

I Just Want My Kids to Be Happy!

“Happy New Year!” Oops. Could I correct that? I think I would prefer to say, “May you have a blessed New Year!” or “May you have all the joy of the New Year!” So what’s the big deal?

I had served for 26 years as a Christian school administrator before coming into my role at the Association of Christian Schools International. Over those years, the most common statement made to me by prospective school families or current school families was, “I just want _____ [their child] to be happy.” That statement or a variation of it was made so often that I concluded that happiness was the number one expectation of the families we served.

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Now, I know in reality that this focus on happiness was not the case with every family. But I continue to hear it over and over from Christian school leaders in every part of this country. The pursuit of happiness seems to find reinforcement even in our own nation’s Declaration of Independence. It is the part that people most readily recognize from that great document: “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” (www.archives.gov).

I suggest that the pursuit of happiness never delivers. It is illusive when sought and is, rather, the result of the pursuit of other things. Christian school educators certainly hope that children will be happy but clearly recognize that in the pursuit of nurturing and developing a biblical understanding and a love for God, there is much that is greater than the pursuit of happiness. The apostle Paul, in a letter to the New Testament church at Philippi, directed his readers to “rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4, NIV). In essence, Paul directed the Philippians to pursue joy, indicating that they could find it in a life yielded to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Paul’s words were a follow-up on Jesus’ own words recorded in the Gospel of John: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain

in his love. *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete*” (John 15:9–11, emphasis mine).

This spiritual joy wells up from within the soul. This joy results from a personal relationship with the Savior. It is not the temporary result of some pleasant circumstance or circumstances of daily living. Life and its varying array of experiences simply cannot and will not produce a state of ongoing happiness, but a life in Christ can and does perpetuate a life of spiritual joy.

The story is told of a thirteenth-century friar, the renowned St. Francis, as he attempts to explain what true joy is. He spins a seemingly unrealistic story of returning to a home of friars during the dead of a winter night in weather so frigid and cold that icicles hang from the edge of his tunic and pierce his shins. He portrays himself covered in mud and ice, desperately cold, and miserable. He knocks at the door. After incessant pleading by St. Francis, a friar repeatedly tells him from inside that St. Francis is not welcome there. St. Francis is ordered to go away—he will not be admitted in. Again he pleads, “For the love of God take me in this night.” Again and again he is refused entrance. In response to that miserable experience, St. Francis explains, “I say to you that if I will have had patience and will not have been upset, that in this is true joy and true virtue and soundness of soul” (McLaren 2008, 193–94).

What greater pursuit exists than to teach and train young men and women to pursue the joy that they can find in a relationship with Jesus Christ, a relationship that produces the wellspring of joy that is the abundant life? You are to be commended for your choice of Christian schooling and the pursuit of an education for your children that prepares them for a life of “true joy and true virtue and soundness of soul.”

Reference

McLaren, Brian. 2008. *Finding our way again: The return of the ancient practices*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



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