



Life is Like Swiss Cheese

BY LINDA GUTERES

The scent of melted candle wax permeated the sacristy as murmured prayers filled my ears. Worship had ended and several people remained for personal petitions. I stood at the end of the line with my eyes closed, focusing my thoughts on God.

Pastor moved down the line, not rushing or belaboring the time he took to anoint and pray for each person's needs. Words of healing, comfort, and peace broke the silence as individuals patiently waited their turn and, as prayer ended, quietly left the church.

I began to wonder what the prayer would be for me. Would it be for my physical needs, or would God give Pastor insight to the emptiness of my being? I yearned for fulfillment in my life and direction in ministry. Maybe my prayer would finally be the answer to the gaping hole in my soul.

I couldn't help but overhear the words Pastor prayed for the young man beside me. "Go forth, knowing you are a child of God. Your faith is strong and deeply rooted. Your family will heal from the loss of your grandfather. God's Holy Spirit resides in your heart and will bless you. Remember His Word is true. Continue to believe in Jesus Christ, and you will be blessed. The Lord has great things planned for you. Remain in Him. Amen." The prayer closed; the young man turned and left the room.

Wow! What a great prayer! I would have leapt for joy if Pastor had just touched me and said, "Ditto," but that was not the case.

Finally, it was my turn. Pastor anointed my head with oil, placed his hands on my shoulders, paused a moment, snickered a little (yes, he actually snickered,) and then said, "Life is like Swiss cheese ..."

I immediately felt deflated. My head snapped up, and I said, "What the heck? Swiss cheese? Are you kidding me?"

He began again, "Life is like Swiss cheese. You can concentrate on the cheese or focus on the holes; it's your choice. God knows many of the holes in your life have not been caused through any fault of your own. He also knows there are many solid blessings in your life too. Concentrate on the solid parts. Don't waste time on what isn't there."

I was stuck at Swiss cheese. What was I supposed to do with that? Go home and make a Reuben sandwich?

Opening Prayer: Father in Heaven, teach us to recognize Your gifts in every realm of life. Lead us always to receive them with thankful hearts. Amen.*

While Pastor's prayer for me was unique, it can apply to all of us. Aren't we all drowning in blessings, yet complaining about the few things we don't have or that are not going the way we wanted? Name at least three blessings in your life.

What things distract you from focusing on the blessings in your life? _____

Read **Hebrews 13:5**. Define the word "content."

What does being content mean to you? _____

When is it easiest to be so? _____

Hardest? _____

Why do we struggle with being content? _____

Look at **Philippians 4:11-12**. Paul wrote these words while he was in prison, and they attest to the fact that he had learned to be content — whatever his circumstances. Share times when you have been content in either abundance or need.

Everyone faces trials, hardships, and times of great sorrow. Talk about how God helped Paul in **2 Corinthians 12:8-10**; then discuss how He has sustained you through your own trials. _____

Paul's outpouring of appreciation contrasts sharply with feelings of neglect, resentment, and even anger that can arise when we lack the privileges and comforts we expect. Paul invites us to see the blessings and fullness of God that are present in every situation.**

Many people in today's world measure worth by the amount of money they have in the bank, the size and location of their homes, the car they drive, etc. Paul's letter to Timothy claims that great gain is achieved through godliness with contentment. See **1 Timothy 6:6-7**. Define "godliness." _____

Discuss ways you can achieve this "great gain" Paul describes. _____

After some self-examination, I find that much of my angst is derived from my constant wrestling with sin. Define "wrestling." _____

With what sins do you wrestle? _____

What tools do you use? _____

How does wrestling with sin keep you from being content? _____

I often wrestle with wanting more and devaluing the priceless gift Christ has given me. This constant tug-of-war — between my pride-filled self (that desire to be noticed and appreciated) and being content with the gifts God has given me — drags me down, and I let go of my joy. Praise God! I don't have to face these battles alone!

Read **Psalm 13:1-6**. What frustrations did King David express in verses 1-2? _____

What did he ask of God in verses 3-4? _____

How did David resolve his frustration in verses 5-6? _____

God's Word is filled with encouraging ways to combat times of feeling discontent. Write down the tools mentioned in the following selections that we can use in battle.

Psalm 5:11-12 _____

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 _____

Ephesians 1:3-10 _____

1 Corinthians 13:7 _____

Discuss what the above verses mean for your life. How do you "rejoice always"? How does "pray without ceasing" happen for you on a weekday? On a Sunday? How do these verses help you "do life with God"? _____

When I remember and trust God, the Creator and Redeemer of the world Who resides within my soul, my joy becomes uncontainable!

Read the following verses. Is there anything you shouldn't bring to God? _____ Do you have a tangible reminder that God is with you always? _____

John 14:18 _____

John 14:27 _____

Psalm 9:10 _____

What does it mean to be in God's peace? _____

When I recognize all that God has done for me and the price Jesus paid on my behalf, I become utterly ashamed that I ever asked for one iota more! Have you ever felt ashamed? _____ Where do you find peace in the following verses?

Psalm 28:2 _____

Psalm 40:11 _____

Hebrews 4:16 _____

1 Peter 1:3-5 _____

1 Peter 2:10 _____

It is when I shift my focus from the things that are missing in my life and refocus on Jesus Christ, remembering His rock-solid love for me, that I finally find true contentment in my soul. And now — any time I see Swiss cheese — I'm reminded of the same!

Let's pray: Holy Father, Almighty God, we magnify Your name and thank You for Your saving grace. Help us to focus on the gifts You have given us and find contentment in Your blessings. Teach us to use those gifts to generously bless others. Amen.

Closing Hymn: "O Bless the Lord, My Soul" (LSB #814; LW #457; TLH #27).

*The Lutheran Study Bible, Page 2074

**The Lutheran Study Bible, Page 2039

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