

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

I wish you all the best and hope you've had a Merry Christmas and will have a blessed New Year.

"Smudged Glasses." by Ron Hutchcraft

When I was new to this business of wearing glasses, it took me a while to adjust to those new things on my face. But I had to get them. It was easier to get glasses than to get longer arms, and the glasses were cheaper. Sometimes when I'm real busy, I start noticing clouds developing between me and what I'm trying to read, and I see strange little spots. Then I remember I'm wearing my glasses which I have neglected to clean for a few days. When I hold them up to the light, I can see the source of the fog and the spots: dirty glasses. It's amazing how much better you can see when you clean your glasses! The world looks so much clearer!

I'm Ron Hutchcraft, and I want to have A Word With You today about "Smudged Glasses."

You might be at a point in your life right now where you really need to be able to see clearly - to see God, that is. You've got important decisions to make, and you really want to be able to figure out God's leading; to see where God is going so you can follow Him into His will for you. You don't want to make a mistake on this one. But maybe you're having a hard time seeing God right now. It might be time to clean your glasses.

In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus described the kind of people who would be able to see God, which you really need right now. If you're having a hard time figuring out what God wants, seeing where He's going in your life, these words of Jesus may help you improve your vision. He simply says in our word for today from the Word of God, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." That's Matthew 5:8. If you can't see God, you're going to wander around confused and unsure. And if you're not pure in your heart, you won't see God clearly. There's dirt on your glasses. You've got some cleaning to do.

You might be doing all kinds of good things to get God's guidance; you're reading His Word, you're praying for His direction, and you're seeking godly counsel. But if there's something impure in your heart, it's just going to block your view. That may be why no answer has seemed to come. God is waiting for you to clean up what isn't pure. Notice, this ability to see God comes from being pure in heart. This is the stuff inside where no one can see it but God. The bitterness, the unforgiveness that you might be harboring, the mind that keeps wandering into lustful fantasies, the pride that's been growing in your heart, the compromises in your integrity, your truthfulness, or that idol in your heart that's been drawing you slowly away from your first love for Jesus.

God sees the junk inside and He's saying, "I have so much I want to show you, my son, my daughter, but I can't show it to you until you get rid of what's coming between us." Could it be that you haven't been able to figure out God's leading because of dirt that's been accumulating on your spiritual glasses? That's your heart. Isn't it time you dealt with what the real problem is? That would be the impurity in your heart. Once you clean your spiritual glasses - once you are what Jesus calls one of his "pure in heart" - you'll be amazed how clearly you'll finally be able to see that God has all the answers you need.

Prayers and Thoughts: Pray for Nick Butcher and family as they minister to us here in Ladoga. Pray for the Leonards and their work in Turkey. Pray for our shut-ins. Remember all our mothers and fathers. Remember our Military the mothers, fathers and their families. Pray for our church and leadership.

Beautiful Words: *Psalm 45:3-6 Put on your sword, O mighty warrior! You are so glorious, so majestic! In your majesty, ride out to victory, defending truth, humility, and justice. Go forth to perform awe-inspiring deeds! Your arrows are sharp, piercing your enemies' hearts. The nations fall beneath your feet. Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. You rule with a scepter of justice.* As this Psalm continues to that tune "Lilies". David is always so descriptive in his words about his Lord God and his mighty powers.

How Happiness Happens by Max Lucado

What does it mean to have lasting happiness in an uncertain world filled with discord and turmoil, and that, for all its promises, delivers a fragile joy: here one day, tomorrow scattered by the winds of comparison, disappointment, or unmet expectations? What instruction does the Bible give for a person to be satisfyingly happy?

In this Q&A, Max Lucado (@MaxLucado) talks about his book, *How Happiness Happens: Finding Lasting Joy in a World of Comparison, Disappointment, and Unmet Expectations* (Thomas Nelson, 2019).

What's the state of happiness these days?

Max Lucado: Everyone craves happiness. And everyone benefits from it. But fewer people are finding it. Only one-third of Americans surveyed said they were happy. In the nine-year history of the Harris Poll Survey of American Happiness, the highest index was 35%. This means a cloud of perpetual grayness overshadows two out of three people. Smiles are in short supply. By some estimates clinical depression is ten times more rampant now than it was a century ago. The World Health Organization forecasts that by the year 2020 “depression will become the second leading cause of disease worldwide.”

So how does happiness happen? The words of Jesus are spot-on: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 22:35). Because when you do, it has a boomerang effect. Happiness happens when we give it away. This is such great news. You can't control your genetics. You aren't in charge of the weather, the traffic, or the occupant of the White House. But you can always increase the number of smiles on our planet. You can lighten the load and brighten the day of other human beings. And don't be surprised when you begin to sense a newfound joy yourself.

Is God really interested in our happiness?

Max Lucado: Scripture has more than 2,700 passages that contain words like joy, happiness, gladness, merriment, pleasure, celebration, cheer, laughter, delight, jubilation, feasting, blessing, and exultation. Our joy level matters to God. This is no call to naiveté or superficial happy talk. Jesus spoke candidly about sin, death, and the needs of the human heart. Yet he did so with hope. He brought joy to the people of first-century Palestine. And he wants to bring joy to the people of this generation, and he has enlisted some special agents of happiness to do the job. You and me.

Not an easy task. The people in our world can be moody, fickle, and stubborn. And that just describes my wife's husband. If we're going to find the joy that comes through giving joy away, we need a plan. We need instruction. No wonder the Bible has so much to say about finding joy in the act of sharing it. The New Testament contains more than 50 “one another” statements; practical principles for making happiness happen. I've condensed them into a list of ten.

Encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11).

Regard one another as more important (Phil. 2:4).

Pray for one another (James 5:16).

Accept one another (Rom. 15:7).

Forgive one another (Eph. 4:32).

Bear with one another (Eph. 4:2).

Greet one another (Rom. 16:16).

Serve one another (Gal. 5:13).

Admonish one another (Col. 3:16).

Love one another (1 John 3:11).

If we open the door to each of these “one another” passages and embark on a happiness project, we may discover what the Bible teaches and research affirms: doing good does good for the doer.

How does patience build happiness?

Max Lucado: The apostle Paul said, “Be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Eph. 4:2 NIV). The patient person sees all the peculiarities of the world. But rather than react, he bears with them. There are many times when we enjoy one another, delight in one another, and even relish one another. Yet there are occasions when it takes a Herculean act of forbearance just to put up with one another. Paul's verb means exactly that: to tolerate, endure, and forbear.

Denalyn's 37 years of marriage to me, the king of quirks, qualifies her for a PhD in this subject. When I drive, my mind tends to wander. When it does, the car slows to a crawl. (“Max, pay attention.”) I repair things at risk of ruining them. (“Max, I told you I could call a handyman.”) I change bedrooms in the middle of the night. I have no explanation or justification. I just wake up in need of new pastures. (“Max, where did you end up last night?”) My jaw makes a popping noise when I eat steak. (“Max, you're distracting the people at the next table.”) I'm good for 30 minutes at a party. She's good for two hours. (“Max, we just got here.”) Sending me to the grocery store is like sending me to the Amazon. I may never emerge. (“You've been gone for two hours, and you only bought potato chips?”)

Yet Denalyn is the happiest person within a dozen ZIP Codes. Ask her friends or ask my daughters. They'll tell you she's married to an odd duck, but she has the joy level of a kid at a carnival. Here's her secret: She's learned to enjoy my idiosyncrasies. She thinks I'm entertaining. Who would've thought? In her eyes I'm a candidate for an oddball Oscar. To be clear, she lets her opinions be heard. I know when I've tested her patience. Yet I never fear failing the test and am happier for it.

Happiness is less an emotion and more a decision; a decision to bear with one another.

Previous was condensed from a Q & A with Max Lucado about his book: *How Happiness Happens*

Check in with our heavenly Father this week, do some good and disappear. Clay Halsey alhalsey@tds.net

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God be with you all. IICorinthians 13:14