



Lie #1: “God Wants Me to Be Happy (Rich, Prosperous, etc.)”

Opening Prayer

Introduction

Focus: There are many versions of the lie “God wants me to be happy.” For example: “God wants me to be rich”; or “God wouldn’t want me to rush into marriage so I’ll live with my significant other”; or “God wouldn’t deny me these feelings I have for someone of the same sex”; and on and on. Usually, the person saying this phrase is trying to justify a sin that God condemns. It sounds so cruel to say, “God doesn’t want me to be happy!” Well then, what does God want for me?

- Begin by reading some quotes from Joel Olsteen and his prosperity gospel message.

1.) Why is this message so appealing?

2.) If you buy into this way of thinking, what is the focus of your life?

3.) Agree/Disagree: There is profit in serving God.

Genesis 3:15-19 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” ¹⁶To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” ¹⁷To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

4.) In Genesis 3, what does God promise we will experience as a result of sin?

5.) How could a good God make such a pronouncement? What would result if we don't experience the consequences of sin?

What God Really Wants for Us

Mark 8:31-37 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." ³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"

1.) What did Peter want?

2.) What does Jesus want for us?

3.) Like Peter, we may have our own ideas about what we would have planned for Jesus. We certainly have our own ideas about what we would like for ourselves. The chart below shows some things that we might have wished for Jesus. Fill in the chart to show corresponding wishes that we might have for ourselves.

<i>If only Jesus...</i>	<i>If only WE...</i>
Had been crowned King on Palm Sunday.	
Everybody had loved Jesus.	
His church expanded rapidly.	
No one had ever contradicted or opposed him.	
Everybody wants to get closer to him.	

4.) Bearing the cross can be summarized in the words: "Deny (say "No!" to) self." Why is that so hard?

5.) The cross in a Christian's life is not simply suffering, but it is suffering that comes as a result of being a Christian. Who of us has not thought, "If I only had _____, then I'd be happy"? Actually, getting what we want leads to disappointment, or the *joy* lasts only a moment before the heart chases after another desire. What are the root causes of disappointment and discontent? Give examples that demonstrate how it expresses itself in our lives.

Romans 7:14-25 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

6.) What one word describes what life is for us?

7.) Think of Luther's explanation to the First Commandment: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." What makes that so difficult for us Christians?

8.) Paul says, "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me." The old self is most fiercely at work when the new self is trying to be strengthened, do what is good and right. Explain how the old self is at work even when we are praying, listening to God's Word, or giving an offering.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

9.) What did God want for Paul? What does he want for us?

10.) Are there any other passages that teach this same truth?

11.) You could write your own autobiography with 2 Corinthians 12:9 as the title. Share some ways God has proven this to you in your life or how he has used the crosses of life to drive you back to his own cross.

12.) King David (2 Samuel 11 – David and Bathsheba) is a good example for us. What happens when all things are going well and there is no apparent cross in one's life? Now, describe life for David with the cross (much as a result of his own doing).

13.) In **1 Timothy 2:3,4** we read: “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” What does God want for us most of all?

14.) John 20:31 says, “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” What is the main purpose of the Bible?

Group Discussion

1.) Think of a scenario in which someone has said to you, “But God just wants me to be happy.” (A hypothetical situation is fine as well!) With your group, develop a biblical response to that person.

2.) Good Quote: “He doesn’t ask you to take a pilgrimage to Mecca. He doesn’t ask you to wash in the Ganges. He doesn’t ask you to walk on burning coals, or burn incense, or ring bells, or enter a monastery. What he asks is much harder. He asks and insists on it: Deny yourself, and take up the cross and follow me. He asks and he insists on it: Be a Christian!” (Daniel Deutschlander, *Don’t Be Afraid! Cheer Up! It’s the Cross!* Part 1, p. 6). In what ways is being a Christian much harder than the items listed?

Closing Activity

Take three minutes to write a haiku illustrating the blessings of the Christian cross in our lives or in response to the lie “God just wants me to be happy.” (*Haikus are three-line poems with the syllable structure of 5-7-5.*)