

Yesterday, July 4, marked the anniversary of the approval of the final wording of the Declaration of Independence. It was signed the following month and circulated with the date of July 4, and so this has been accepted as the date of the anniversary our nation's independence. While some have celebrated this momentous occasion since the Declaration's signing, Independence Day became a recognized national holiday in 1941.

The Fourth July means different things to different people. For some it is a time of national pride and thanksgiving. For others it means a day off from work, a day to work for time and a half, or double time or an excuse to party. For the signers, it was a dangerous and bold step that produced the most powerful, influential, and wealthy nation in the world. Our founding fathers dared to dream of a self-governing people with equality under the law for all. The United States of America was to be a grand experiment in democracy, and representative government, conceived with the highest of ideals. It was to be a government which freed the people from tyranny, and gave them the freedom to pursue their dreams.

The writings of the founding fathers make it clear that their intent was to not allow government to interfere with the freedom of worship according to the individual's conscious. The government was not to dictate how a person worships, or interfere with their pursuit of God. Ours is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. The problem with our government has at its root something that goes back to the creation of man, and the Garden of Eden. Where there is corruption in our government, it is because of the corruption in people's hearts, and especially in the hearts of our representatives. When sinful man is in charge, we should expect corruption. This is why it is so important for Christians vote.

Even so, we cannot help but to look at our current situation and ask ourselves, "How could we have fallen so far. The second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence begins with these words: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Thomas Jefferson understood, and the men of the Continental Congress agreed, that there is a creator God who is the supreme authority, and who gives us the ability to live in liberty and pursue a lifestyle that produces joy and happiness.

But in America today there is no right to life, for the most innocent among us, because of our nations laws, set by the Supreme Court, and raised under the banner of a woman's right to choose. There is no opportunity for liberty or the pursuit of happiness for a victim of abortion. Our founding fathers threw off the shackles of monarchy for the cause of freedom, but our government today has its tentacles in everywhere, seeking to control every aspect of our lives. Here is a truth that we can hold as self-evident, a marriage is between a man and a woman, but not any more, not according to the Supreme Court. Lord forgive us, and hold back the judgment we deserve.

Democracy focuses on individual rights. Communism focuses on the collective being controlled by the elite. I never thought I would see the day when America would surrender to Communism, but we are becoming more and more communist with every piece of legislation that passes, or executive order given, that gives the government more control. We feel the pinch. We resist the encroachment of government into our lives, and yet it continues to advance upon us to rob us of the truths that our founding fathers thought self-evident.

I am not giving up on America. I love this country, and I have hope that some godly leaders might arise, ushering God's blessings upon our people again. But today I want to declare

to you that I have taken dual citizenship. I willingly submit myself to a monarchy, to which I owe my primary allegiance. For no matter what happens in this world, or to our country, I choose to serve the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Whatever He says, I will do, with joy in my heart. I invite you to join with me in this commitment as we look at a passage of scripture that tells us what King Jesus desires for everyone who places their trust in Him. Please read along with me 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

These verses, of course, do not give us an extensive list of God's will for our lives, but if we live for Him with all our hearts, if we turn from sin, and have a desire in our hearts to please God with our lives, if we surrender completely our will to the Lord, there are qualities that a godly lifestyle produces in a person, and these will result in doing God's will in every situation.

God's will for you in Christ Jesus is that you be joyful always. God wants us to have joy in our hearts at all times. It's hard sometimes to have joy in your heart when you watch the news, but it's ok to turn off the TV. It's kind of hard to have joy in your hearts when the circumstances of your life are counter-productive to joy. Illness, or the loss of a loved one can rob us of joy. Trouble at work or seeing our children and grandchildren making ungodly choices breaks our hearts. Personal debt or strains in our relationships can add so much stress to people lives that there seems to be little room for joy. The natural consequences of sin can make our lives miserable.

But a Christian's joy is not dependent upon his or her circumstances. God gives us reason to be joyful, no matter what our circumstances. The actions of people in their sinful, self-centered, human condition bring us down. But the divine nature of Christ, who lives in our hearts, lifts us up. Joy springs from the blessings of being in Christ Jesus. Through faith in Jesus, I am a citizen of the kingdom of God. He is completely sovereign over the affairs of man. He is with me always in the person of His Holy Spirit. He produces the fruits of the Spirit in my life, when I am living for Him. Love, joy peace, happiness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control, produce a quality of life that the world cannot offer, or understand.

Because of my faith in Jesus Christ, I know that I can trust in God's providence. God's got this. Nothing escapes His attention, and He has a plan for me, for you, and for the future. He has forgiven me of my sin, and He empowers me for all the challenges that will come my way. I am going to live forever with Him in paradise, and that promise, and that hope, brings joy to my heart.

It is God's will for you to be joyful always, and to pray continually. Continual prayer is not uninterrupted prayer. The word used here is sometimes used to give a picture of a person with a hacking cough. Just a few months back there was a bug going around and many of us were coughing our heads off. We went about our normal routines as best would could but there was a constant awareness, and a tickling in our throats, and a pressure in our chests, that produced a persistent cough.

This gives us a better sense of what God desires in our relationship with Him. If we do not suppress the ministry of the Holy Spirit, there is within the believer a persistent awareness of the presence of God. Contributing to my joy, I know that God is always with me. I can speak to Him at any moment, and I know that He hears and answers my prayers. If I am overwhelmed, or tempted, or confused, He is just a prayer away.

Prayer is all about maintaining fellowship with the Lord, and sharing our lives with Him. The idea is to talk to God about everything. Talk to God about your feelings, your concerns, and your desires. Take your worries and circumstances to Him in prayer. Prayer is also about trust, and it goes to the heart of your faith.

Over the years I have had a lot of people come to me for counseling. They come in part because they know that they can trust me. I'm not going to break their confidence, and to the best of my ability, I am going to give them a biblical perspective on their situation. Most of the time people just need someone to listen, and I do only a small percentage of the talking. They are looking for answers, and I will help them to find those answers if I can. But the truth is I have nothing to offer apart from Jesus Christ. Jesus is the answer to every problem, and it is my job as a counselor to help them to see that.

God will listen to you for as long as you desire to talk to Him. You don't have to worry about broken confidences; you just have to be open and honest. Sometimes, however, people don't want to talk to God because they are convicted over their sin. Please do not cut yourself off in your relationship with God because you're doing something that you know in your heart you shouldn't be doing. When you feel conviction, talk to God immediately. Confess your sin. Find forgiveness. Get your life straightened out. God always wants what is best for you.

God is always there for you. He has the power to do something about your situation to set your heart at ease. He will laugh with you, and He will cry with you. He will encourage you, and He will lift you up. He will help you to be joyful always, if you will pray continually, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

And, it is God's will that you give thanks in all circumstances. No matter what is going on, we are to be joyful and praying all the time, but this command of King Jesus deals specifically with our circumstances. God never changes, but our circumstances do. In the best of circumstances, we wish that it would never end. In the worst of circumstances we can't wait for everything to change. Some circumstances rattle our cage. They inflame the spectrum of our emotions. They catch us off guard and leave us confused. The worst circumstances often come as the consequence of sin, either our own, or someone else's. If we confess and repent, we receive the affirmation of the Holy Spirit, and know that God has forgiven us, and that gives us reason to give Him thanks.

Nobody likes to be rejected, but if you share your faith, there will be times when you will be rejected. Give thanks to God that you had an opportunity to speak the truth, and perhaps to plant a seed. When you are ridiculed because of your Christian lifestyle and biblical worldview, give thanks to God that He has revealed Himself and the truth to you, and that He has given you strength in the midst of your trial. Give thanks when you share in the sufferings of Christ for His name's sake. God's will for you in Christ Jesus is to give thanks to God no matter what is happening, in every circumstance.

As Christians we cling to the word of God, and in our faith, we agree with Romans 8:28: We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. When I have personal trials in my life, I talk to God about it. I trust Him. I believe His word. I know He loves me, and He doesn't like it when someone tries to hurt me, a member of my family, or my church family. I may feel helpless and hopeless, but there is nothing too big for my God to handle, and I know that He will take care of it in His time, and in His way. I can turn it all over to Him, and it is as good as handled, so long as I hold up my end of our relationship. As circumstances run their course, He is right there with me, seeing me through, and blessing my life in the midst of the most trying circumstances, and for that, I am eternally thankful.

Be joyful always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances. This is not just good advice; this is God's will for every Christian. This is what the Lord wants for you and me.

It's not the totality of God's will, but it is important. If we can keep these simple verses in mind, it will help us to experience life to the fullest.

The world has gone crazy. Our nation is turning into something the founding fathers never imagined. Our liberties are being suppressed and taken away. The Middle East, and the whole world is ready to explode, but maybe these things have to be, before the Lord returns, and I am longing for that day. So no matter what happens, we will stand upon the principles of God's word. We will endure whatever hardships might come our way. We will continue to share the love of Christ at every opportunity. We will strive to fulfill God's purposes in our lives and in our church, and do whatever we can to advance His kingdom. We will do it with joy in our hearts, praying continually, and giving thanks in all circumstances.

Life is all about Jesus. Without reservation, I surrender my life and will to His care, because I understand who He is, and I know that He loves me, and is able to do all that He promises. This is my faith, and my hope, but it is not mine alone. The bible quotes Jesus as saying that God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

If you are a born again believer live in your faith. If there are any here who have not trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord, what is so important in your life that it is holding you back? Come to Jesus and receive His forgiveness and grace. Experience the joy that comes from being born again. We will give you that opportunity in just a moment.