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**Lesson 1 | April 16th, 2023 | “God Wants Me to Be Happy”**

**Ministry Updates**

**We Gather Together:** (*Selected verses from Ephesians 2 )*

Pastor: As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins

**Group: Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.**

P: But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **5**made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions

**G: it is by grace you have been saved**

P: For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God

**G: not by works, so that no one can boast.**

P: For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,

**G: which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

**Opening Prayer**

**Schedule for Our Study | “10 Lies About God”**

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| **April 16th**  | **God Wants Me to Be Happy** |
| April 23rd  | There are Many Ways into God’s Presence  |
| April 30th  | God Has Grown Soft on Sin |
| May 7th  | God Helps Those Who Help Themselves |
| *May 14th*  | *Confirmation Sunday (Cake Reception)*  |
| *May 21st*  | *Congregational & Voter’s (CV) Meeting*  |
| May 28th  | God Has Made Death a Natural Part of Life  |
| June 4th  | God is Distant and Disinterested in What Happens  |
|  *Break for Summer...* |

**Introductory Activity**

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.

**What God Wants for Us**

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| **Mark 8:31-37 - 31**He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the 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 concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” **34**Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **35**For whoever wants to save their life[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24536b)] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. **36**What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? **37**Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?  |

1. What does God want for us? A \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

In Matthew 16:22, Peter expresses the natural reaction to suffering: “Never!” What did Peter want?

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.

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| *For Jesus* | *For Us (His Followers)* |
| Jesus is crowned King on Palm Sunday. |  |
| Everybody loves Jesus. |  |
| His new church grows rapidly. |  |
| No one ever contradicts or opposes him. |  |
| Everybody wants to get closer to him. |  |

* Bearing the cross can be summarized in two words: “Deny self.” Why is that so hard?

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. Within your group, identify the root cause of disappointment and discontent. Give examples that demonstrate how it expresses itself in our lives.

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| **Romans 7:14-25:** **14**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**For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+7&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28110c)] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. **19**For I do not do the good I want to do, but 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: Although 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 me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. **24**What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? **25**Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+7&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28117d)] a slave to the law of sin. |

1. What one word describes what life is for us (and what God wants for us)? A \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* 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?
* The old self is at work most when the new self is trying to be strengthened. Explain how the old self is at work even when we are praying, listening to God’s Word, or giving an offering.

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| **2 Corinthians 12:7-10:** Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given 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. |

1. God wants us to be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* You could write your own autobiography with 2 Corinthians 12:9 as the title. What are some ways that 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?

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* King David (2 Samuel 11) 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).
* 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?

To be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

* 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?

**Closing Discussion**

* **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 Prayer**