



How aware is a fish of the water in which it swims? Not very. Similarly, we swim in cultural water everyday, often without realization or examination.

To complicate the matter, we live in a very polarizing time. American culture demands that we adhere to certain cultural dogmas, but it takes great thoughtfulness and courage to stop and consider whether or not these dogmas have Biblical basis or truth.

In this eight-week series, we will examine eight prevalent messages our culture preaches that, for better or worse, create the “water in which we swim” everyday. We will discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each when considered in light of the gospel.

NOTE: There may be slight changes to what follows, primarily in the main passage(s) used. However, the ones shared below will be a great start and very applicable for the sermons.

The Happiness Narrative

A Brief Definition:



"You *deserve* to be happy." Or so it is believed in the happiness narrative. If you're not happy, you should get rid out what is making you unhappy and fill yourself with what makes you happy...because, after all, you deserve to be happy. In the end, the point of life becomes your happiness.



Discuss the definition above.

? How do you personally see the happiness narrative lived out in your midst and more broadly in culture? What are the most prominent sources/voices that give rise to this cultural mantra that life is all about you being happy?

An Example from Culture



CRU #FallingPlates <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGlx11BxF24>



Discuss the video above.

? How would you define joy? What are the similarities and difference between happiness and joy?



"And so the meaning of life [as our culture defines it] is to have the freedom to choose the life that makes you most happy. However, in that view of things, suffering can have no meaningful part. It is a complete interruption of your life story--it cannot be a meaningful part of the story. In this approach to life suffering should be avoided at almost any cost, or minimized to the greatest degree possible."

-Tim Keller¹



Discuss the quote above.

¹ Keller, Timothy. Walking with God through Pain and Suffering (Pg. 16-17). Penguin Group.

Bible



Jeremiah 2:5-13 & 17-19 (NIV)

The word of the LORD came to me: ² “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem:

⁵ This is what the LORD says:

“What fault did your ancestors find in me,
that they strayed so far from me?

They followed worthless idols
and became worthless themselves.

⁶ They did not ask, ‘Where is the LORD,
who brought us up out of Egypt
and led us through the barren wilderness,
through a land of deserts and ravines,
a land of drought and utter darkness,
a land where no one travels and no one lives?’

⁷ I brought you into a fertile land
to eat its fruit and rich produce.
But you came and defiled my land
and made my inheritance detestable.

⁸ The priests did not ask,
‘Where is the LORD?’
Those who deal with the law did not know me;
the leaders rebelled against me.
The prophets prophesied by Baal,
following worthless idols.

⁹ “Therefore I bring charges against you again,”
declares the LORD.
“And I will bring charges against your children’s children.

¹⁰ Cross over to the coasts of Cyprus and look,
send to Kedar and observe closely;
see if there has ever been anything like this:

¹¹ Has a nation ever changed its gods?
(Yet they are not gods at all.)
But my people have exchanged their glorious God
for worthless idols.

¹² Be appalled at this, you heavens,
and shudder with great horror,”
declares the LORD.

¹³ “My people have committed two sins:
They have forsaken me,
the spring of living water,

and have dug their own cisterns,
broken cisterns that cannot hold water...

¹⁷ Have you not brought this on yourselves
by forsaking the LORD your God
when he led you in the way?

¹⁸ Now why go to Egypt
to drink water from the Nile?

And why go to Assyria
to drink water from the Euphrates?

¹⁹ Your wickedness will punish you;
your backsliding will rebuke you.

Consider then and realize
how evil and bitter it is for you
when you forsake the LORD your God
and have no awe of me,"
declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty.



Discuss the passage above.



Matt. 6:19-21 (NIV)

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.



Hebrews 12:1-3 (NIV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.



James 1:2-4 (NIV)

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,^[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

? How does our culture's happiness narrative line up with teaching from God's Word? Where do they "agree"? Where do they "disagree"?

? There's great danger when the happiness narrative fuses with Christian thought. In practice, Christianity morphs to become about our personal happiness and comfort. Do you see this playing out in your life or the lives of those around you? How?

? If we, as followers of Christ, allow our culture's happiness narrative to skew our thinking, how can that drive us away from authentic, Christian community and accountability?

? Have you been previously hurt by other Christians? Are you able to share about that experience? As a result of this experience, have you clothed yourself in "spiritual bubble wrap" to prevent future hurt and keep your small group at a safe distance?

? How might you take a step in bringing forth more of your life (both its highs and lows) so that others might support you?

Application & Accountability

? Identify one example (e.g. relationship, work situation, weekend time, use of finances, etc.) where you are most tempted to believe that it's all about you being happy. What are one or two concrete ways you hope to emulate the example/teachings of Christ that, in the end, it's all about God?