

Happy Accidents

Jeremiah 29:11-13 & Romans 8:28, 38-39
February 16, 2020 ~ Rev. Jo Ramsey

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[1 quiz] We're going to start our time reflecting on God's Word with a little quiz. You can answer in your head. [https://www.buzzfeed.com/alexmagdaleno/perfectionists-will-get-mad?utm_term=.ad5Lk6Jpew]

[2 pie] How does this picture make you feel?

[3 road] And this one?

[4 gum] Any feelings about this?

[5 picture] Do you want to fix this?

[6 cookie] What's the first thought that pops into your head?

[7 pizza] What would you do to this person?

[8 nails] Now, if you answered scold them, get annoyed, like nails on a chalk board, or are you kidding me, then you're a perfectionist. Perfectionism is described as "a personality trait **[9 perfect ten]** characterized by a person's striving for flawlessness and setting high performance standards, accompanied by critical self-evaluation and excessive concern regarding others' opinions." If you edit your emails a hundred times before sending them, struggle with decisions, fixate on your mistakes, when then... Anyway, we know who we are...

[10 shield] Perfectionism might sound good in job an interview, but it's hell to live with. And I mean it. It can be a slave driver -- a toxic, suffocating, even abusive way of living—or not living. Many of us grew up feeling not good enough. For many years, I wondered why I'd been born. **[11 family]** One day, when my brother and I were sorting photographs, he held up this picture and, in true obnoxious brother fashion, said, "This is when we were happy, before you were born and ruined everything." Isn't that terrible? He laughed and I'm sure I called him a jerk, but it spoke to a truth we all felt. Something went wrong with our family, and we wanted someone to blame. I understood. If I had been more perfect, maybe I could have fixed everything. I grew up thinking only beautiful, skinny, rich, talented, perfect people deserved happiness. **[12 Brooke]** I mean, what's the point if you aren't Brooke Shields?

I don't believe that anymore. And I don't want you to either...

[13 made you] You see, God loves you just the way you are. God's big, beautiful, diverse, dynamic world is designed for love, not perfection. God's unconditional love is the

standard by which He measures us. Yes, excellence is a beautiful thing, but it's not what God requires. God loves us no matter what---no matter how and when we are conceived, if our parents stayed married or were ever married, if we're low class or high class, attractive or plain, if we're super smart or intellectually challenged. God loves us, period.

[14 yes but] No doubt there are those among us who might say to themselves, "Yes, but surely, there are exceptions!" What about this mistake or that bad habit? What about this feeling or that failure? What about this attitude or that accident? But God's love isn't limited by our actions.

[15 Bob Ross] It was TV painter Bob Ross who coined the term, "Happy Accidents." Bob Ross, who is known for his gentle voice, words of wisdom, remarkable talent and excellent hair, believes that mistakes enrich art. Bob was a drill sergeant for many years, and painting became a place where he could relax and feel free. He often says, "It's your world, make it want you want." **[16 ladies]** If he paints a bird he doesn't like, he turns it into a cloud. If his paint gets muddy, he scrapes it off with his knife. Often near the end of an episode, Bob will say, "here's your bravery test. Let's get crazy and add a big tree." Painting isn't meant to be perfect, its meant to be joyful! The same goes for life.

[17 all things] Perfectionists don't believe in happy accidents, and surely, many accidents are not happy. Often they're painful, difficult, frustrating and life-changing. But we believe God can use even the most unfortunately of accidents for good. **[18 mistakes]** God is endlessly creative with our chaos--whether it's of our own making, or something over which we have no control. We are who we are because of what we've experienced, endured, and enjoyed. That's what makes us unique and amazing.

[19 future] Jeremiah says God's plans are for our good, for our well-being, for a future filled with hope. How accidents, happy or not, fit into God's plan is in God's hands – and ours.

What about you? **[20 look back]** When you look back over your life, whether you're six or sixty, fourteen or fifty-five, eighteen or eighty, what are the happy accidents, the moments, stories, choices, that make you, you? Can you recognize times when God was at work? **[21 masterpiece]** What we've been through doesn't have to define us, but it becomes part of who we are...And God can use it all – what's within his plan, and what falls outside of his will -- to make a masterpiece!

[22 good enough] These days, most of the time, I'm glad for my story, for all the roads that led me to this moment. I don't want to be anyone else. I'm glad to be me—even

with my complicated family history, my flaws and goofy quirks. I hope and pray that God will redeem it all and use it to his glory.

[23 puck drop] It is this same hope that inspires Vietnam Veteran and Medal of Honor Recipient, Gary Beikirch. Gary was one of 46 of the 70 living Medal of Honor recipients honored last October at a hockey game between the Tampa Bay Lightning and our own Pittsburgh Penguins. The 46 attendees include nine veterans from the War on Terror, 34 from the Vietnam War, two from the Korean War and one from World War II.

[24 vietnam] Gary spent two years in Vietnam as a Special Forces medic. According to his medal citation, Beikirch earned his medal moving “unhesitatingly through the withering enemy fire to his fallen comrades.” His 15-year old Vietnamese helper and guide, a boy he called Dale, spent hours leading Gary around the battlefield helping others. One day, a mortar round came in as they worked side-by-side. When it hit, young Dale fell into Gary, shielding him from the blast. He died there in Gary’s arms.

[25 medal] Ironically, America’s highest award for combat valor is a constant reminder of what’s often the worst day of recipients’ lives. Medal or not, Gary lived in a cave in New Hampshire for two years after he got home. It took a long time for him to find healing and reintegrate into society.

[26 Gary] In speaking with Jeremy Roenick at the hockey game, Gary reflects, “For me personally when I was awarded the medal of honor, it was quite a burden. It took a while but many of us who wear the medal eventually come to the realization that along with the medal comes a purpose, comes a mission, comes a message.... I went on to spend 33 years as a middle school counselor so I’ve had a lot of time to refine that message...

[27 hope] “So what is that message?” Roenick wanted to know. Gary answered, “What I try to do is share a message that each of us is created for a purpose, we have a reason to live. If we can help somebody find that reason of ‘why I am here,’ what that will do is provide motivation, inspiration — it will provide a hope for you, and all of us need a hope to go on living.”

[28 love] So children of God, I remind you, God loves you and has plans for you. God will use our accidents, happy or not, for good things. Nothing from the past, present or future can stop God’s unconditional, unending love. **[29 amazing]** You have a hope, you have a purpose, and you have a reason to live. If you forget that, call me or Pastor James, or someone else who loves you and we’ll remind you.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.