



Series: EXTREME MAKEOVER: HOME EDITION
Sermon: "The Living Room- What Are You Looking For?"
Scripture: Philippians 3: 4-12
Pastor Jeffrey E. Greenway
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This month we are beginning a series of sermons titled, "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." When we begin to speak about "home," that conjures up images of family – and that brings all kinds of feelings into the life of people in this room. Some of us are living "the American dream" – we are married to the same person we wanted to be married to in our youth, we have 2 ½ kids, a dog named Spot and a house with the white picket fence. We have everything that we could possibly dream about; however, most of us never quite "get there." For most of us, the American dream sometimes becomes a nightmare that overwhelms us; and when somebody begins to talk about marriage, family, parenting, or life, we feel as if it does not have anything to say to us. I believe that all of us need to be delivered from that kind of a nightmare into God's dream for us. When we start talking about an Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, this is not just for traditional families; in fact, most of our families are not traditional. This is not for people who are trying to live the American dream; because, frankly, most of us are not even close to living that dream. This is for individuals – men, women, girls and boys – who want God's dream for them.

The principles that we will be talking about (although we may use some traditional family illustrations) apply to everyone. This morning, I will use a couple of verses of a paraphrase of the third chapter of Philippians. In the beginning of this chapter, Paul – who is in Rome waiting to die because of his faithfulness to the Gospel – is writing to his sweetheart church in Philippi. He is talking to them about "last things." At the beginning of this passage, he lists out all of the criteria that he has had in his life that marks out success. If there was a Jewish dream in that day, Paul has lived it.

Paul said, "If I lost them all, I would still be full because I have the source of life itself – a personal relationship with Jesus Christ." Brothers and sisters, your Extreme Makeover: Home Edition begins with Jesus. There is nothing else that is going to be able to makeover your life and mine unless we put Jesus in the primary importance in our lives. To get there, I need to unpack some things for us, so I am going to ask you, "What are you looking for in your life?"

Time Magazine had an edition that said most Americans are driven by the search for meaning and purpose that will result in our "happiness." The concept of happiness has always intrigued me. Happiness is skin deep, superficial, circumstantial, temporary, man-made and emotion-driven. At the end of the day, it is hollow and empty. The criteria for happiness is always changing – it is fickle and fleeting. Kind of like spring-time in Columbus – if you do not like the weather, just wait fifteen minutes. Happiness does not last. It is like a vapor that we try to grab, only to have it disappear in our

grasp; but when you contrast it with “joy,” the difference is astonishing. Happiness is superficial, it is skin deep. Joy is eternal, it is to the bone. Happiness is circumstantial; joy is consistent. Happiness is temporary; joy is permanent. Happiness is man-made; joy is God-given. Happiness is emotion-driven; joy is Spirit-born. Happiness is hollow; joy is full. Happiness is empty; joy is abundant. Happiness has criteria that are always changing, where joy is the Fruit of the Spirit that gives eternal faith perspective.

I have a friend, Bob Tuttle, who is a professor at Asbury Seminary. He has a phrase cross-stitched in his office, “Joy is the unexpected by-product of doing the will of God.” Are you looking for happiness – or are you looking for joy? Jesus said, “I came so that you might have life and have it in joyful, super abundance.” That was the purpose of Jesus’ life and death. It was to give us joyful, super abundant life. Why is it that most of us are so far removed of living the full and joyful abundant kind of life that Jesus came to give us? It is because we try to fill our lives with people and things that we think will make us happy; but at the end of the day, those things never give us the source of joy – which is Jesus.

Gary Smalley is an author, teacher and family specialist. He says, “Our lives are like cups.” We want our lives to be full. We have patched together a series of hoses and faucets that he calls the “Four Ps.” He says that we try to find fulfillment and joy in PEOPLE, PLACES, POSSESSIONS and POSITIONS rather than trusting in God who can fill our lives with joy in any circumstance. He believes our problem is that we never tap into the Real Source while someone keeps turning off the other four faucets.

PEOPLE – We look to other people to fill our lives and make us happy. We expect our cup to be filled by people like our spouse, our kids, our friends, our grandchildren, our bosses, our co-workers, our pastors, our counselors, even our mentors. The problem with this source is we cannot control them. We cannot make sure that they do the things we want them to do. No matter how much love and respect we have for the other people in our lives – at some point – they will hurt and disappoint us. When that happens, it chips holes in our cups and leaves us feeling empty inside.

I love my wife, Beth, and she loves me – that is true to the bone. We have learned though, not to depend on each other to fill our cups with happiness – or we will be disappointed. In fact, after 26 years of marriage, we can tell you with confidence that we cannot control one another; and even if we never intend to, there are times when we hurt and disappoint one another. I see this happening in dating and marriage relationships all the time. An example would be a woman who dreams for years of finding “Mr. Wonderful” – the one who is going to fulfill her deepest longings for companionship and intimacy. She dreams of how they will sit for hour upon hour in that overstuffed loveseat, arm in arm, night after night, eyes locked upon one another, sharing heart felt conversation – with no TV and no Ohio State football games. They will dream and plan together about their future – how they will decorate their house, how he will always fill her gas tank when it is empty, how he will always be there to support her, to offer encouragement when she is discouraged. She often thinks that Mr. Wonderful is like a waterfall cascading down with a never ending source of fulfillment in her life.

She does not know it, but she is setting herself up for the very heartbreak she is trying to avoid. It does not take her very long to figure out that Mr. Wonderful cannot – or will not – cooperate with her expectations. No matter how much he loves her, he will disappoint her because he cannot possibly do the things she is asking him to do. When that happens, she might begin to think of another alternative. She reasons, “If Mr. Wonderful isn’t going to fill my needs, then let’s start a family. That will certainly fill my cup.” It is too late – soon she will discover the children, rather than filling her

cup, have this incredible capacity to drill holes right down into the middle and drain our lives.

Men also enter into relationships with unrealistic expectations. A guy pictures how “Ms. Perfect” will respond to him – each day she will affirm how gifted he is as a provider, lover, husband and father. We see in our minds that she will carry a job; and she will cook like a gourmet chef, keep a spotless house and will always respond warmly to our advances. Soon, we discover that our spouse – or that other significant Ms. Perfect – is unable to fill our cups; in fact, she starts to chip off the enamel and leaves leaky cracks. Like her, a man’s insecurity increases, and he may even begin to think that maybe he married the wrong cup-filler. He may even begin to look around for somebody else who might be his ultimate cup-filler.

This kind of disappointment can happen in any relationship – especially when we are trying to depend on other people to fill our cups. They cannot do it; we cannot control them. At some point – no matter how much they love us, no matter how much we love them – they will disappoint us, leaving us empty and frustrated. It should not surprise you that Jesus talked about this. In the fourth chapter of John, Jesus is walking in the middle of the afternoon through the region of Samaria, and he comes upon Jacob’s well. Good, respectable women went to the well early in the morning or late in the afternoon; the only women who went to the well in the heat of the day were people who had something to hide or who were women of ill repute. Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman there. He asks her to draw him a drink, and he begins to talk with her about this living well of water that could come up inside of her and fill her cup so that it would never run dry. She says, “I would like to have some of that water.” Jesus replies, “Go find your husband and bring him here.” She responds, “Sir, I have no husband.” Jesus says, “You’re right, you have had five husbands, and they haven’t been able to fill your cup – and the guy you’re living with won’t be able to fill it either.” Something amazing happens – Jesus was able to give her what she had been thirsty for all of those years.

People will never fill our lives and make us happy. No matter how much they love us, they will always disappoint us. Only Jesus can fill our cups so that they will not run dry. If I lost them all, my life would still be full because I have found the secret of life itself – a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

PLACES – People look today for all kinds of places to fill their cups; in fact, in America, the first place that many of us look to find fulfillment is our home. We are not connected until we have the right house – in the proper neighborhood, in the best school district, with the finest furniture, beautiful decorations and professional landscaping. We set our hearts desire on living in the land of straight teeth and Volvos. If we do not attain that goal by the “normal” time frame, our lives are empty and hurting inside. Whether we live in an apartment complex or a subdivision, we expect pleasure and satisfaction from the places we live. We feel cheated if we live in the wrong location or if we do not have the “dream house.” This can become a source of anxiety for us. If we are looking to fill our cup with the place we live, it will not work. We get bored with them; and then we have to redecorate or build on, renovate or sell, buy or build another place.

I have a friend who is now planning to build her third “dream house.” The first one cost her \$150,000; the second one cost \$250,000, and now this one is costing \$500,000. I guarantee you this house will not do for her what she thinks it will do. She is looking for happiness in a place that can only be filled by the Divine Son of God, and soon she will be miserable all over again.

When we cannot do it with a house, we begin to look outside of our home for that place – somewhere we can find it all, while we get away from it all. We might go camping, we might buy a second home, or we might begin to plan our “dream vacation.” Have you ever lived for a vacation? I have. There are two life-giving places for me to vacation. One is the Rocky Mountains, and the other is the beach. There is something about going to either one of those places that give me perspective.

Approximately ten years ago, I was living for a vacation. We made our way to the Outer Banks of North Carolina, and we arrived on a Saturday afternoon. It was beautiful – the sky was high and the surf was great. The following day, the sky was high and the surf was a little rough – but that was okay; however, we woke up on Monday morning, and the people we were sharing the house with said, “We have to go.” I responded, “What do you mean we have to go? It is beautiful.” They replied, “Hurricane Felix is about 300 miles offshore and is making a bee-line for our house.” I did not want to go, but I was convinced it was time when the waves began breaking over the sand dunes. As we left that place as “vacation refugees,” I cycled into depression with a real sense of emptiness and despair. I had been dependent upon that trip – that place – to give me happiness.

Jesus talked about the danger of looking to a place to fill our cups. In Matthew chapter 17, He takes Peter, James and John to the top of the Mount of Transfiguration. While He is there, Jesus is transformed into His original form; and appearing next to Him – radiant and bright as lightning – is Moses and Elijah. Peter sees this and says, “This is awesome – let’s just build three tents right here. We never have to leave. We can just stay in this place.” Jesus made it clear – it is not until we take our experience of His fullness and power into the valleys of our lives that our lives become full. Jesus made it clear – a place will not fill us.

In my 22 years of ministry, I have visited all kinds of homes – big and small, mansions and trailers, rich and poor, good neighborhoods and bad. I have found joy-filled and miserable people in all places. It is not the place – the place where we live has little to do with our joy. It is when we experience Jesus on the mountaintops of life, and we allow Him to come into the valleys of our lives that our cups become full. Remember the text, “If I lost all of the measurement of my life, my life would still be full because I found the secret of life itself, which is a personal relationship with Jesus.”

POSSESSIONS – When people or places do not fill our cups, we often turn to possessions. I believe a testament to this fact are the balances on some of our credit cards. We somehow bought into the bumper sticker, “The one who dies with the most toys wins.” That is a lie.

How many of us have a “wish list”? I keep it in my pocket sometimes or in the top right hand drawer in my desk at home. It is the list of possessions that I would like to get next. Have you ever noticed that when you finish your list, it is relatively easy to find a new one? You never run out of stuff that you want. The reason is that possessions can never be enough. Money – and the stuff that it buys – does not provide lasting fulfillment.

I have met rich and poor, young and old, and I have found joyful, fulfilled people in every socio-economic category. They understand that it is not possessions that give us contentment; it is a personal relationship with Jesus. Possessions will not fill our cups – but Jesus will. This is the lie that many of us buy into at Christmas.

Our children used to deliver newspapers. When your kids have a newspaper route, that means YOU have a newspaper route. For about three years living in Erie, Penn-

sylvania, in all kinds of weather, I was delivering papers on a Sunday morning. The day after Thanksgiving, the paper was a “doorstop” with all of the Christmas sales ads for “Black Friday” – we all buy into that. The advertising tells us you have to have this thing or that thing in order to have joy or fulfillment in your life. We buy into that and we wrap it up. On Christmas day, after the bows are broken and the papers are torn, and all of the “stuff” gets put away, why do you think it is that so many Americans cycle into depression and despair? It is because of the hole in their life that will not be filled with the things that they purchased. There has to be another Source. Did you know that Jesus talked about this?

In the Gospels, Jesus is telling a story about a rich man who did very well. All of the markers of his life are up and to the right. Every measurable means of success was his. He had so much “stuff” that instead of thinking, “Well, maybe God has blessed me with all of this so that I can be a blessing to other people”, he said, “Oh no, I am going to tear down all of my old barns and I am going to build newer, bigger barns.” This is what he did. After the building was completed he looked into the mirror and he said, “You have done very well. You can eat drink and be merry.” The Scriptures tell us that night the Lord visited him and spoke to him saying, “You fool, you are rich in things, but poor to God. Tonight your soul is required of you. What will your possessions get you now?” Is that going to fill your cup?

Jesus was always pointing us from focusing on the things that we think we want, to focusing on the God who is ready, willing, and more than able to supply our needs. Jesus said, “Seek first my kingdom and my righteousness and all the things we worry about will be cared for.” Possessions will never fill our lives with joy because we can never get enough. Only Jesus can fill us and supply our needs. If I lost them all, my life would still be full because I found the source of life itself; this personal relationship with Jesus.

POSITIONS – If lasting fulfillment is not found in people, places or possessions, we often turn to the power of position to fill our cups. I have had a lot of positions in my life, and I am here to say that it will not do it at all.

In 1992, I was attending the General Conference of The United Methodist Church; and there was a United Methodist Bishop speaking that morning. Whenever a United Methodist Bishop is speaking, in our tradition, we tend to listen to them. He stood up and spoke, “I have spent my entire life climbing to the top of the ecclesiastical mountain.” He confessed, “If you look in the wake of my life, you will see all kinds of scattered and shattered relationships lying back there. I thought that when I got to the top of the mountain I would be fulfilled, and I have only found that I am emptier than ever.” Then he told us, “There is nothing that you can have at the top of the ladder that you cannot have at the bottom. Spend time working on the ‘heart stuff’ so, when life gets messy and mixed up, you know where your priorities are.”

This is a seduction for people of every age and station. We think that somehow if we could just be the captain of the team, the chairperson of the PTA, the leader in the church, the foreman in the shop, the president of the company or even the lead pastor of a large church – that somehow our life will then be full. If we attain those positions, we find that they alone will not full us. I have found that many of us spend too many of our days worrying about who and what we are going to be tomorrow. We have not figured out how it works today. Did you know that Jesus talked about this?

Jesus was talking to His disciples who were always jockeying for positions. They were always asking who the “favorite” was. They wanted to know who was going to be first. Jesus was always turning their expectations upside down, telling them they had to

have child-like faith, servant hands, and humble hearts to be great in God's eyes. James and John did not quite get it. They are walking along one day and they asked, "Jesus, can we be number one and two in your kingdom when we get there? Can I sit on your right and my brother sit on your left?" They were all caught up in the seductive power in position. Jesus turn it upside down and said, "You don't get it. In my Kingdom, the last is going to be first and the first shall be last and those who want to be great in God's eyes will be the servants of all."

It matters not which job title you have or what position of power you hold. That alone will not fill what you are looking for. Remember the text, "If I lost them all I would still be full because I found the secret of life itself, which is a personal relationship with Jesus."

What are you looking for? Are you looking for a quick fix or a lifelong journey? Are you looking for happiness or are you looking for joy? If you want a quick fix, then chase all of the people you want, move to all the places you want, invest in all the possessions you want or strive for every position you want. You need to know – at the end of the day you will just have a cracked, leaky cup. Your "Extreme Home Make-over" begins with Jesus. It can begin today.