

DENNIS BURKE MINISTRIES

# Insights

The Way to a New Life | JULY / AUGUST 2013

# grace

GOD'S  
GATEWAY  
*to* HAPPINESS

— HOW TO **ESCAPE REVENGE**



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The fountain from  
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*within.*

# Grace

GOD'S GATEWAY  
TO HAPPINESS



Abraham Lincoln once said, “*Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.*” Lincoln’s simple wisdom captures a very big spiritual truth. We can make up our minds either to be happy or sad. Our firm decision to always see situations, people, and circumstances from a joy-filled, happy point of view will make a huge difference in our lives.

The pursuit of happiness is a guaranteed right in the Constitution of the United States. But as Benjamin Franklin pointed out, “The U.S. Constitution doesn’t guarantee happiness, only the pursuit of it. You have to catch up with it yourself.”

The happy Christian doesn’t just wake up that way one day. The happy life is not automatic; it’s an *option*. God has made us free in Him to enjoy the happy, fulfilling life He designed for us from the beginning.

Scripture is full of wisdom God has given us that, when applied, will make our lives happy. God’s Word reveals that true happiness comes out of our inner man and that the fountain from which the spiritual force of joy springs forth resides within. Nehemiah 8:10 tells us what joy accomplishes in our lives: “Do not sorrow, for *the joy of the Lord is your strength.*”

It is the force and power of joy that strengthens us in the face of unhappy conditions. This joy within comes from keeping God’s Word and perspectives in place. God’s righteousness, peace, and joy are the result of His dominion in our lives (Romans 14:17).

In Hebrews 1:8-9, there is a clear link between the King’s scepter of righteousness and our joy-fed happiness.

But to the Son, He says: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a

scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”

God’s grace, which has brought to us His righteousness, results in the oil or perfume of gladness. A glad heart gives off a fragrance. It may not be an actual fragrance that your natural sense of smell picks up, but there is an obvious influence that surrounds the truly glad heart. People with glad hearts brighten up a room with their joy and positive outlook. And their happiness is usually accompanied by gratitude, which is a sure sign of inner happiness.

In Ecclesiastes 5:19-20 (NLT), Solomon said, “And it is a good thing to receive wealth from God and the good health to enjoy it.... God keeps such people so busy enjoying life that they take no time to brood over the past.” In other words, it’s never too late to enjoy a happy childhood!

Keep in mind, however, that God issued a stern warning to Israel about the consequences they would face if they did not serve Him with “...joy and gladness

of heart, for the abundance of everything” (Deuteronomy 28:47). God didn’t take lightly the Israelites’ lack of joy over the abundance He provided.


This tells us how important it is to maintain a glad heart. No one else can do it for us.

Happiness in life is a quest embarked upon by most people, yet it is a disappointing quest for far too many. It is difficult for someone to find happiness when he or she lives in a manner that makes happiness impossible. Other

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times, people are simply looking in the wrong places to find the happiness they seek.

Let’s keep in mind what we already know will not make us happy. Money fails, fame fails, status fails, and people



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fail. Actually, we won't find happiness in *any* material thing or person; true happiness comes only from *within*. Although it may not be easy to find happiness in ourselves, it is impossible to find it anywhere else.

It's the heart of a person filled with God's love and grace who will enter into the kind of happy life he or she has sought after. Of course, every Christian expects that to be said, and the statement is true. But why are so many true Christians also so very unhappy? Because happiness is a *choice*. We can choose to be happy once we know what will make us happy and what will not.

When we base our happiness on our own inner joy in Christ, our thoughts and attitudes can be mastered. But if we think we can be happy only when others do or say what we want them to, we place our happiness under the control of those people.

We can never have a guarantee regarding how others will behave. Even when people do behave according to our wishes, we often remain uneasy about how they might misbehave in the future. But the ability to choose our own happiness comes from the strength we have in experiencing God's joy within us by the Holy Spirit.

The choice to live by the grace of God within will set the compass of our hearts. Once that is set, our decisions, our thoughts, and the words we speak will follow this inner guidance system to correct and direct us into the very benefits and blessings God is ready to give us. And even if we do make a misstep from time to time, we'll find that a truly happy person can enjoy the scenery even while on a detour!


We need happier Christians. True believers have every reason to be the happiest people on earth. Of course, certain external circumstances definitely help us to be happy, such as good health, a good marriage, a large number of close friends and relatives, wealth, fame,

and honor. But none of these can truly guarantee happiness. Some wealthy and healthy people are also some of the most depressed people alive. On the other hand, some people who live in poverty or are sickly in their bodies manage to remain consistently cheerful. Once we accept the responsibility for being happy — independent of conditions that surround us, whether good or bad — we will become determined to work on our own choices and thought patterns rather than chasing after all the wrong things in an elusive search for happiness.

As we begin to bring God's kind of joy and happiness into our homes, we will fill our house with the fragrance of gladness, praise, and encouragement. Our words will be seasoned with the gladness in our hearts. Just as God doesn't wait for us to do something right before He says good things about us, we will learn not to hold back words that will build up a person's self-esteem and outlook on life.

We know that because of the love God has for us, we can be the happiest people on earth. But first we must learn to let go of the things that steal our happiness and yield to His joy as we think on the abundance of blessings and benefits we have received from Him. Victor Hugo sums it up this way: "*The supreme happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved.*"

*Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptures come from the New King James Version.*



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# NEVER!

BY VIKKI BURKE

## TAKING THE HIGH ROAD

would be easier if life were more like the Star Wars show at the Jedi Academy at Disneyland. The battle between good and evil is obvious there. Making the right choice is so simple that even a four year-old can do it.

Ask my grandson Jude. He got to be a part of the Disneyland show during a family vacation when he was picked to play the character of his dreams: a Jedi-in-training. Within seconds, he assumed the identity of Luke Skywalker. He played his part and at the end of the show received his official Jedi Master Certificate. Then suddenly, at his moment of triumph, something shocking happened.

Darth Vader's evil voice filled the room. "Come to the Dark Side..." it beckoned.

Jude's eyes widened at the sound. He stiffened his stance against the sinister invitation. He growled out his answer in a voice fierce with resolve. "NEVER!" he said. Then, to everyone's surprise, he charged forward with his light saber, ready to fight.

Ever since then, Jude's reply has become a favorite in our household. Whenever the Dark Side threatens us, we growl just like Jude did. "NEVER!" It not only makes us laugh—it also reminds us of some very serious, scriptural instructions:

*NEVER* pay back a bad turn with a bad turn or an insult



with another insult, but on the contrary pay back with good... [*NEVER*] retaliate when people say unkind things about you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God wants you to do, and he will bless you for it. (1 Peter 3:9 *Phillips, NLT*)

*Never* is a strong word. It means *not ever, at no time, not at all, absolutely not, to no extent or degree*. And it's the word we need to remember when somebody does us wrong.

Like a glaring, red stop sign, *NEVER!* can bring us to a screeching halt when we're about to deal back to somebody a little of the hurt they've caused us. It can cool us down when we're about to boil over and put them in their place.

Somebody might say, "Do you mean I can't even be catty to the backstabbing gossips at the office and the relatives who swindled me out of my inheritance? I'm not supposed to get back at them in any way?"

*Not ever, at no time, not at all, absolutely not, to no extent or degree.*

"But that's not fair! Why would God put those kinds of restraints on me?"

Because He wants to protect and bless you. And He knows that even a trivial act of revenge will lead you out of the land of blessing and onto the dark side. It can set you on a slippery slope



that will put your very destiny in danger.

What's worse, you won't even realize what's happening. Real life isn't like the Jedi Academy. When the devil beckons us onto his territory, he doesn't announce himself like Darth Vader at Disneyland. If he did, we'd go after him with light sabers blazing. So he employs another M.O. He masquerades as our ally. He pets our hurt feelings. He tells us our resentment is justified and a little bit of revenge is OK.

That's a toxic bunch of lies, but the devil has sold it to God's people with surprising success for generations. An Old Testament Israelite named Ahithophel, paid an especially high price for it. If anybody ever had good reasons for revenge, Ahithophel did. He saw one member of his family violated and another murdered. All by one of his closest friends—King David.

Instead of going to war with his troops as he should have, King David decided to stay in Jerusalem. And unable to sleep one night, he went for a walk on the roof of his house...

And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very

beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her... (2 Sam. 11:1–4)

When Bathsheba became pregnant as a result of the encounter, David did something even worse. He arranged for her husband to be killed while on the battlefield fighting for Israel. Then he married her, thinking he'd covered up his sin. He hadn't. God had seen everything and He sent the prophet Nathan to confront David about it. Mortified, David repented in tears and agony. And God forgave him.

As modern day believers, we're glad God is merciful and forgiving. We're happy that even a situation as reprehensible as David and Bathsheba's can be redeemed. But Ahithophel didn't see it that way. He took David's sin personally. And it's easy to understand why. Ahithophel was one of David's most trusted advisors. They were confidantes, companions, and friends.

David had known full well that Bathsheba was Ahithophel's granddaughter. Yet he'd sent for her anyway. He'd used his power as king to betray Ahithophel's trust.

Although David repented, the Bible doesn't say whether or not Ahithophel knew about David's repentance. Perhaps he didn't. It's possible that only Nathan and God Himself were privy to the king's gut-wrenching grief over what he'd done. So Ahithophel might have assumed the violation of his granddaughter had just been ignored.

If so, he was dead wrong. But then, that's one of the problems with judging

## Driven by bitterness, Absalom and Ahithophel put their heads together and came up with their own brand of justice.

other people and taking justice into our hands. We never really know all the facts. We can wind up condemning someone for a sin God has already forgiven. That's a dangerous mistake, and Ahithophel made it. He decided David should be punished and waited in bitterness for years for the chance to make David pay.

The opportunity presented itself when David's son, Absalom, sought revenge after his sister had been raped by his half brother Amnon, and David had done nothing about it. As usual, the devil exploited David's failure. Driven by bitterness, Absalom and Ahithophel put their heads together and came up with their own brand of justice.

God had designed a good plan for Absalom but he chose another path. He listened to the tempter's voice



and defected to the dark side, pitting himself not just against David but against God. Fighting God is always a losing proposition. The way God sees it, we're siding against Him when we pass judgment on His people.

"But what if they deserve that judgment?" you might ask.

The Apostle Paul answered that question:

"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls... Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God."<sup>1</sup>

Only God knows what people deserve. So we need to get off the Judgment Seat of Christ, and let Him sort it out.

Absalom didn't do that. Instead, he let his pain and anger drive him to become both judge and executioner. Falling for the devil's deceptions, he decided that justice would be served and his own future preserved by bringing David down.

We all buy that lie at one time or another. When someone hurts us and tries to hinder our advancement, we think we have to fight them to protect God's plan for our lives. But that's just not true. As long as we stay on God's side, trusting and obeying Him, no one can steal our destiny. God guarantees it in His Word: "No weapon turned against you will





succeed.”<sup>2</sup> That’s a powerful promise and it cuts like a sword. If you’re on the right side, it protects you. If you’re on the wrong side, it can destroy you.

Absalom and Ahithophel chose the wrong side. Knowing their rebellion was doomed, Ahithophel “saddled his donkey, went to his hometown, set his affairs in order, and hanged himself.”<sup>3</sup>

Not long afterward, Absalom died too. He was trying to escape King David’s forces when he rode his mule under an oak tree and his hair got tangled in the branches. Then Joab, David’s general, took three daggers and plunged them into Absalom’s heart as he dangled from the oak still alive. It was a tragic death for the son of the king.

It’s easy for us to throw stones at Absalom and Ahithophel for their attack against David. But if we put ourselves in their place, we have to wonder: What were they supposed to do? Imagine they hadn’t been wounded by the way David had treated them and their loved ones? Shrug their shoulders and pretend their pain didn’t matter?

No. They had another option available to them. They could have taken the road that David chose. You have to remember, David was hurting too. No question about it, the treachery of David’s family and friends left him reeling. So what did he do?

How did he process his pain? He prayed.

When you read David’s prayer from Psalm 55 you can see that he didn’t deny his emotions. But he didn’t let them drive him to take matters into his own hands either. Instead he dumped the entire mess into God’s hands.

You and I can do that too. When the pain of mistreatment pushes us toward offense, we can run to the Lord and He’ll help us. He will give us “more and more grace.”<sup>4</sup>

One thing’s for sure, David told the straight story when he prayed; and he told it directly to God. He didn’t run around to all his friends sobbing on their shoulder. He didn’t drag everybody

else into the mud with him. He knew that wouldn’t solve the problem. It would only make things worse. So David limited himself to an audience of One. Confident the Almighty

could handle his turbulent emotions, he poured them out with passion and said:

“Listen to my prayer, O God. Do not ignore my cry for help! Please listen and answer me, for I am overwhelmed by my troubles. My enemies shout at me, making loud and wicked threats. They bring trouble on me, hunting me down in their anger. My heart is in anguish. The terror of death overpowers me. Fear and trembling overwhelm me. I can’t stop shaking. Oh, how I wish I had wings like a dove; then I would fly away and rest! I would fly far away to the quiet of the wilderness...How quickly I would escape—far away from this wild storm of hatred.”<sup>5</sup>

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continued on back

## upcoming meetings

dennis & vikki burke



### July 13-14

Living Word Bible Church  
3520 E Brown Rd  
Mesa, AZ 85213  
(480) 964-4463

### July 21

New Life International Outreach Center  
2633 Hartsfield Road  
Tallahassee, FL 32303  
(850) 386-6129

### July 28

Victory Christian Center  
719 US 62  
Maysville, KY 41056  
(606) 759-7211

### August 4

Praise Center Church  
420 W Murray Ave  
Visalia, CA 93291  
(559) 733-2744

### August 11

New Life Church  
4230 Highway 14  
Millbrook, AL 36054  
(334) 285-6996

### August 17-18

New Dimensions Church  
701 N Cemetery Rd  
Yukon, OK 73099  
(405) 324-9000

### August 24

Vikki Burke  
Word of Life Church  
5401 Lakeland Dr  
Flowood, MS 39232  
(769) 216-3657

### August 25

Word of Life Church  
5401 Lakeland Dr  
Flowood, MS 39232  
(769) 216-3657

### September 8

Believers Church  
222 N 2nd St  
Porterville, CA 93257  
(559) 782-0531

<sup>1</sup> Romans 14:4, 1 Corinthians 4:5, NASB | <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 54:17 | <sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel 17:23 | <sup>4</sup> James 4:6, AMP | <sup>5</sup> Psalm 55:1-8

David minced no words in telling God how torn up he was about the wrongs he had suffered. He was specific. He was graphic. He was emotional. Not

because God needed the information but because he needed to express his feelings to Someone—the only One in the universe who could do something about them.

No one can do for us what God can do. He will not only heal our wounded heart when injustice threatens to destroy us; He will defend us and make things right.

David understood that. So as he prayed, his faith began to surge. “The LORD hears my voice!” he said. “He rescues me and keeps me safe from the battle waged against me, even though many still oppose me. God, who is king forever, will hear me and...save me.”<sup>6</sup>

Absalom and Ahithophel should have taken a tip from Jude. When the devil invited them to return evil for evil and step to the dark side, they should have said, “NEVER!”

We should too.

9psalm 55:17-19, 23



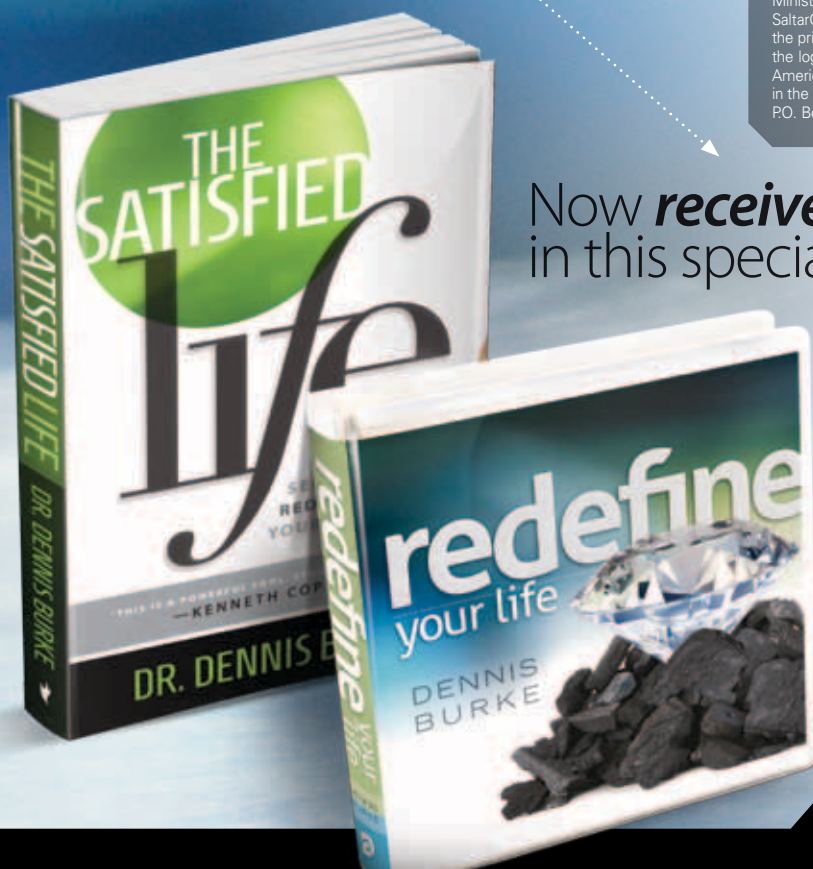
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