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Title: *Happier: Moral Clarity and Clear Conscience*

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:23-33

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Welcome. It's great to be with you all this morning. A big shout out to everyone at Butler campus, watching online, and my dear friends at the Strip District. I miss you all this morning. My name is Dan Irvin. I'm the Strip District Campus Leader. And as of the last three months, my family and I are from Pittsburgh.

I wanted to introduce you to my family very quickly. If you don't know my wife, Cassie, and my son, Ben, is ten. He's the big one. Jack is seven. And Ella is four years old. As I said, we're from Pittsburgh. We briefly moved to Indianapolis this summer, and now we're already back in Pittsburgh as of March. It's been a wild year. Three different houses, and three different schools for my kids in the last calendar year.

A little story about my son Jack, and his baseball team this year. In the spring, when it started, we had just moved back to Pittsburgh. We were about two weeks back in March, and Jack had started a new school. And we're going around the circle, say your name and where you go to school. All the kids are meeting each other, and it gets to Jack and he says his name. And then he didn't remember what school he went to. He literally blanked on the name of the school that he had been attending for two weeks at that point. That was my fault, buddy.

We did a lot of moving this year, so we are really excited to be back in Pittsburgh and really excited to be serving in the Strip District. And for me, my Orchard Hill involvement started long, long ago. Well over 20 years ago, I was involved with KidsFest as a high school leader. I remember that time at Kids Fest as formative in my faith as a time where I really probably for the first time understood what it really meant to follow Christ. I met some lifelong friends through that process and have been involved with Orchard Hill ever since.

So, as we begin to talk this morning, and as I get ready to share from the word, let's pray before we do that. God, thank you for your word. Thank you for the truth that it will unlock for us today. God, I pray today as we listen and hear your word that we would be changed, that you would speak to us directly, that we would be open to hearing from you, and that we would know beyond any measure of doubt as we leave today, that we are loved by you and that you have things in store for us. Lord, as we seek to follow you, it's in your name that we pray for these things. Amen.

Well, I remember stepping into my freshman year of college, and I remember very vividly thinking I have way too much freedom right now. You know, coming from high school and living with my parents, there were rules at my house. And now all of a sudden, they dropped me off in this college experience. And I'm in a dorm and I can literally go to bed whenever I want. I can hang out with whoever I want. I can eat as much food as I want, which is a little dangerous.

And one of the funny things that my roommates and I noticed quickly was the all-you-can-eat cards. We had the meal swipe cards at the dining hall and for some reason, every time you swipe it, you had 99 swipes per day. That was how they did the unlimited plan. And we thought to ourselves, you know, who in their right mind would use 99 swipes in one day for food? And we thought, wonder if we could. So, we set out to make it our quest one day to use all 99 swipes, meal swipes in one day. We got to about 87 swipe-ups before we realized we have better things to do with our time. Let's take our talents elsewhere. And so, we gave up that quest.

But this college I went to was kind of a mid-sized school, with bigger class sizes. This was another thing I learned very quickly about my freedom was that if I didn't show up to class on a given day, there was a good chance nobody would know and nobody would care, which was very different from high school when they were taking attendance. So sorry, Dad. If you're listening to this, happy Father's Day. There were times when I didn't attend a ton of classes in college, and early on I was like, well, no one is really noticing if I'm here.

This is interesting. One of my friends took this to the next level of his freedom, to attend class or not attend class. He hardly ever went. His GPA at the end of the first semester of college was .37, not 3.7. That actually got him an invite to not come back to the next semester of college. Not sure what happened to him actually.

This new freedom that I had, a tremendous amount of freedom, was exciting. It was new. And I quickly realized something in all this freedom in college as I grew up. Everything I did, every choice that I made, every place that I went, and every action that I took, had a consequence.

So, I had freedom. But if I didn't go to class, my grades would probably suffer. If I ate whatever food I wanted, however much food I wanted, something else in my life would probably suffer in all of this. My point in all of this is this freedom that I was experiencing, this new freedom quickly learned in college, that while all things may have been permissible, not everything was beneficial for myself and for other people. And as we look at the texts today, one of the things Paul is trying to emphasize to the early believers in Corinth was that just because we have been forgiven and set free,

our debt has been paid by Jesus on the cross, God says we don't have to measure up in order for Him to love us. He's chosen to love us because of who he is. All of that is true. And our choices still matter because of that. Freedom isn't just taking that out of the equation and saying, well, we can do whatever we want. Paul was trying to help the people in Corinth understand that their choices, the way they live, truly affect their daily lives and their happiness.

And remember, as we've seen throughout this series if you've been around as we've been going through First Corinthians, Corinth was a high-paced culture where a lot of influential people were. There was trade, industry, education, influence, and wealth. And with this most likely came access to freedoms that were new, exciting, and maybe a little bit dangerous for some of the early believers.

And the people that lived in Corinth, and the question that they were asking, constantly asking Paul and other people is what should we do? How should we live? What is wise? What will bring us true happiness? So today in the text Paul emphasizes three key things that I would like to walk us through today in regards to this idea of finding true happiness in the choices we make.

The first one is he invites his hearers to seek the good of others. Number two, he invites them to seek the good of God or God's glory. And number three, he invites them to seek a purpose or a mission. Let's jump in and let's take a look at the first one seeking the good of others. This is First Corinthians ten verses 23 and 24.

Paul says, "'I have the right to do anything,' you say—but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others."

Why can Paul say that? Well, I believe it's because he himself had had a dramatic life shift, an encounter with Jesus Christ that changed him forever. And if you've been around the series, again, we've talked about Paul's life a little bit and who he was before he knew who Jesus was. He lived a life that was self-centered. It was for his own gain, his own influence, his own rise, and his own prominence. He actually was putting to death people that believed in Jesus.

Strongly opposing the ways of Christ until Jesus showed up in his life, changed his life in a real way, invited him to live a life that was different, that was meaningful, that instead of dividing people with hate and division, brought people together in a different way. Paul devoted his whole life to sharing how God had changed his heart and to seeking the good of others in this process going out of his way most of the time to do so.

I had some really good friends over the course of my life, perhaps you can relate. Back again in college, a friend of mine, Todd, I'll tell a quick story about my friend Todd. I was really sick. Food poisoning had gotten a hold of me, like next-level food poisoning. I was two days in bed. I couldn't even hold down water. It got to the point where it's funny now to think about, it wasn't quite that funny then, but I was lying in my bed and I couldn't even move my muscles from a locked, clenched position. That's how dehydrated I was. And it was the worst I've ever felt as far as sickness. I didn't know what to do.

And again, two nights without sleep, no food, no water, really sick. I was a little incoherent. I was not really in my right mind at the time. And I really didn't want to go to the hospital. I didn't want to go to the doctor. I was young, just post-college. And, my roommates are checking on me. My friends are coming to check on me and are like, who do you need us to call? Do you need us to get anything?

I was so incoherent, but I thought, I know who we should call. Let's call my friend Todd. He works at a hospital. He'll know what to do. Todd's a good friend. He lived about 20 minutes away. So, I told my roommate Jonathan to just call Todd. I'm yelling at him, screaming at him, saying some things that I'm not going to repeat right here. And Todd shows up. Todd drives 20 minutes, gets to my house, and I look at Todd and I'm like, Todd, help me. What can I do? How can you make this better?

And I quickly realized at that moment calling Todd might have been a mistake. You see my error. Todd's role at the hospital wasn't medical-related. He was in I.T. So, Todd really had nothing to offer me in my medical crisis. He got there. He showed up like a good friend. He said, hey, I heard you wanted to see me for some reason. He's like, you know I work in I.T. at the hospital, right? I'm not premed. I'm not training to be a doctor.

And I said, yeah, I think I remember you told me that one time. Thanks for coming and see you later. I ended up going to the hospital. Everything was fine. They rehydrated me. But, you know, Todd, as I think about that story and the way he was willing to drive 20 minutes out of his way to show up, knowing that he really didn't have much to offer me, even though I thought he did, for us, that deepened our friendship, our bond as brothers. We still look back and laugh at that moment. To this day, our friendship has never been the same because Todd was willing to do something that was out of his way, and that was seeking the good of someone else.

But the hard part in all of this, as we talk about this idea, is Paul says, that if you call yourself a Christ-follower, this freedom we have to really live as we want is it can make

things and see the good of others difficult and challenging this freedom. And I think it's really perfect timing that we're talking about freedom this weekend. Today, as a nation, we celebrate Juneteenth. And in a few weeks, we'll celebrate the 4th of July, two days in which our country can come together.

We celebrate freedoms that have been given to us, granted to us to be able to worship freely. Freedom of speech, to be able to live really how we want to live. And it's remarkable when we think about all the other things going on in the world right now that this is where we find ourselves. However, I think Paul would argue that true freedom really isn't just doing whatever we want.

Recently, both of my boys, a ten-year-old and a seven-year-old have been responding in a certain way. It's a popular thing. As my wife and I say, "You should clean your room. You should play with your sister. You should clean up your toys." They'll say, "Well, Dad, it's a free country and I'm going to do what I want." And my wife and I will lovingly respond with, "Well, yes, it is a free country, but living in a free country doesn't mean you can live however you want without consequence."

If I got in my car after this service and decided to go one hundred and twenty miles an hour down 79, number one, my Honda CRV probably would blow up because I don't think it's meant to go that speed. And number two, I would probably get pulled over. There would be consequences for my actions.

We live in a country, in a world, where the way we act, the things we do, have direct consequences. And so, Paul is not inventing something new here. He's actually proclaiming the truth of Jesus when he talks about seeking the good of others and God's heart in all of this.

In Matthew Chapter 22, Jesus is approached by a few people and he's asked a question. They say, Jesus, which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus replied, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Earlier in the book of Matthew, Jesus is actually giving his what's called the Sermon on the Mount, maybe his most famous address, and he says these words in Matthew five. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." I was recently listening to a sermon on that very verse. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

And the Pastor who was giving the sermon was talking about the word righteousness. And what do we think of when we hear it? And I think commonly what we think of is personal holiness or doing the right thing and we should want that. But in the original language of this text, the word righteousness in Matthew chapter five probably more closely resembles the word judicial approval or justice. In other words, the good of people around us. Do we have eyes to see people when they need help when there are injustices taking place, people in our direct circles, or people that we may not even know, do we do anything? Do we take action?

If we call ourselves Christ-followers, this is part of seeking the good of other people, even other people that we may not have a direct association with. Well, this was not a new idea for Paul, a new talking point, but this was something Paul was constantly having to remind the people in Corinth about, about thinking about the good of other people. Why did he have to constantly go back to this? Well, I think it's because Paul realized something was true, that's true about all of us, myself included. We as human beings are naturally self-centered because of our brokenness, our sin condition. It was never God's intent for us to be this way.

He wanted us and designed us to be in perfect relationship and unity with Him and with other people. But we've chosen to go our own way. We were designed to know each other in a deeper, much more relational way than we currently live. When we live in a way with others in mind and make decisions in that way, we contribute to this idea of what's called human flourishing or helping the world to become more the way God intended it to be.

Again, flashback to college with me for just a moment. There was a time when somebody who lived in one of my dorm rooms thought it would be a really good idea to pull the fire alarm often. And I called him the serial fire alarm puller. It would be three in the morning and the fire alarm would go off, and this would happen two or three times a week for, I'm not exaggerating, a course of three or four months. And this was during the winter months. So, you know, you have to get up out of your bed, throw some clothes on, you're going outside in the cold and just standing around until the fire department comes in and gives the all-clear to go back in. Nobody could catch this guy. Apparently, it was before the days of security cameras because this guy or girl was just pulling the fire alarm and nobody could figure it out.

Now, it had a real effect. Like at first, it was kind of funny, like, oh, who's this person pulling the fire alarm? And maybe when they started doing it, they thought, I bet this will be a fun prank to do once, maybe twice. And then they just kept doing it for whatever reason. But what ended up happening is I remember this. I remember the classes that I was attending, it was hard to pay attention. I felt less rested. It affected

my relationships with my roommates. There was a lot of anger. There was a lot of tension. And people were pretty upset about why it couldn't be stopped.

In that choice that person was making to pull the fire alarm repeatedly, causing a lot of harm and some distress to everyone that lived in the dorm, if that is true, if that negative choice could bring about such a negative reaction from other people and negative consequences, how much more is the other side true? What if a positive choice is made, if a choice that's bringing unity and people together is made, how much more good could that do?

Paul argues that and continues in verses 25 and 30. In this part of the text, he's highlighting an issue that if we read it may be a little bit confusing for a modern audience but as he was writing it to the people in Corinth, it wouldn't have been confusing at all. If you were here during the week when we discussed Chapter eight in this series, Paul addresses a very similar issue.

And here is the issue. There are two groups of early believers in Jesus. There are the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers. The Gentiles were the non-Jewish believers. And there was a debate. There was meat that was being resold in the marketplace after it had been used in these pagan celebrations and festivals.

And the debate was, should we eat this meat that we know has been used in these pagan celebrations that are not celebrating the true God that we celebrate, or should we eat it? And Paul, in chapter eight, if you remember in chapter eight, if you were here, he basically says, we know that these pagan celebrations, these things that they're doing, they're meaningless because we serve the true God.

So, it would be okay to eat this meat. We know it's okay unless the eating of this meat causes another one of your brothers or sisters to be confused or to stumble or not understand why you're doing this. Then we should consider that person. And even though we have this freedom to eat this meat because we know there's nothing wrong with it, we should consider the other person in this.

So, Paul is addressing a similar issue in chapter ten in that there is a question he was asking. What if a nonbeliever invites you to their house and you as a believer accept the invitation and they serve the meat and they say this meat was used in a pagan celebration, a ritual, a ceremony, what should you do in that case? And Paul says in verses 25 through 30, pretty frankly, he said you should maybe not eat that meat in that instance because it might confuse the host. It might do damage to the way they think about who God is or their faith.

So, even though again, a similar argument, you have the freedom to do that, to eat that, would you consider the other people? Would you consider other people in the room and how they might think about what's going on in all of this? They were asking important questions. And the important question that they were asking in Corinth was how do we know what is right in these grey areas of life? There's not really anything that I can find that's explicitly saying do this or don't do that. But I have a feeling that I should exercise wisdom and think about some of these things.

Perhaps you've asked this question yourself over the years of some choices to make or some places to go or people to be associated with. And you've wondered what is the wise thing to do. At the heart of Paul's message in all of this as we're thinking about decisions and choices, is, I believe, is what we're doing, the choices we're making, are they helping people understand the goodness of God, or are they pushing people farther away as believers?

This word wisdom, that we keep coming back to, has come to mind a lot, as I've prepared over the last couple of weeks. Proverbs 15:33 says this about wisdom, the fear Lord teaches a man wisdom. The understanding of who God really is, teaches us to make wise choices. When we exercise this biblical wisdom, it really puts the attention on God. In other words, it helps us illuminate really how good God is. It brings glory to Him, which brings us to our second point that I think Paul's trying to get at in this text in regards to true happiness and the choices we make.

Remember to seek the good of God, His glory, and we see that a little bit more in verse 30. One of the texts says this, so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Whatever you do, do it all for God's glory. This requires something on our end, I believe two things actually.

The first thing, it requires is a heart, a true heart, understanding of what God has done on our behalf. That God paid a price. He sent Jesus to cover our debt so that we could live. And maybe this is a hard reality to understand, or maybe this is something you've never heard before I just said those words. That God, full of mercy has forgiven us of our sin. The penalty of our sin has been erased. And I don't think it's enough for us to maybe just know that in our heads in order to really be changed and want to bring glory to God's name. I think it has to sink into our heart.

In John chapter four, Jesus has an encounter with a woman. He meets her at a well. It's just the two of them. It's in the middle of the day, and Jesus ends up knowing things about this woman that probably nobody else knew about this woman. Probably secrets that she was trying to hide, trying to keep. Some of her relationship

issues Jesus knew all about. And He loved her at that moment. He called her at that moment in a different way.

Forgiveness was offered, and it changed her life in such a way that when she went back into town from that encounter with Jesus, do you know what she said to everybody? She said this. She said, come and see a man that told me everything I ever did. I think she was blown away, that there was this man, Jesus, God, who knew everything she ever did and still loved her, invited her, and called her to be a part of what was going on in spite of everything that she had done.

Just like that woman, Jesus knows us. He knows the things that we're hoping nobody else finds out about. He knows the things that we'd like to forget about. And He calls us. He invites us into this life with him, this relationship with him. So that's the first thing. If we're going to understand what it means to really seek the good of God and seek to glorify his name, a heart recognition of who God is and what He's done for us because it changes us.

And the second thing is a deep, deep understanding of just how beautiful God really is. When my wife and I got married to each other just a few years ago, I remember our wedding day like it was yesterday. Even though it wasn't. We were young when we got married, but we were excited. We were enthralled with each other, with beauty inside and out. I remember standing there and looking at her and thinking, you know, when we both said I do at that moment when we were married, it was exciting.

And at that moment, we weren't saying I've got it all figured out now. I've got you all figured out. I know everything I need to know about you at this moment. But it was saying yes to understanding every day the beauty that each of us had. Just how beautiful we were. We were constantly discovering that and almost 15 plus years later in the marriage, we're still discovering that with each other.

And we also have discovered that there are times when both of us are not so beautiful and not so lovable. And the beautiful thing about a relationship with God and about who God is, is that he only has the beautiful side. He only has one nature, and that is His divine brilliance and beauty. And as we understand that more, as we really know how beautiful God is, that changes us. That shifts the way that we think.

I remember my first time visiting Colorado in the Rocky Mountains. And, you know, I was young. I was in high school. I remember sitting on the top of a 13,000-foot mountain peak that we had just climbed up and looking out over the view and thinking I can't believe that God says that I'm even more precious than these mountains that He created, and that he's more pleased with us as human beings than

even the mountains. It took my breath away, that idea of beauty, of brilliance that I got to see that day.

The third thing that I think Paul is getting at and this is where we will kind of land the plane here in a minute when we're talking about making decisions and really finding happiness, is he talks about seeking a true purpose. Paul talks about this in verses 32 through 33. Paul says this, "Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God - even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved."

Paul's purpose in his life had become sharing how Christ had changed his life and telling other people he realized that was the most important thing, the most valuable thing he could be doing. Life is so short. It's a cliché, but it's true. I've probably realized that more in the last calendar year with all the moves and the transitions, and watching my kids go through different things that they've had to deal with and challenges with that, and thinking about where they were a year ago and where we were as a family and how they've grown.

One of the things my kids love to do is look at my phone and look at old pictures of themselves. I don't know what it says about themselves. They like to look at themselves. But they look at these old pictures of themselves and they even look back at pictures that were 10 to 11 months ago and they say that I don't even remember doing that. I was like, were we that little really? Did we do that? It was only 10 or 11 months ago.

It goes fast. Life goes fast. I think the most important thing that my wife and I talk about is telling our kids every day that, yes, we love you unconditionally, not perfectly, but unconditionally. But more important than that is that you have a creator that loves you perfectly, unconditionally, just because of who he is, just because he made you. We want them to know that until they're sick of hearing that. They've probably memorized our bedtime speeches by this point, all the things we say before they fall asleep.

And if you call yourself a Christ follower, if you're sitting here today, you have an opportunity to help people unlock the mystery of the gospel to find this true purpose. This is the true purpose that I think Paul was talking about. Our brokenness, our sin, it's separated us from God, and God sent Jesus to die in our place. We have this opportunity to be reconnected now to a life source that will offer us true and everlasting life. Paul might have had this appreciation of this news more than anyone, given where his life was at this point.

So, as we finish today, this message that Paul was sharing with the believers in Corinth, was against the grain, counter-cultural, counterintuitive to the way we think life should be lived, this idea of laying down your own freedom so that others might have a chance to know the good news of Jesus.

And maybe you're here today and you're not sure you really bought any of this stuff. You're not sure where you stand with God or where your faith is, and you're thinking this all seems a little restrictive. So, I have to give up things for the sake of other people. I have to give up the freedoms that I've earned or been given. And I'm not sure I buy into that. I'm not sure this is for me. And I would contend that a life that's really devoted to following Christ and living for Him isn't restrictive at all. In fact, the opposite, I think.

A truly restricted life is one that is centered on ourselves, centered on working so hard to make a name for yourself, or performing in such a way that you'll attain something that you feel would make you worthy. This is a little idea that I've called the performance treadmill over the years. And it's this idea of we just keep running hard enough trying to achieve, trying to attain do the most good, and please all the right people, including ourselves. One day you'll realize that you're in the very same spot, much like a treadmill, just a little bit more exhausted and burnt out.

The life that's truly devoted to following Jesus is a life that's centered around what Christ has done for us, not what we can do. The grace that He's offered us saying that we can't possibly work hard enough or do anything well enough to achieve this gift, is the offer. It's an offer of true freedom. Freedom from having to perform, succeed, or please other people. Because ultimately, he says, we matter to him and he has done all the work for us.

It's only when we realize this that our true sinfulness has separated us. Christ made the ultimate sacrifice that we are able to turn our lives in such a way that causes us to make these sacrifices that could ultimately have an eternal impact on our lives and the lives of other people. When we take that in, when we deeply realize that, then we begin to seek the good of other people, to seek God's glory, and to seek and find a true purpose in life.

Let's pray. God, thank you for the way that you offer us a true purpose. A new identity that's rooted in what you say about us, not in what we can do or achieve or attain. God, I pray today that if there are those in the room or listening online, that they may have been thinking about this for the first time, that you would help them to be honest, maybe with themselves and maybe with you for the first time. And that they

would know that without any measure of a doubt that they are loved, they are accepted by you and that you call them to something more.

And for those in the room today that are listening, that call themselves followers of you, I pray that we can leave here today in a different way, knowing more clearly the opportunity we have to seek the good of others, to share with others just how good you are. God, we pray and lift all these things up to you in your name. Amen. Hey, Happy Father's Day, everybody. Have a great rest of your weekend.