



Highlights From the Heights

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PASTOR'S CORNER — Joy in the Mess

*Happiness is a firecracker sitting on my headboard
Happiness was never mine to hold
Careful child, light the fuse and get away
'Cause happiness throws a shower of sparks*
— The Fray, "Happiness"

The preamble to the Declaration of Independence states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." If there's any part of that statement we've taken more seriously than any other is the pursuit of happiness. We are a people who strive for happiness any where and any way we can get it. The problem, though, as hints the song from which the quote above is taken, is that that happiness is inherently and intrinsically fleeting. It comes and goes, sometimes with a change in our circumstances, sometimes completely randomly. The more we chase happiness, the more elusive it seems to become. We are all pursuing happiness, but few seem to find it.

I think this is because we've confused and conflated happiness and joy. Happiness is a fleeting emotional experience. Joy is a deeper state of being. We pursue happiness because it's an easier objective, something that seems like it's more within our control. But what we are actually yearning for is joy. Joy is one of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). While it certainly has an



emotional component, joy is something that persists no matter our circumstances. No matter how messy life gets, joy persists in our hearts and our souls. It doesn't ignore the sad, the bad, the hurtful, the wrongs of life but recognizes that there's more to this life and to our faith than what is happening in this moment or season.

This summer we're working our way through the book of Philippians. It's a letter written to encourage a group of Christians to find joy in the midst of the messiness of their lives and their circumstances. It was written by a guy who was in a pretty messy place in his life at the time himself. And yet, the resounding theme is rejoice, rejoice, rejoice.

Not a "pretend the messiness doesn't exist" naïve joy, but a joy that is grounded in something deeper than our life circumstances. A joy grounded in our salvation in Jesus Christ. A joy that knows there is nothing we will go through or endure that our Savior did not endure Himself. A joy that knows that there is no greater joy than to know and be known by Christ as deeply and thoroughly as possible.

Happiness says that it will come when the mess gets cleaned up. Joy comes in the midst of the mess. As we said above, joy is a fruit of the Spirit. As we pursue Jesus Christ, the seeds of joy are planted in our soul. As we grow in grace and truth, faith grows those seeds so that even in the messiness, when life goes sideways, through the hurt and pain, a joy invincible is nurtured and developed. This kind of joy doesn't appear magically overnight, but rather through a lifetime of faithful trust in Jesus Christ.

There's nothing wrong with being happy, as long as we recognize that happiness isn't an end unto itself. Happiness understood rightly should be an expression of the joy we have in our salvation. May God nurture a joy in your soul that surpasses understanding, a joy born of gratitude for our salvation in Jesus Christ and the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and souls.

Blessings,
Rev. David Garrison

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

LIFE TOGETHER

Keeping in touch with one another

JULY BIRTHDAYS:

7 Don Hedrick
11 Henry Sechler
29 Margie Seal



JULY ANNIVERSARIES:

Gerald & Sharon Bryant, July 10, 1976
Ernie & Barbara Baker, July 14, 1973

PRAYER REQUESTS

*I sought the Lord, and He answered me;
He delivered me from all my fears.*

— Psalm 34:4

Several members have asked for prayers for needs that they'd prefer not to share publicly. Please lift up these prayers, knowing that God knows for whom you pray and what they need.

Arlene Horton is grieving the unexpected death of her sister, Deion Telafaro, in a car accident last month.

Robbie Brightwell requests prayer for his mother, Kathy, as she recovers from shingles and calcium buildup around her heart.

Julie Lerner requests prayer for several ongoing difficult and stressful challenges in her life.

Remember others who cannot be with us in church: **Arlene Horton, Mary Murray, Mary Wilhelm** and **Dolores Wright**.

All active servicemen and women, law enforcement personnel, first responders.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP REPORT 2025 GENERAL FUND

	May	Year To Date
Income	\$8,664	\$49,124
Expenses	\$9,584	\$50,082
Balance	\$ -920	\$ -958

MILLS' MUSINGS – THE HUMAN CAPACITY FOR BEAUTY

By Rev. Bob Mills

A man should hear a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine picture every day of his life, in order that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the human soul. – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

I turned on the TV just as the cardinals were entering the Vatican's Sistine Chapel. Once the door closed behind them, they would begin the conclave that would elect Pope Leo XIV. As the cardinals came into the chapel, each one paused, put his right hand on the Book of the Gospels, and sealed his oath not to reveal what happened in the conclave.

As they did, they stood facing *The Last Judgment*, an enormous (45 × 39 feet) fresco by the Renaissance artist Michelangelo. Inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the painting was unveiled on October 31, 1541, exactly 24 years after Martin Luther posted the 95 theses that launched the Protestant Reformation.

Five years before Luther's bold declaration, Michelangelo completed what is widely understood to be his greatest work, the *Sistine Chapel Ceiling*. Although he had been commissioned to paint the 12 apostles, Michelangelo instead filled the chapel's ceiling with scenes from the Old Testament.

These frescoes were the largest, but by no means the only, works of art surrounding the cardinals as they prepared themselves for one of their highest duties. As their solemn, unhurried procession unfolded, the news anchor was joined by a gentleman who had spent several years working at the Vatican. She asked how he reacted the first time he set foot in the Sistine Chapel. After a brief pause, he answered:

"I was stunned by the human capacity for beauty."

This was not the first time I had heard a commentator talk about the beauty of the setting and the moment. But it may have been the first time I heard anyone use the words, "the human capacity for beauty." That fine-tuned phrase was a welcome reminder that the

God who made us in His image created us not only with the innate ability to recognize and enjoy His infinitely varied gifts of beauty, but also with the indelible awareness that shining through the beauty we can access with our physical senses is the One whose very nature is the basis of all beauty, the Triune God.

Sadly, in recent centuries, the notion that God is Beauty (as well as Goodness and Truth) has been scorned in our culture and, for the most part, ignored in our churches. The consequences have been severe. Once we uncritically accept the unbiblical assertion that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, it is a very short step to saying the same about goodness and truth.

Offering a valuable corrective, John Hugo notes, "In both the tabernacle and the Solomonite temple, artistic design, metal craft, sculpture, architecture, and textile arts were employed with God's blessing and special inspiration (Exod. 31:3-11; Chron. 28:11-21). These examples show that God has uses for the artistic skills of people and that *art works are fit vehicles for serving Him.*" (Emphasis added.)

I believe the cardinals in the Sistine Chapel were well served by the works of Michelangelo, Botticelli, and others. I also believe that Protestants are well served by beautiful things like stained glass windows and paraments, banners and flowers, hymn texts, piano, and organ (*pace*, Calvin). For I believe that as we intentionally employ our God-given gift of appreciating beauty, not only we will be drawn closer to God, but we will open those doors so that others may follow that path as well.



JULY 2025 MISSION FOCUS: NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

Neighbors Helping Neighbors is a nonprofit organization with the primary focus to assist individuals in Amherst County in overcoming food insecurity. They also help connect those in need to area resources that can help build self-sufficiency and quality of life.

The mission statement: Provide hot nutritious meals to the hungry of Amherst County; Educate citizens of Amherst County on needs of the hungry; Advocate for citizens in need.

The vision: Approximately 14% of all ages and 20% of children of Amherst County residents Live in Poverty. WE WANT TO CHANGE THIS; Promote self-sufficiency and improve quality of life for those in need; Understand the challenges of poverty.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors in Amherst County was established in the fall of 2015. In May of 2018 actual hot meals were served and this was done until the Covid Shutdown.

There continues to be a Selective Food Warehouse providing "guests" the opportunity to shop for their groceries. This food warehouse is open the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Saturdays from 8 until 10:30 am. Funded through donations from businesses, churches, organizations, and individuals, mostly from our area, the existence of NHN is truly Neighbors Helping Neighbors. Food donations are accepted and monetary contributions allow for bulk purchases of foods and to cover operational expenses. We also collect plastic grocery bags and empty egg cartons for 12 or 18 eggs. A collection receptacle is located in coat-hanging area of the narthex. 18 volunteer workers are need per distribution day and administrative help is welcome.

Donations for Neighbors Helping Neighbors can be made by designating "NHN" in the memo field of your check or in the notes field if giving online. We thank you for your ongoing support of this important service to our community!

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