



## Discussion Guide

Date: 3/22/2026

Sermon Title: Is the goal to be happy?

Scripture: Matthew 16:21-27

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

### OPENING PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, we come before You with honest hearts, seeking to see the truth behind the illusions that surround us. Open our minds and our hearts to Your Word today. Help us to discern Your call, to take up our cross, and to follow You faithfully. Guide our conversation with Your Spirit, that we may not be deceived by the lies of culture but anchored in Your truth. Amen.*

### OPENING QUESTIONS:

1. What's one thing you thought would make you happy that, once you got it, didn't deliver the happiness you expected?

### OPENING CONTEXT:

In Matthew 16:21–27, Jesus begins to prepare His disciples for His suffering and death, challenging their expectations of a triumphant, worldly Messiah. Peter resists, reflecting a natural human desire for comfort, success, and happiness. Jesus' response reminds us that following Him often requires surrender, sacrifice, and a redefinition of what it means to "gain life."

### EXPLORING THE TEXT:

Read Matthew 16:21–27 (NRSV). You may want to read in a different translation like ESV or the Message as well to see a different insight.

1. In verse 21, Jesus begins to explain His suffering and death. Why do you think Peter reacted so strongly in verse 22?
2. Jesus calls Peter "Satan" in verse 23. What does this reveal about the tension between human desire for comfort and God's call to discipleship?
3. Verse 24 invites us to "take up the cross and follow" Jesus. What does this mean in your daily life? Can this involve joy even amid sacrifice?
4. Jesus asks in verse 26, "For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?" How does this challenge modern cultural ideas about success, wealth, and happiness?
5. How does verse 27 reshape our understanding of what it means to live and die well? How does this connect to our hope in resurrection and eternal life?

### **CONNECTING WITH OTHER SCRIPTURE:**

6. Read 1 Timothy 6:6–10. How does this text challenge the cultural notion that happiness comes from possessions or status?
7. Read John 10:10 that talks about abundant life. How does this abundance differ from cultural definitions of happiness?
8. Read Philippians 3:7–11. How does this show the difference between worldly gain and spiritual gain?
9. How might taking up your cross (Matt. 16:24) change your approach to daily decisions, relationships, and ambitions?

### **Wesleyan & Methodist Reflection:**

John Wesley emphasized that true holiness and joy come through surrender to God's will, not worldly achievement. In "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection", Wesley writes that our pursuit of happiness must be aligned with God's purposes, not our own desires. Methodist liturgy and the baptismal covenant also echo this: we promise to "resist evil, injustice, and oppression" and "seek to love and serve God and neighbor," reflecting that our ultimate goal is obedience and discipleship, not mere personal pleasure.

10. John Wesley teaches that true joy comes from holiness and love of God. How can Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection help us resist cultural lies about happiness?
11. How does Methodist liturgy, prayer, or sacrament practice (e.g., baptism or communion) help remind us that our goal is discipleship, not personal comfort?
12. Are there areas in your life where you might be seeking happiness apart from God? How could surrendering these areas bring a deeper sense of joy?

### **SERMON QUESTIONS:**

1. The sermon opens with the things that would make you happy. What would make you happy? What would make your list of happinesses? I.e. Achievements, possessions, avoid pain, etc.
2. Pastor Clayton quoted Ayn Rand's philosophy: "The achievement of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life." How does our culture reinforce this message?
3. How does the cultural pursuit of happiness through comfort, success, and possessions conflict with Jesus's call to deny ourselves and take up our cross?
4. We are called to live a sacrificial life "taking up the cross" in following Jesus. What are you living out in your life sacrificially? The sermon mentions several ways to live for the needs of others which may cost us something.
5. What are the costs of living sacrificially like speaking out for the marginalized or living counter to the prevailing tide? Have you experienced these costs?
6. The sermon ends with a list that includes relationships, purpose, sacrifice, gratitude, and giving bring true happiness according to Harvard studies. Which of these areas do you need to develop more fully in your life?



### **APPLYING IT ALL:**

1. What cross are you being called to take up daily, and what keeps you from fully embracing that sacrificial calling?
2. How do you balance caring for your own well-being with Jesus's teaching that we must not make ourselves the center of the universe?
3. In what ways might you be in danger of gaining the whole world but forfeiting your soul in the process?
4. Share an example of someone you know who lives sacrificially for others. What impact has that had on you?
5. How can your small group support one another in seeking God's kingdom over worldly success or happiness?

### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

*Gracious God, we thank You for Your Word that challenges our assumptions and illuminates the path of true life. Help us to take up our crosses with courage, to seek Your kingdom above our own desires, and to trust in Your abundant grace. Strengthen us to live faithfully in a world full of smoke and mirrors, that we may find lasting life and joy in You. Amen.*

### **WAYS TO RESPOND:**

Choose ONE of the following practices to focus on this week:

1. Practice Self-Denial by give up something you enjoy (social media, a favorite food, entertainment) for one week as a spiritual practice to remind yourself that Jesus is first. Each time you're tempted, pray: "Jesus, you are the center of my life, not me."
2. Try taking on "Sacrificial Living" by identifying one person who needs encouragement, help, or support. Sacrifice your time, resources, or comfort to serve them this week. Reflect on how it felt to give yourself away.
3. Create a gratitude practice by writing down three things you're grateful for each day this week. Share your gratitude with God in prayer and with at least one other person.
4. Make a relationship Investment by reaching out to someone you've been meaning to connect with. Have a meaningful conversation where you listen more than you talk. Look for ways to bless them rather than focusing on what you get from the relationship.