

Pacesetters Devotional John 13:17

John 13:17 “If you know these things, you are truly happy if you do them.”

In Jesus’ final conversation with His disciples, He explicitly connected observing His instructions to their souls’ well-being. In John 15:11, He told them: “These things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” In John 16:33, He promised them: “These things I have spoken to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” And here, in John 13:17, Jesus promised them that they would be truly happy if, knowing His instruction, they responded to it with obedience: “If you *know* these things, you will be truly happy if you *do* them.”

These three passages tell us that Jesus affirms our desire for joy and peace and happiness. Otherwise, He would not have appealed to them as incentives to observe His instructions. This comes as a surprise to many, who assume (or who have been taught) that God does not care about our happiness. No, the God of the Bible is a truly happy God.¹ He hard-wired our hearts with a deep desire for happiness, and throughout the Bible He affirms this desire and appeals to it as an important part of our relationship with Him.

¹ 1 Timothy 6:15 is one of many biblical passages which describes God as happy: “. . . He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. . .” “Blessed” (both in this passage and in John 13:17) is the Greek word *makarios*, which means “to be truly happy.”



So the issue is not whether it is spiritual to desire joy and peace and happiness, but rather how to attain them. Here Jesus differs radically from our culture, which says that we will be happy if we have favorable circumstances and if other people treat us well. By contrast, Jesus promises in John 16:33 that even when we experience tribulation, we can have His peace. How, then, can we possess this true happiness?

Our passage gives us a very simple answer to this question: “If you know these things, you will be truly happy if you do them.” In the previous context, Jesus refers to two “things” – allowing Him to wash our feet, and washing others’ feet. If we build our lives around doing these two “things,” Jesus promises that we will experience true happiness. Let us, then, take a close look at each of these “things.”

When Jesus washed His disciples’ feet in John 13, He stated that His action was symbolic: “What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter” (John 13:7). By washing their feet and taking their feet’s filth on to Himself, Jesus was providing a picture of the more radical cleansing that His death on the cross would accomplish. “He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf, so that we might become right with God through Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). This cleansing, Jesus said, would make them clean (John 13:10). In the same way, Jesus’ death fully cleanses us from the penalty for all of our sins the moment we entrust ourselves to Him.

But while this “bath” guarantees our forgiveness, it does not guarantee our happiness. Jesus says that His “bathed ones” still need to have their “feet” cleansed in an ongoing way. I take this to refer to the spiritual defilement that we inevitably contract by living as fallen people in this fallen world. We come into contact with others’ godless attitudes and behaviors every day, and our own fallen natures continually generate their own self-centered attitudes and behaviors. None of this brings us under God’s condemnation, but it explains why we so often sense a film over our spirits which steals our joy in the Lord.



The good news is that no self-cleansing is needed in order to have our happiness restored. Jesus promises that He will wash our feet if only we consent to it. We need only to honestly acknowledge our defilement, and He will cleanse us. Sometimes, we need to agree with Him about a specific sinful attitude or behavior that He shows us. Sometimes, we need only to tell Him that we have been defiled by the spiritual environment in which we live. As we come to Him with dirty feet, He will not shame us or condemn us. Rather, He will lovingly dissolve whatever filth clings to us, and restore our spirits to vital communion with Him. As David said to God: “I acknowledged my sin to you. . . (and) You surround me with shouts of deliverance” (Psalm 32:5,7). As the author of Hebrews says to his Christian friends, “. . . the blood of Christ (will). . . cleanse your conscience from works of death to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14).

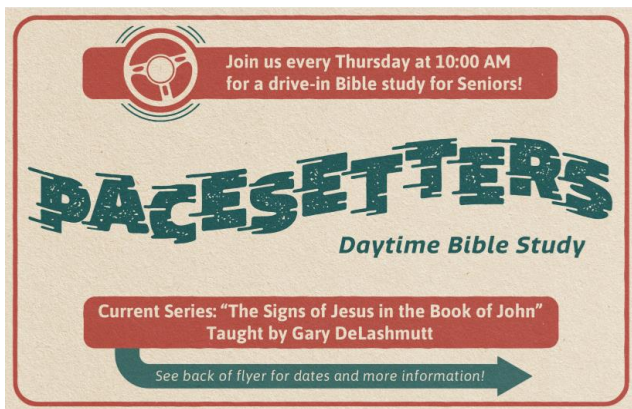
First, we must allow Jesus to cleanse us; then we are ready to serve Him by washing others’ feet. This is the second “thing” Jesus said we must understand and do if we want to be truly happy. “Do you know what I have done to you? . . . If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. . . If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

God designed us to have His love pour through us to others. “Freely you have received (from me); freely give (to others)” is the divine order (Matthew 10:8). Receiving God’s love must always come first; but if we wish to selfishly hoard His love, it will grow stale in our hearts. Then we become like the Dead Sea – tremendous fertility flows in, but because nothing flows out, it is sterile and lifeless. But when we trust in His love by consenting to wash the feet of those He puts in our paths, we become full of life like the Sea of Galilee. The voluntary outflow of God’s love to others will produce true happiness, joy and peace in our hearts.



Thank You, Lord Jesus that you care about the well-being of my soul. Thank You that you want me to experience your happiness, joy and peace. Teach me how to come to you and allow you to wash my often-dirty feet. Teach me to give your love away by washing others' feet in daily life – when I come to a Bible study, when I interact with my neighbor, and when I spend time with friends and family-members. Thank You for another day to learn and practice Your new way of life!

**Come hear Gary in person at our Pacesetters Drive-in Bible Study!
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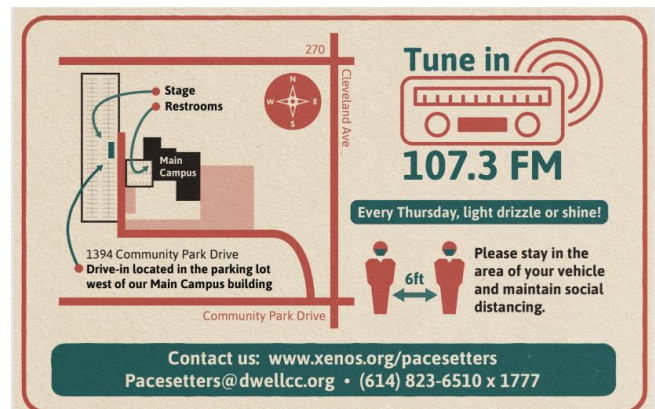


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