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Hello and welcome to this episode of the St Andrew's Enfield podcast with me, Steve Griffiths. And in this episode I want us to think about a, um, really fundamental issue, which is the pursuit of happiness in our lives and what we need to do to find a happiness that lasts. And to do that, we're going to be thinking about Psalm 1, which is a great introduction, I think, into this topic. And of course, it really is an important issue because we're all searching for happiness, aren't we? It's the, it's the one thing that all human beings have in common. Um, every single person on this planet is searching for happiness. Aristotle, the philosopher worked it out thousands of years ago when he said that the pursuit of happiness is the only thing that human beings do for the sake of itself. And that every decision we make in life is made in the light of our pursuit of happiness.

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Now, some of those decisions are very direct. Um, we might eat a curry because it makes us happy. Or we might watch a favorite program on Netflix because it makes us happy or we might go clothes shopping, uh, because it makes us happy. Um, but other decisions that we make are, um, less direct but nevertheless geared up towards the pursuit of happiness. So we can decide to do something which might make us unhappy in the short term knowing that it will bring us closer to happiness in the long term. Uh, so for example, um, one of the hobbies that I've got, um, is that I'm learning the language Esperanto and it would make me very happy to be fluent in that language. Uh, whatever fluent means. And so I study it for an hour or two hours a day and sometimes that can be very enjoyable, but other times it can be a real grind.

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Uh, but I put myself through that with self discipline on a daily basis because I have a sense of the happiness that will be attained when I am fluent or more fluent in the language. Diets are the same, of course. We may go through short term pain for the long term gain of achieving happiness. So the pursuit of happiness is really what drives us all. And then Aristotle hit the nail on the head again when he said that even the things that we do wrong in life and the bad decisions we make in life are still in the pursuit of happiness. So for example, um, I might, uh, steal someone's car because I think that owning that car myself will make me happy. Um, I may take drugs because I believe that numbing the pain for a few hours will bring me happiness by helping me forget the agony of my life.

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Or, um, I might cheat in an exam because I believe that passing that exam by whatever means is integral to my happiness in the future by enhancing my chances of getting a job or a promotion or whatever. Um, Aristotle commented that even, uh, the most heinous crimes were driven by the pursuit of happiness. So even to, uh, to murder someone is brought about by the belief that, um, eradicating that person will make me happier. So the pursuit of happiness then is behind, uh, every decision that we make in life, for good and for bad. And of course, the pursuit of happiness is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. Um, Jesus said in John's Gospel that I've come so that you may have

life in all its fullness. God wants us to know true happiness, true joy, true fulfillment, and that's why he sent his Son Jesus into the world so that our sins could be washed away by his blood and so that we could have eternal access to God the Father.

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So the pursuit of happiness is at the heart of our Christian living. But as Christians, how are we to pursue happiness? Where will we find true happiness? Well, that's what this Psalm is all about, uh, Psalm 1. Um, and the thing is that you and I, uh, spend our whole lives pursuing happiness, making good decisions and bad decisions in life, uh, hoping that we will find a happiness that lasts. But of course, uh, those decisions only bring about temporary happiness. Shopping may make me happy for a while until the thing I bought wears out. Uh, eating a curry, we'll certainly make me happy for a while. Uh, but only until I'm hungry again. Uh, stealing a car may make me happy, uh, but only for a while until I end up in court. Uh, where do we find a happiness that lasts forever?

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Well, Psalm 1 tells us exactly where in the first two verses because the Psalm starts off like this: "Happy is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night." So the Psalmist, uh, makes it really simple for us to understand. In fact, it's so simple that it's easy for us to by-pass it. Uh, I've read that Psalm literally hundreds and hundreds of times in my life and yet still, um, I don't take heed of it like I should. Uh, still I look to other means for my happiness in life through good choices I make and through the bad choices I make. It's so hard to learn this lesson that, quite simply, eternal happiness will only be ours if we make the decision,

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and it is a decision, it's a conscious decision, to stop pursuing bad life choices, to stop pursuing, um, nasty talk and gossip and the slander of other people and start delighting in the law of God in our lives. Um, happiness is a lifestyle choice, uh, where we continue in bad and unhealthy ways of living or will we choose to follow the ways of God? It's a simple choice for each one of us to make. And if we choose for God, we will know eternal happiness because Jesus offers us life in all its fullness. And as we make that choice on a daily basis, so we come to understand ever more deeply that the happiness we think we're pursuing through our life choices, is only, um, a dim shadow of the real happiness or what we might call joy that is found in a relationship with God. Because happiness pursued through many of our life decisions is only fleeting. Um, it can be easily lost when something negative happens to us. Whereas the joy of being in a relationship with God cannot be lost even when life throws us curve balls and a raw deal. Um, and even in our moments of deep loss and agony.

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Happiness, the joy that God gives us, is like a deep river running through our soul in comparison to the fleeting happiness that this world has to offer us. And that's why in verse 3, the Psalmist writes this of the person who lives life pursuing God. He says, "that person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they

do prospers." So those who pursue true happiness through the pursuit of God, are like trees with deep roots and the wind and the storms of life will not uproot them. So ultimately then, happiness is about being rooted in God, deeply connected to God. Uh, happiness is a relationship. It's not like an earthly relationship with someone who may leave us or eventually die, but a deeply, deeply connected relationship with the eternal God who will hold us tightly in his embrace, uh, in the here and now and forever. Um, it's in God's embrace that happiness, true happiness is found. "Happy is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day

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and night."

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But how do we delight in the Lord? How do we meditate on his law day and night? Well, we can't stay up all night reading the Bible, can we, uh, you know, we've got to get some sleep. We've got jobs to do. Uh, we've got families to look after. So I don't think it, it means that, I think there's, uh, something else here about making, um, spiritual disciplines so much a part of our everyday life that even when we are not actively engaged with them, we're still in their presence and those disciplines are still informing us. Uh, let me give you two examples, uh, not actually from spiritual disciplines, but two examples that may, uh, uh, help us to understand this a bit better. And first example really is back to my language study, learning Esperanto. Now I spend a lot of time immersed in the world of that language each day.

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Uh, I study Esperanto. Uh, I listened to Esperanto podcasts and Esperanto music. I read books in Esperanto. I study the Bible in Esperanto. Now I am, uh, still far from fluent in the language, but much more regularly now, I find myself thinking in Esperanto and talking to myself in Esperanto and even dreaming in Esperanto. Um, because conscious immersion in the language is beginning to impact me on a subconscious level. Another example is watching a movie I like. Now I can, uh, watch a movie on my own and it's reasonably enjoyable. But I'd much rather watch it with someone I love. Uh, we don't even have to say anything during the movie. Just sharing it in each other's presence is enough to, um, alter the experience dramatically. And I think that's what dedication to the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study eventually bring about in us.

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Um, if we are disciplined in prayer each day and disciplined in reading the Bible each day, then even when we are not praying or reading the Bible, we will still have a sense of the presence of God with us. Um, conscious immersion in God through prayer and Bible study will eventually begin to transform us on a subconscious level. And I think that's what the writer means when he says about meditating on the law of God day and night. Um, and it's as this becomes a deeper reality for us, that we discover true and lasting happiness, true and lasting joy as we become more aware of God's lingering presence with us.

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Sadly, the

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Christian faith is often portrayed as a system of Do's and Don'ts as if we need to, uh, somehow grit our teeth and do the best we can to live obedient lives and never let God down or let other people down. Well, that's an impossibility of course, because, uh, we all mess up in our lives and our relationships. It's, it's part of the human condition. Um, so we'd do well to cut ourselves and each other a bit of slack when we don't always get it right. But in truth, the Christian faith is not so much a list of commands to be obeyed as a relationship to be enjoyed. Um, we are deeply connected to God, like the roots of a tree going ever deeper into the nourishing soil. And as we learn to focus on that connection, that relationship, that deep rootedness, all the more, um, so we will relax into the Christian faith and increasingly become the people that God has destined us to be.

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We're all pursuing happiness, a happiness that will be deep and long lasting and how we choose to pursue that happiness is a choice for all of us. We can get short term, temporary happiness very easily today by making certain choices and deciding on various actions to undertake. Some of them may be good and some of them may be bad, but long lasting eternal happiness is a different matter altogether. Jesus said, "I've come so that you might have life in all its fullness". He also said, "I'll give you peace that the world cannot give." Now, surely, uh, um, if we have these promises from Jesus' - life in all its fullness, a peace that the world cannot give - surely that's an offer from God worth pursuing with every fiber of our being. So let's pursue happiness. Let's pursue joy. Uh, after all, it's what we were made for. But, but let's make sure that we, uh, put behind us our bad choices, the sinful behavior, the gossip, the slander, the anger, the seeking after revenge, uh, the desires of the ego, the pursuit of worldly recognition and all the rest of it. And let's instead, uh, resolve to delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on his word day and night so that our conscious decisions towards happiness increasingly transform us on a subconscious level. And then as we do that, we will know what happiness truly is. We will know peace and joy in our hearts. And ultimately that's what you and I were created for.

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So,

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I hope that you found this a useful episode. If you want to chat about it further, then please do email me, steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org. Uh, do check out our websites standrewsenfield.com and our Facebook page, St Andrews Enfield. And, uh, don't forget, please to subscribe to these podcasts so that we can send them directly to you and let other people know about them too, so that we can grow together as a community exploring the importance of God in our lives. So wherever you are, whatever you're doing today, I hope that you will have a deep sense of God's peace in your life and that you will increasingly know what it is to find happiness and not just a fleeting happiness, but a happiness that is enduring and eternal. So have a great day.

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Bye.

