

Does God Exist to Make You Happy?

Every day in America celebrity TV preachers tell people that God exists to make them happy. What really makes God happy, they say, is when people are happy, so just do whatever makes you feel good. I can see why this would sound appealing. I mean, who wouldn't want a giant Santa Claus in the sky who has limitless resources and infinite power and whose sole purpose is to make you happy?

The problem with this kind of self-centered theology is that it is the exact opposite of the message Jesus preached. Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

The movement that Jesus started called people to deny themselves, sacrifice their lives, follow Him, and serve others. Billy Graham once said, "We are all selfish, and the essence of sin is selfishness." The message of the cross is about the transformation from being proud and self-centered to being humble and Christ-centered. Phil. 2:3-4 couldn't be any clearer: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

However, in the feel-good gospel that is becoming increasingly popular in America, self-denial has been replaced with self-expression, and sacrifice has been replaced with pleasure. The problem in the American church today is that we have traded substance for style, chosen comfort over the cross, and pursued a crowd more than the presence of God.

In his book *Radical*, David Platt hit the nail on the head when he wrote, "Radical obedience to Christ is not easy. ... It's not

comfort, not health, not wealth, and not prosperity in this world. Radical obedience to Christ risks losing all these things. But in the end, such risk finds its reward in Christ. And He is more than enough for us."

Rev. 4:10-11 clarifies that we were created to give God pleasure, not the other way around: "The twenty-four elders fall down and worship the One who lives forever and ever. And they lay their crowns before the throne and say, 'You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created.'"

God does not exist to make you happy or to meet your needs. Nothing could be further from the truth. We were created *by* God's pleasure and *for* God's pleasure. When we don't bring God pleasure, we cease to fulfill our purpose here on Earth.

In Col. 1:15-18, Paul is trying to help us understand that it's all about Jesus. He is the center and focus of creation. "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."

I love how Tullian Tchividjian puts it: "Jesus plus nothing equals everything." It pleased God the Father to give His Son the supremacy in *everything*. Jesus is the Creator, the Almighty God, the Everlasting One, the Beginning and the End, the King of Kings, and the Lord of all lords.

And what makes Jesus happy is not when His followers are self-

centered, but when they walk in obedience to Him. Jesus said in John 14:21, "If you love me, keep my commandments." Obedience is God's love language. The ultimate proof of love is obedience. Now, of course God wants to bless His children. What kind of Father would he be if He didn't delight in blessing in His children? But we need to understand that God's blessings are a reward for obedience.

God's love is *unconditional*, but His blessings are *conditional*. I am the father of three beautiful children, and I love all of them unconditionally—whether they are good or bad, obedient or disobedient, it doesn't change my love for them. But I only reward them when they obey.

An abundant, blessed life is the fruit of obedience, as seen in Deut. 28:1-2, "If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God."

So does God want you to be happy and blessed? Of course He does. Jesus wants you to find true happiness not in material possessions but in a personal relationship with Him and in pursuing His purpose for your life. As you build your life, marriage, family, career, finances and ministry on obedience to God's Word, His blessings, joy, peace and favor will chase you down and overtake you.

This is the paradox of life—the more you die to yourself, the more you will actually live (John 12:24-25). The more you sacrifice and give up for the kingdom, the more God will bless you. The more you take up your cross and follow Jesus, the more His favor will surround you like a shield. As your life revolves around Jesus, you will discover true and sustainable joy.

But as you experience this blessed life, don't forget that the

purpose of your life is to glorify God and bring Him pleasure. Always remember that it's not about you; it's all about Jesus. Build your life on Jesus Christ, the Solid Rock. All other ground is sinking sand.

Brian Alarid *is the founder and lead pastor of Passion Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico.*