

“Happiness Habits of the Heart:  
Compassionate of heart, clear in word,  
gracious in awareness, courageous in  
thought, generous in love.”

“It’s Simple...Sweet Heart!”

Mathew 21: 33-42, Exodus 20: 1-4. 7-10.  
12-20

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Before Exodus: Good news story...as they, we, cross over to the promised land...no more will you have to do what you have always done...just to survive.

Listen to what you don’t have to do and what you get to do...

<10 best ways to live the promised life in the promised land!

Before Matthew:

What did you hear in those 10 best ways?

In case you missed the connection between promised land and new ways you “get” to be,

in case you need a clearer picture of the consequences of continuing to do what you’ve always done the way you’ve always done it,

Jesus shares a parable. This is not a metaphor like many other parables, but an allegory.

It doesn’t point to something bigger than itself (like a metaphor does)

Instead it does a 1 to 1 comparison/correlation between choices and consequences...keeping it simpler so you can understand, sweetheart!  
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Habits. We all have them.

There can be good life-giving habits? Also, ones that are life stopping...I wonder if they are, in a way, a form of denial.

What’s your best habit? How does it impact your day?  
Do you nurture it?

And, it’s often really hard to start a new habit you want to take on. While others things are so easily habit forming....hard to break.

Is there a difference between a routine and a habit? Would it be that routine has to do with consideration of the world beyond yourself while habits are more about us internally? Habit and habitat coming from the same root word...perhaps we live in our habits...good and bad.

What if we let habits start and flow from our hearts...letting go of “ought to” and “willfulness”? ...embracing the ancient notion that our hearts are not the center of feelings/emotions but rather the center of our wisdom which embraces thoughts, feelings, intuitions, experiences.

Would it help if we let our heart's deep wisdom be the foundation for letting habits happen vs trying to "will" a new habit to begin?

And that happiness thing!

It is joy that brings meaning to our lives far beyond any moment's happiness or lack of it! But EVERY life needs some happiness!

*And the Dalai Lama says: Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions.' Habits!*

I'm not one who believes you can be happy all the time,  
but I have learned you can be happy much of the time.  
And that's not something that depends on how your day is going  
or how others treat you —  
it depends on how you see things around you and how you respond.

*But, when you change the way you look at things,  
the things you look at change!*

When you change the way you look at things,  
the things you look at change!

You see more deeply and so respond to your life rather than react to it! And, it doesn't take many happy heart habits to make a life joy-full!

Happiness is possible, as we can embrace happiness habits of our hearts!

*And so our Bible Wisdom stories lift up....*

Boy, tell me to do or not to do something....that'll get my dander up....just watch me!

Or, how about, rule as are made to be broken...

or, you aren't the boss of me

or I am free to do what I want to do....

same things said differently?

There's something about "thou shalt not" that raises the "old Irish" in us and makes us want to challenge the laws, challenge the authority, assert our own authority.

Perhaps there's something in us that wants to see whether the implied threat/consequence will come to pass, or not.

Or just wants to fly in the face of those who think they know....

After all, many of us have been burned by following the rules...because others don't or because those in charge do what they want to do anyways.  
Often we feel threatened by the "rules".

The Decalogue, these 10 sayings, which we have come to call the Ten Commandments, are they to be taken as a threat coercing us to do what we resist doing?

Is God setting us up to fail or to succeed?

What do you think?

That big God in the rock chair in the sky just waiting for us to be bad? Setting us up with these commands!

Many of us were certainly were raised with an image of God watching over us a threat *to get us to behave*.

Better be good, God is all knowing, sees everything.  
Has a list, checking it twice.

Didn't hold much water for Santa, I dare say  
it doesn't for God either!

The early Church may have portrayed God this way and hung things over people's heads as a tool (guilting folk!)  
to get them to behave.

But they got it wrong! We are not innately bad!

The human concoction of Original Sin is all wrong...it isn't in the Bible! **What is** in there is Original Blessing!

Adam and Eve (earthlings!) walk with ease side by side with their God. They were good!

So good, God wants more for them.

And gifts them with free will.  
Forced obedience is not obedience at all!

Free will often (as it did for them) presents itself in the form of...a hard/potentially bad choice...for them...  
these good/soft people!

But,  
the One gifting free will and doing the commanding is the gracious, just One...only wanting good things for them, us!

Hhmmnn....

The Holy One prompts us with the Decalogue and wisdom of the prophets,  
so we don't have to find out the hard way  
about the consequences of dead-end choices....like they did.

It's sad the early church thought we each held such little power to think and choose  
when the opposite is actually true!

Did they actually think God was "mean"?

For me, it just doesn't add up! A mean God wouldn't be worth worshipping...One who  
has to threaten us to get us to be good.

And this is the *same* One who gives us free will to begin with?  
Doesn't add up!

No! The God Jesus presents, is powerful but not mean.

Threats didn't and don't work! Do they?  
At your home, school, community!  
That can't be it then...what God has in mind.

Maybe it would help if we took a moment to recall  
the "whole of God's Law", God's ordering of the universe...  
it was good, for good, for our good. Do you remember?

At creation, there is a goodness that is beyond words, constant, finer than gold,  
sweeter than honey and is everywhere  
for us to see and participate in!

And, we human beings are given free will and then....let me play devil's advocate for a  
minute...then,

having free will end up wandering in circles  
in the deserts of life,  
slaves to this or that...  
consequences that feel like punishments.

What was God thinking then...really? ...free will?  
God *sure thinks* more highly of me *than I do!*

Oh that *I could **resist*** the seduction to set aside God's ways  
when confronted with a situation or someone  
whose actions bring out the worst in me rather than my best.

So, that I'd resist the urge to retaliate...and instead,  
respond through my free will.

Do I? Do I need to be threatened to be "good" ...faithful?

- ~God's laws are not threats cloaked in fancy language.
- ~God does not reward or punish...our consequences seem to  
do that in and of themselves!
- ~God's laws are not one more thing we have yet to do!

They are really the 10 best ways to live our lives so we live the life God so longs for us to  
live...  
a life of freedom, joy, peace, community...  
the promised land!

In the Promised Land, in the life you are poised to enter,  
you **do not** have to do things the way you always done them.

You can atop! You get to do it differently!

After all, in this day and age we're adjusting to threats (they're everywhere!), but our  
ears pick up at the promise of freedom...and peace. Pick up your ears!!

God is not testing us in the usual sense. Monday night we said it's more like God is  
tutoring us (a pre-test complete with answers) ...that's why Moses says don't be afraid.

**God is giving us a way to prove ourselves to ourselves, improve ourselves  
for ourselves!**

Moses begins by reminding us God is with us and has been ...it was God who brought  
us/you out of the land of Egypt...where/what is your Egypt?

Out of slavery...what is oppressing you?  
through the desert...of your life...  
despite your grumbling, fears, doubts...  
*and boy we voice them!*

What is the Egypt from which God has already brought you ...how is God freeing you  
from what has been enslaving you?

How is God with you in your desert times as you approach your promised land?

When you can begin to see your story right here in the Bible, then it makes the giving of the law feel very different because you begin to see it just may be part of how God is caring for you.

God is leading you to a promised land...  
*these are the 10 best ways to be able to stay!*

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By the way, the first 4 laws center on our relationship with God and the last 6 our relationship with each other.

The laws begin by putting our focus on God....

I wonder how you might think about your day and your challenges if you thought about God and God's love for you **first, each day.**

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If we begin to see how we have been seduced by the world to fall out of relationship with God,  
and so rebuild our lives placing God in the center of our day, then we see the other 6 laws are fortified.

God first and the rest will flow.

The other "god" we are tempted to serve...  
the false God's before us?

Success, life-styles of comfort, personal saving and security above our concern for the common good, pride-thinking we've got the only right way through, stress, clarity, exhaustion and so withdrawal.

God knew what God was doing when these laws were given to us....these ways to freedom.

And the last 6, think they don't apply?

...how is it we "kill" each other each day...put down by put down, we kill with manipulation, sabotage, mutiny, harsh words.

Many ways we commit forms of adultery...acts of unfaithfulness to family and friends and church and community.

Many ways we steal things....we take away goodness and dampen and darken someone's spirit by stinginess, complaining, blaming.

Many ways we covet what others have....their roles, ideas, sense of self.

These six laws are not as outdated or irrelevant to us  
"good folk" as we might like to think they are!

**God gives us the ability to think!  
The mandates of love and loyalty,  
respect and honor, justice and worthiness  
must stand inside each one of us  
*ready to direct us when we face  
trouble and temptation.***

God did give us free will,  
yet while we are free to choose what our actions are,  
we are not free to choose the consequences of our action.

This is where the Matthew story comes in.

Maybe all these commandments are God's way of supporting us and to see beyond our choices to the consequences

**we are setting up for ourselves.**

There is a way God judges, sees clearly what is...but not for punishment's sake...but for do-over's sake!

The tenants had chances to do it over...and the consequences for them are clear!

Like them, like the Israelites, there is another chance for us to get it right!

To stop and get it right-er! Many stops on that journey!

Every day we need the guidance of God's wisdom  
so engrained within us  
**that we see the temptation in front of us  
for what it is!**

We need to be aware and take a second breath from the center of who we are...each time we:

We endorse violence as a form of cheap entertainment;  
laugh at inappropriate jokes.

We accept justifying greed as a striving for success;  
we depersonalize the poor and hungry and home-less by making them statistics or  
projects;

we settle for a “quick fix” instead of solving the underlying issue;

we shut out the cries of others in order to focus better on our own desires;

each time we use and discard friends, lovers, coworkers or family members as though  
they were disposable diapers.

Ouu....gee. Now that’s getting a little personal, Lord!

Maybe these wisdom ways are more for us normally good folk that we would like to  
think!

When all the people had witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the  
trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a  
distance and said to Moses,

“You speak to us, and we will listen; but-do-not-let God speak to us, or we will die.”

Moses said to the people,

“Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you (to give you the test in advance so  
you have the answers in advance)

and to put the fear of Him upon you (the awe of the presence of God within you) so that  
you do not sin,

break away, turn away from God’s vision of freedom and joy that is...for YOU!

The peace God offers the world, and abundantly so,

begins with you, in you, in simple, simplifying ways.

You have been personally invited into the Promised Land.

You have received the 10 invitations to freedom, the ten best ways to live.

*You can stop and get off that not so merry go round of life!*

We are invited to be the kind of human being  
that when our feet hit the floor in the morning,  
the “devil” says...Darn! *She’s* up!

(You can modify the exclamer there on your own!)

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Make that a habit!

When you change the way you look at things,  
the things you look at change!  
Courageous and generous habit of the heart!