different times in this chapter he cites "The fear of God"...the respect, awe, and awareness of the reality of God's presence- is the reason they are doing the difficult work
- So Nehemiah in the face of severe hateful opposition gives a rousing speech that motivates everyone to build.
- These are apathetic people that through the beautiful vision Nehemiah gives them, turn into people that sacrifice to get the job done.
- Many of them work long hours, some under the threat of attack from outsiders. They resist the urge to quit. They walk away from money making professions to do a collective work of rebuilding Jerusalem.
- **In short, what we have here is a lot of people who have done the right thing.**
  - Not only have they done the right thing, they've done the right thing when its really hard to do the right thing.
- Time for Karma to kick in... right?
- Put the work in- get the results- right?
- Listen, I think the people of Israel have gone more than 8 seconds with a bull. With what they've gone thru up to this point, they've been on the bull for 8 minutes.
- ...and did you hear what happened to them?
- Famine. Higher taxes.
- ...and...slavery. **v 5**
- See when people left their jobs to do the right thing...GOD's thing... they made less money.
- And when farmers weren't planting crops but laying bricks...well, there was less food.
- Pop quiz for all the econ majors out there...what happens when supply is decreased, and demand is increased?
  - **Higher prices.**

- **And money was exactly what the people working on the wall...ON GOD'S WALL...didn't have.**
- So to buy food, they went into debt. And when they went into debt and couldn't pay, their children were taken as slaves to pay off the debt.
- What did the people of Israel get for their obedience? What did they get for going the whole way on the bull? Did they get happiness?
- No. Their daughters ended up in slavery.
- So, what would you do with God right here?
- Well, if you are a bull rider, you get very angry with God.
- Because see, you pulled your end of the deal. You stayed on the bull. You even did extra credit. Its time for the pay out.
- Its time to be happy. And when it doesn't happen....thats when you quit in the bad way.
- That's when you throw your fists up at God...that's when you end up having a conversation with me in a coffee shop or an airplane.
- You guys know the conversation I'm talking about?

### **Back to 1)**

- It goes like this:
  - I'm sitting reading a book and someone walks up and says, "What are you reading?"
    - Book about God
  - Oh, I don't believe in God.
    - Why not?
  - Because I spent years believing and obeying all that EXPLICITIVE Bible stuff. And then my mom died....or I had my accident...or lost my job....or my husband left me...
  - ...so I was done with obeying God.
- I'm sorry to hear that. Can you show me the part of that BLEEP Bible stuff you were reading where God told you if you obeyed him you are guaranteed to avoid death, or pain, or poverty, or desertion, or mistreatment?
  - Because its not in there.
  - Now, there ARE promises about your body wasting away, about people hating you, about being mistreated, about enduring suffering...he does make those promises.

- Listen, If you are looking at obedience to God's commands as a means to get you a happy life...well, I'm afraid he doesn't promise you that.
- The Jews did the right thing. They sacrificed. They worked...and then they were hungry, broke, and their kids were enslaved.
- I'm not telling you not to do the right thing...you absolutely SHOULD obey God's commands.
- I'm just telling you doing the right thing doesn't buy your happiness in the immediate short term of this vapor of a life...in fact, it's going to guarantee your suffering.

**TRANSITION:** I told you this chapter was dark. I told you it was hard. That's why I told you the end first.

...and then there's the next point. Which is also uplifting.

## **2) The pursuit of happiness can turn you into the person you hate.**

- Andre Agassi was one of America's greatest tennis players. He's a legend.
- ...and he hated tennis.
- See, Andre grew up with a Dad that from Andre's birth marked him as a tennis player.
- He taped a little tennis racket to his hand in the crib.
- He would take Andre out in the hot Las Vegas desert sun and make him hit over 1,000 balls out of souped-up mechanical ball server notoriously named "The Dragon"
- All the while he was yelling at him to hit it harder, and straighter, and with more top spin.
- **When he was 5 years old!**
- Andre Agassi wanted to escape his Dad. He wanted to be free of his overbearing voice. He wanted out from under his oppressive authority.
- As a 7 year old child, Agassi's only escape from his father's wrath, was to win tournaments.
- And he did.
- He won his first 7 tournaments he played. Didn't lose a match.

- Until the finals of his 8<sup>th</sup> tournament.
- He lost.
- This is what he wrote about that experience in his autobiography "Open"
- **I [was] furious with [my opponent], with God, with myself... I'll now have a loss on my record—forever. Nothing can ever change it. I can't endure the thought, but its inescapable: I'm fallible. Blemished. Imperfect. A million balls hit against the dragon—for what?**
- **After years of hearing my father rant at my flaws, one loss has caused me to take up his rant. I've internalized my father—his impatience, his perfectionism, his rage- until his voice doesn't just feel like my own, it is my own. I no longer need my father to torture me. From this day on, I can do it all by myself.**
  - **– Andre Agassi, Open**
- See, Andre Agassi hated Tennis. He hated who his Dad was.
- But once he understood winning at tennis as the only way to have peace from his Dad's fits of anger..
- ...he became angry at anyone who stood in the way of his winning...
- ...even if he WAS the one who made the mistake.
- **The one who hated the anger, became angry in his attempt to escape it.**
- **The tortured became the torturer.**
- **Hurt people, hurt people.**
- ...and when we pursue happiness as a thing to wrestle into submission, we end up becoming the person we hate.
- Take a look at Nehemiah again.
- **v 6-7**
- after the kids are taken as slaves....Nehemiah is angry.
- Maybe we should call him Liam Neesonmiah. Because our daughters have been taken and he has a particular set of skills.
- But, Notice, Nehemiah doesn't go in breaking necks and exacting vengeance. Instead he counsels himself before he opens his mouth.

- That's because Nehemiah is not becoming what he hates. Its because Nehemiah has understood how happiness comes in.
- Its because Nehemiah understands what it means to fear the Lord.
  - But I can't show you that yet.
- First, **v 7**
- See, some of the Jews who happened to a be more financially well-off looked at the famine as an opportunity to chase down their happy days.
- They became loan sharks who eventually became oppressive slave owners.

### **Back to 2)**

- **Now, there are 2 things you need to know about Israel to really get the picture of why Nehemiah is so angry here.**
- The first is that they have a long history of being dominated and enslaved by other nations.
  - From Egypt, to Assyria, Babylon, Persia...the Jews constantly find themselves in slavery.
- The second thing you need to know about Israel is that the reason Jerusalem was ransacked by the Babylonians in the first place was because of their hard and disobedient hearts toward God.
  - Every time Israel would get to a point where they were safe and began to prosper, somehow, they would forget about God. They would forget that God had called them to deliver a message of hope to the world.
  - They would make their lives about themselves, and God would then allow another nation to take them over so that they would wake up to their real mission again.
- And the primary way that God was trying to show himself to the world was by having Israel live a different kind of life than the rest of the world at that time. So he gave them the law.
- Take a look at this part of the law from **Deut 23:19**
- **19 "Do not charge your brother interest on silver, food, or anything that can earn interest**

- Do you see the irony in all this? Israel was just released from slavery to back to a city that was ransacked because they forgot the law, but they go back, disobey the law and end up enslaving themselves.
- Do you see why Nehemiah is so angry?
- Look in **V 8-9**
- Nehemiah is angry because Israel is just repeating itself.
- Nehemiah is angry because Israel doesn't fear God.
- Nehemiah is angry because Israel has been freed from slavery, only to enslave themselves.
- Its just like Andre Agassi said "I didn't need my dad to torture me anymore, I could do it all by myself."
- And now Israel can say the same thing "We don't need other nations to enslave us anymore, we can do it all by ourselves."

### **Back to 2)**

- **App:** I bet some of you already recognize this in yourself.
  - You come from an abusive home.
  - Maybe you watched your Dad take out his anger on your mom.
  - ...and you swore you'd never do that.
  - But now, you are hitting your wife.
  - Or now, you keep getting into relationships with guys exactly like your dad.
  - Or maybe divorce wrecked your home...and you swore that would never do it...but now you are thinking back and saying "It wasn't that bad" as you pursue it in your own marriage.
  - Or maybe you are in some inescapable self-destructive pattern... and even though you know its destroying you...you keep going back, telling yourself every single time...that its its the last time. You've enslaved yourself.

Or maybe- like the people of Israel here, and like Jesus warned about over and over- Money has become the root of all sorts of evil for you.

Sure- its not overt- but you lack generosity. You hold onto money for safety and security. You get angry when you are called to give money away. You use money as a status symbol. You refuse to give to the poor because you blame them for their own issues.

There is nothing about your attitude toward your money that reflects that you fear God and want to honor him.

Its amazing- just like here in Nehemiah 5- how many of us who grow up thinking "I want to be a person thats generous and shares and takes care of people"- maybe because you saw the ugliness of a greedy or exploitative parent or employer or government. But you end up grown with a dozen glib little excuses about how its not right for you to sacrifice...at least right now.

The truth is you're enslaved to your money while you refuse to help those in need.

- I could probably list 1,000 more ways that people in this room are becoming what they hate. All because you're trying to find the happiness that's always been missing in your life by riding a bull....chasing the dollar...or the relationship....or the perfect record... instead of listening to what God says about you.
- Israel thought that building a wall to keep them safe from outside invaders would ensure they'd have a happy life. What they didn't understand is the enemy was inside.
- And until they dealt with that, they'd never be happy....and neither will we.

**TRANSITION:** Now, I want to show you what gets them started. What wakes them up. What's the turning point on this road of self-destruction to one where they end up "rejoicing with Great Joy" like we read at the end of the story?

What causes them to get off the bull and hit the shower?

It all starts when they see someone dying for them.

### **3) Happiness comes from knowing there is life at the end...and dying to get there.**

- The Jewish people are very familiar with people who suck the life out them.

- That seems to have been a recurring part of their story for a long time.
- sin, slavery, grief, sin, slavery, grief. Sin, slavery, grief.
- **Sound familiar to anybody?**
- Would you say your story is like Israel's?
- Sin, slavery, grief. Sin, slavery, grief.
- A recurring pattern of becoming what you hate. Feeling bad for it... then doing it again.
- There is only one way to break the pattern.
- ...and its to find someone who will give life...instead of take it.
- Its to find someone who will freely give you what you always feel like you have to try and suck out of people.
- Its to find someone who will die for you to give you life, rather than steal life from you so they can chase their own happiness.
- In fact, the cycle of sin, slavery, and grief is always broken when someone decides to die for someone else's happiness rather than kill for their own.
- ... and that's exactly what Nehemiah does here.
- **5:10**
- **Nehemiah is different.**
- He doesn't suck life out of the people, he gives it. He dies a thousand little deaths.
- He left his position of comfort in the capital City to come to the slums for the sake of his people.
- Now, when he finds people he could take advantage of, he doesn't. Instead, he's giving out no interest loans.
- At his own expense.
- He's giving away what he has to the oppressed.
- He's generous.

**Responsibility over Rights  
Calling over Comfort**

- But listen to me. He's not doing it because he's trying to get a leg up, or to put people in his debt so he can call in a favor later.
- He's doing it because he knows who God is....and he knows who God says he is.
- He knows the promises God made to this people.
- He knows God has promised to restore Israel, to make them a light to the world to display his glory.
- **He knows how the story ends. So when he gives generously, when he looks sin and oppression in the face and says "This must stop" ...he knows he can't lose.**
- Lose money? Yes.
- Lose his life? Sure.
- But what he can't lose is this tiny little role in a huge beautiful story that ends with rejoicing with great joy.
- Which is what we're all looking for.

#### The Good Life

- **Spiritual Connection**
- He fears God. Knows him and knows he is known- awareness of God's presence.- His prays throughout this book. You can see the connection he has to God in the depth of love he has for this people. It reflects the way God feels about them.
- **Deep Relationships**
- Dan Quinn when he took the job with the commanders- (remember the list of names?- remember the rams horn calling brothers and sisters to come to each others aid- think about the way he shares his food and money with people.
- **"There is nothing more rewarding than doing hard [stuff] with good people."- Dan Quinn, Washington Commanders Head Coach**

#### **Transcendent Purpose**

Are you kidding me? He's on assignment from God. Nehemiah can directly connect the work he is doing to a bigger picture. He is looking to the picture God has painted about how this whole thing ends up. A restored people with their God in a place they will forever be safe with him.

- Because Nehemiah knows how it ends, he is willing to die a thousand little deaths to see it through.
- The death of his riches. The death of his royal position. The death of his rights to the King's salary.
- You know how I know this? **5:19**
- **19 Remember me favorably, my God, for all that I have done for this people.**
- This is not Nehemiah saying "Hey God, don't forget all this good stuff I've done so you'll pay me back." That's bull riding.
- This is a **HERE** shower prayer. See, when people ask God to REMEMBER things, its not because they think he's forgotten. Why would we have any confidence in a God with amnesia. He wouldn't be sure. He wouldn't be rock solid. We couldn't trust a god like that.
- When Nehemiah asks God to remember for his good, he is saying "As I die for these people, I'm doing it knowing that every little death I die is a part of God's beautiful story."- Keep me in that story!
- ...and look what Nehemiah's generosity does.
- Look what his little deaths do to turn around the people of Israel.
- Watch them climb off the bull and into the shower. **v12-13**
- Because of Nehemiah's generosity. Because he was willing to give himself away to give life to these people, they were able to see the God Nehemiah worshipped.
- **You see? the people said "we will do as you say...and everyone said "Amen". And they did as they promised.**
- Aren't those beautiful words at the end of v. 13.
- Do you know what Amen means?
- Amen means "So be it."
- Amen is a way that you say "We agree with what God says."
- That's why we say Amen at the end of a prayer.
  - (Well, truthfully we say amen at the end of the prayer or nobody knows when to look up.) But it SHOULD be why we say amen at the end of a prayer.

- This is the people of God agreeing that the story God is telling is a better one than they can write.
- This is people seeing someone lay down their life on their behalf and saying "YES!" to God.
- And that leads to those beautiful words. "And the people did as they promised."- You hear that in our benediction every week. "WE ARE A FAMILY, A BODY, WE MAKE AND KEEP PROMISES"its a part of our 6 pillars.
- Its why we have covenant membership instead of just being a bunch of people that hang out together. Promises bind us to the each other- they help produce the byproduct of the good life by committing us to sacrifice.

### **Back to 3)**

- **APP:** See, you've promised yourself over and over and over that you will just determine to be happy.
- You've promised yourself over and over and over that you would not become what you hate.
- But you can't keep those promises. You keep breaking them.
- Because you have never REALLY seen anyone die for you.
- ...or maybe you have, but you quickly turned your eyes back to the bull to climb back on.
- Let me give you a picture that sends you to the showers.
- See, there is someone much better than Nehemiah.
- **His name is Jesus. This is what he said. Luke 9:23-24**
- **23 Then he said to them all, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. 25 For what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world, and yet loses or forfeits himself?"**
- If you want to find life, you have to lose it.
- If you want to live, you have to die.
- If you want find happiness, you have to stop looking for it.
- Deny yourself, take up your execution device, ...every single day... die a thousand little deaths...and follow me.

- Sound impossible? Sound backwards?
- Welcome to following a God who died so you can live.
- **Jesus is better than Nehemiah.**
- He didn't just give his money away, he gave his life away.
- He didn't leave the riches of an earthly king behind to save the people of Israel.
- He left the riches of an eternal kingdom behind to save the world.

## **2 Corinthians 8:9**

**For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich**

- Listen, when you see Jesus on the cross, you are looking at your cycle of sin, slavery, and grief. ...and its ugly. That became his poverty.
- But here's the beauty you see on the cross. You see the end of the story.
- **John 19:30**
- On the cross Jesus said "It is finished". Then he bowed his head and died.
- Before the people of Israel could faithfully go about the work of God, they had to know that their own self-torture was going to stop.
- And the only way that could happen was for Nehemiah to give himself away so they wouldn't be tortured anymore.
- And before you can faithfully go about the joyful work of laying down your life for others...you have to know that the God of the universe has laid his life down for you...so you don't have to be tortured by your sin anymore.
- **You've been given the end of the story.** Jesus died. But then he resurrected. And he said "I'm coming back."
- And when I come back, I will finally rid the world not just of the torturous effects of sin and death...but I'll rebuild the world....all things new...no sin, no death, no tears.

- I'll rebuild the world to make you safe...I'll rebuild the world forever single one of you that listens my voice and believes what I've done for you.
- **That is happiness. It is finished.**
- Shower picture after a rodeo. The grace of God.
- 
- Get off the bull. Get it the shower. ...and then you'll start giving your life away...once you know you can never lose it.

## **PRAYER COUNSELORS**