



The Pursuit of Happiness

“Happiness is a valid pursuit for the people of God,” writes Tim McConnell of his new book Happy Church: Pursuing Radical Joy as the People of God. “The habits and culture of church should feed your awareness of happiness in Christ. This is a distinctive idea only in the sense that it has been forgotten and abandoned in recent generations. . . . This is not a book on new church practices to cultivate happiness, but on recognizing the happiness inherent in the common practices of church.” In the following excerpt, Tim talks of the importance of happiness for the church.

Is your church happy? Most of us are not sure how to answer that question. It seems like church should be a happy place, right?

Yes, it should. Church should be a happy place not because we want it to be but because God wants it to be. God has intentions and purposes for the church, and oddly enough, those purposes include instilling joy in his people.

The church’s influence on the world depends on its joy.

Joy is available to any church of any size, and yet joy often sits by as a neglected resource for most churches. It is time to equip Christians to release joy in their churches, to live into a neglected aspect of the Christian life – we are meant to be a people in pursuit of radical joy.

The direct pursuit of happiness rarely produces happiness. But foundational reasons to be happy exist in every church – if it is truly the church. There are blessings unleashed in the common activities of every church. Large or small, in any context or any language, churches have a number of consistent patterns of behavior so simple they often go unnoticed. The tragedy comes when a church forgets why it does the things it does, when these behaviors become dead ritual and mindless habit. Happiness perishes in the arid climate of empty ceremonialism. When a church has lost touch with deep happiness and joy in Christ, it is time to reexamine these common activities we regularly share and uncover the blessings of God we find in them. In restoring this understanding, we just might restore the foundations for a community of pervasive celebration and gladness.

C. S. Lewis said, “Joy is the serious business of heaven.” *Happy* is serious business. I believe we need to learn the serious business of happiness in our Christian life together in the church. We need to learn to fight for joy in our churches.

It is not a superficial matter. Church in the Western world is declining. *Church* has developed such a bad reputation that some will be surprised I even choose to use the word. Many pastors avoid saying “church” at all – as impossible as that is – because too many people

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“Reading Tim’s book changed the way I lead. I want to lead a happy people of God, and that means I want to lead with more joy, more happiness, more exuberance because of what Christ has done for us. It’s important. It reflects a joyful God when the people of God celebrate joy. Read it. And stop being such a grump.”
 –From the foreword by **John Ortberg**, senior pastor, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, author of *Soul Keeping* and *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*



BOOK EXCERPT

Tim McConnell (PhD, University of Virginia) is lead pastor of First Presbyterian Church (ECO) in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He is the author of *Happy Church* and *Illumination in Basil of Caesarea's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*. He has served as a chaplain in the US Army Reserve, worked as the director of graduate ministries for the Center for Christian Study in Charlottesville, Virginia, and taught Christian history and theology in undergraduate and seminary settings. Tim currently serves on the national Theological Task Force for his church, ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. Tim was born in Germany to a military family but raised in Colorado Springs. He came to Christ through Young Life and has been devoted to ministry since, promoting the love and knowledge of God to the best of his ability. He holds degrees from Northwestern University, Princeton Theological Seminary, Oxford University, and the University of Virginia. Tim lives in Colorado Springs with his wife, Abigail, and four children.

associate the word *church* with a bad experience, a time they visited a dark and musty building filled with little or no joy, where the people whispered and wept in dark shadows. Church has been starved of its happiness.

It's time to bring "happy" back.

– Taken from chapter one, "Getting Serious About Happiness"