

## Do you need some ideas for sermons on giving? Here are three sermon starters:

### Sermon Starters 2

#### **Giving: A Pursuit of Happiness**

*"You'll not likely go wrong here if you keep remembering that our Master said, 'You're far happier giving than getting'." [Acts 20:35, The Message]*

\*As you prepare the sermon, remember that this verse is the conclusion of the farewell speech Paul gives to the people of Ephesus when he leaves. Ephesus was a community where Paul lived and worked with the people for many years. It was not a short-term stop on his journeys. Paul had friends and deep relationships with people in Ephesus and as he prepares to leave them, he reminds them of the important teachings he wants them to remember. At the end, he makes this point that all their efforts will be successful if they will simply remember this great teaching of Jesus: "You're far happier giving than getting."

\*Before you begin the sermon, allow time for congregation interaction by inviting members of the congregation to answer the question: "What does happiness look like?" Depending on your setting, there are a variety of ways to do this. Informal settings might be able to simply ask the question and let people respond. You may choose to pass out papers and have people write or draw responses that can be collected and shared. Consider making video beforehand, featuring members of your church and community, including individuals of varying ages and backgrounds, to respond to the question. Pose the question to classes of children, youth, and adults the week before and have them create written responses and pictures that can be compiled in a slideshow/PowerPoint to share. If a PowerPoint presentation is not an option, have people place their written responses and pictures on posters and display them at the entrance and front of your worship space.

\*In our cultural history, we as a people recognize the pursuit of happiness as one of the basic God-given rights all people. We believe that this right is one to be protected and promoted throughout the world.

\*As people similar to the people of the early church of Ephesus, people seeking to live out God's will in the world, what does pursuing happiness mean? If Jesus taught that giving will make us far happier than getting, then how should we pursue happiness in our lives?

\*By the standards of our world, happiness is frequently associated with financial success and the acquisition of possessions. Those who have more, have more to be happy about, right? That new car, those new shoes, the latest phone or computer; all of those are things we seek after and aspire to attain in some great pursuit of finally reaching a level of life where we will be happy. When we no longer have to worry about how the bills will get paid and when we can simply buy anything we want anytime we want, then we will be happy, won't we? Doesn't this compel us to buy that lottery ticket? Or risk that stock, or bet on that horse, or go after that other job? Somewhere just around the corner, there is a level of success, a level of acquisition where happiness waits.

\*The problem is that is not what Jesus taught. When Paul left his friends in Ephesus, friends who lived in a culture similar to ours, where many opportunities to make lots of money and spend lots of money existed, that is not the message Paul left with them. The message of our Master that Paul wanted his friends to hear, the message of our Master that God wants us to hear is this: "You're far happier giving than getting."

\*If you are lacking happiness in your life, don't waste your time looking for what you can get that will lead you to happiness. You aren't going to buy your way to happiness. Instead, if you want things to fall into place in your life and be happy, pursue happiness the way your Master recommends, find ways to give more.

\*Study after study has found that the correlation between the level of our income and the level of our happiness is a false one. People with more money and stuff are frequently more miserable than people who live below the poverty level. The biggest thing that determines how happy someone is no matter what their income level is how generous they are about giving to others. A magazine news report a number of years ago on giving surprisingly found people who were poorer financially tended to give a larger percentage of what they had to others and were happier than those who had more money but were not as giving. People, who are more giving, are simply happier. They aren't focused on protecting what they have. They are living in love and relationship with others. They are able to see how they are making a difference in the world. They recognize themselves as being part of something bigger, better and more important than just what they have.

\*In our pursuit of happiness, maybe it is time for us to stop and listen to Paul's parting words to the Ephesians and remember that for us as well: We will be far happier giving than receiving.

\*Before leaving, pass out heart-shaped cut-outs and pencils. Invite people to write three things they can do in the upcoming week to be more giving. Remind people that this can be giving of their time, giving of their gifts, giving of their money, giving of their talents, or simply giving of their spirit of kindness and joy to others.

Invite people to bring their hearts forward to place on the altar, or pass the offering plates and allow them to put their hearts in the plates as a sign of their willingness to offer the attitudes of their hearts to God in a spirit of giving.

\*As a Benediction, send people forth to be more giving and to go and pursue happiness as their God intends them to do.