

The Misery of NOT Fearing God
Ecclesiastes 12:13

Many of you are familiar with The **Screwtape Letters** by C.S. Lewis.

It's a fanciful, but insightful series of letters written by a "senior" demon – Uncle Screwtape- to his young apprentice demon, Wormwood.

As you read the book you have to remember that its advice is backward, or at least for us as believers.

I recently came across an article that has the flavor of Screwtape Letters, but it is not written by a Christian. It comes from a psychotherapy networker name Chloe Madanes. The article is entitled "The 14 Habits of Highly Miserable People" – the Art of Self-Sabotage.

As I read the article it struck me that this woman was tapping into some common grace insights about life, and she was actually reinforcing the Wisdom of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. I don't think she was doing it intentionally, but she did underscore the importance of biblical wisdom.

So I decided to make it a two part sermon Series – "Un-Ecclesiastes"

The 14 Habits of Highly Miserable People, or what I would call "The Misery of Not Fearing God."

REVIEW

1. Be afraid, be very afraid, of economic loss.
2. Practice sustained boredom.
3. Give yourself a negative identity.
4. Pick fights.
5. Attribute bad intentions.
6. Whatever you do, do it only for personal gain.
7. Avoid gratitude.

A RISKY EXERCISE.... Take the 14 Habits and ask someone who knows you well if any apply to you. (spouse, parent, child)

8. **Always be alert and in a state of anxiety.** Optimism about the future leads only to disappointment. Therefore, you have to do your best to believe that your marriage will flounder, your children won't love you, your business will fail, and nothing good will ever work out for you.

Exercise: Do some research on what natural or manmade disasters could occur in your area, such as earthquakes, floods, nuclear plant leaks, rabies outbreaks. Focus on these things for at least an hour a day.

EX: A couple moved to Columbus Ga because they researched areas that are LEAST LIKELY to encounter natural disasters and Columbus was in the zone.

<http://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2018/06/04/too-much-bad-news-can-make-you-sick-say-researchers/>

According to the National Centers for Environmental Information, the United States experienced 16 weather and climate disasters last year, with losses exceeding \$1 billion and total costs of approximately \$306 billion – a national record.

Our brains are hardwired to process stress relating to trauma by entering what is known as "fight, flight, freeze" mode before returning to a restful state, explained Susanne Babbel, a psychotherapist specializing in trauma recovery. However, constant exposure to trauma can derail our ability to cope healthily and hinder our ability to return to a relaxed state.

PATH OF WISDOM: Ecclesiastes 3; John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

Rom 8:28 - And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Difficulty will come, but it does not have to bring Misery. Supernatural Peace in the midst of difficulty brings stability for your life.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil 4

9. Blame your parents or anyone else. Be a perpetual victim- Blaming your parents for your defects, shortcomings, and failures is among the most important steps you can take. After all, your parents made you who you are today; you had nothing to do with it. If you happen to have any good qualities or successes, don't give your parents credit. Those are flukes.

As for other trials that come your way, find someone else to blame : a teacher, the kid who mistreated you in 2nd grade, a lousy girl/boyfriend, the town you grew up in, your church, a co-worker, boss, etc.(God or your spouse)- this is especially useful for misery in marriage. There is nothing new under the sun - Gen 3 "That woman YOU gave me." **BLAME IS ESSENTIAL FOR BEING MISERABLE**

Exercise: Call one of your parents and tell her or him that you just remembered something horrible they did when you were a child, and make sure he or she understands how terrible it made you feel and that you're still suffering from it.

PATH OF WISDOM- Rom 8:28

Recognize that God is still in control and whatever happens to you must first pass through the nail-scarred hands of Jesus.

Recognize that everything this side of hell is grace.

A part of God's plan for your life is for you and me to be conformed to the image of Christ, so that means that we will have to learn to forgive, even as he forgave from the cross.

Dallas Willard- paraphrase - "We'll never find healing until we come to the place of saying, "God has done right by me." THAT IS THE POSTURE OF FAITH.

1 Cor 15:10 - I am what I am by the grace of God.

2 Cor 12:9-10

Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 9And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong

10. Don't enjoy life's pleasures. Taking pleasure in things like food, wine, music, and beauty is for flighty, shallow people. Tell yourself that. If you inadvertently find yourself enjoying some flavor, song, or work of art, remind yourself immediately that these are transitory pleasures, which can't compensate for the miserable state of the world. The same applies to nature. If you accidentally find yourself enjoying a beautiful view, a walk on the beach, or a stroll through a forest, stop! Remind yourself that the world is full of poverty, illness, and devastation. The beauty of nature is a deception.

Exercise: Once a week, engage in an activity that's supposed to be enjoyable, but do so while thinking about how pointless it is. In other words, concentrate on removing all sense of pleasure from the pleasurable activity.

PATH OF WISDOM – Ecclesiastes – 3:13, 5:18 Eat, drink, and enjoy the fruit of your labor – Joni Tada is a great example of this.

11. ALTERNATE (based on recommendation from community group member)– **Chase after every new gadget, toy and fad. Live with an “I want it now” mindset**

EX: Veruca Salt



Veruca was miserable and made those around her miserable.

PATH OF WISDOM - Contentment

Heb 13:5; Phil 4; 1 Tim 6

Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"

Contentment, or the lack of it is mainly A THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

When I lack contentment, then I am revealing my true theology about God. I reveal that I have forgotten that God is God and is worthy of my trust.

Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition. Jeremiah Burroughs

A quiet disposition and a heart of giving thanks are the marks of contentment at any given moment.

12. **Glorify or vilify the past.** Glorifying the past is telling yourself how good, happy, fortunate, and worthwhile life was when you were a child, a young person, or a newly married person—and regretting how it's all been downhill ever since.

... Focus on what you could've and should've done, instead of what you did. **Live in a world of regret.** This will surely make you miserable.

Vilifying the past is easy, too. You were born in the wrong place at the wrong time, you never got what you needed, you felt you were discriminated against, you never got to go to summer camp. How can you possibly be happy when you had such a lousy background? It's important to think that bad memories, serious mistakes, and traumatic events were much more influential in forming you and your future than good memories, successes, and happy events. Focus on bad times. Obsess about them. Treasure them. This will ensure that, no matter what's happening in the present, you won't be happy.

Exercise: Make a list of your most important bad memories and keep it where you can review it frequently. Once a week, tell someone about your horrible childhood or how much better your life was 20 years ago.

PATH OF WISDOM – Learn contentment and to trust in the Sovereignty of God – Develop 50: 20 VISION - Gen – “What you meant for evil, God meant for good.” This is ultimately seen at the cross.

Acts 2: 23..this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

13. Find a romantic partner to reform. Make sure that you fall in love with someone with a major defect (cat hoarder, gambler, alcoholic, womanizer, sociopath), and set out to reform him or her, regardless of whether he or she wants to be reformed. Believe firmly that you can reform this person, and ignore all evidence to the contrary.

PATH OF WISDOM – Don't do that. Marry a believer, 2 Cor 6:14ff (ADVICE - therefore date a believer, who only dates believers).

Parental advice, not biblical text – I KISSED DATING GOODBYE - “Don't get into a serious dating relationship until you are in a place to make it last, i.e. avoid the typical cultural norm of jumping from one girl/boy friend to another between 13-18.

14. Be critical. Make sure to have an endless list of dislikes and voice them often, whether or not your opinion is solicited. For example, don't hesitate to say, “That's what you chose to wear this morning?” or “Why is your voice so shrill?” If someone is eating eggs, tell them you don't like eggs. Your negativity can be applied to almost anything.

It helps if the things you criticize are well liked by most people so that your dislike of them sets you apart. Disliking traffic and mosquitos isn't creative enough: everyone knows what it's like to find these things annoying, and they won't pay much attention if you find them annoying, too. But disliking the new movie that all your friends are praising? You'll find plenty of opportunities to counter your friends' glowing reviews with your contrarian opinion.”

Exercise: Make a list of 20 things you dislike and see how many times you can insert them into a conversation over the course of the day. For best results, dislike things you've never given yourself a chance to like.

PATH OF WISDOM- Eph 4:29ff

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. .Eph 5:18ff....but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father

Phil 2:14ff

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

The Holy Spirit filled life is the opposite of the Miserable life.

The Holy Spirit is the resource that God has given us to live the supernatural life described in scripture and manifested by Jesus. We are not alone; we are not powerless. We are no left to wallow in the Misery of Not Fearing God, but we are called and equipped to know the Joy of Fearing God.

GO TO THE TABLE

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