

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles, please, to Romans 12. I’m preaching through the book of Romans verse after verse and today we’re going to talk about, “Stop enduring life and start enjoying it.”

I heard about a fellow who didn’t get along very well with his wife. In fact, they just sort of endured each other. The only person he hated more than his wife was his wife’s mother, his mother-in-law. One day they were having a discussion, and they were being relatively civil. His wife said to him, “I know you don’t like me very much and I know the only person you dislike more than me is my mother.”

“That’s right.” He said.

“Would you do me one favor? If I die before you do, at my funeral, will you promise me that you’ll ride in the car with my mother, behind the hearse?” She asked.

“Now, let me get this straight. You want me to ride with your mother in the car behind the hearse at your funeral?” He replied.

“That’s right.”

“Okay, but it will sure take the joy out of the ride.”

I look around me, and I see a lot of people who are having no joy in the ride. They are just not enjoying life very much; they are just enduring it. There are people around us who are simply marking time, counting off days and months and years on the calendar. They’re the kind of people that think the next stage of life will bring happiness. You know, when you’re in school you say, “When I finally graduate from school and get a job, then I’ll be happy.” Then when you are single you say, “If I could just get married and have a family, then I would be happy.” Then when you are working you think, “When I can retire, then I’ll be happy.” When you get in retirement, you say, “What’s next?” Jesus Christ said in John 10:10, “I’ve come that you might have life and live it to the fullest.”

Several weeks ago I told you that the letters B.I.B.L.E. could stand for “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.” But it could also stand for “Basic Instructions Building Life Enjoyment” because this book is all about how to live life. Sometimes people talk about the Bible as if it’s so mysterious and deep and theological and hard to understand. Well, friends, right here in Romans 12, we get some basic, plain, simple commandments of God about how we are to live. You just can’t miss it.

Look in Romans 12:11. Remember the context of this whole passage is verse 9 where it says, “Love must be sincere,” and then there follows 25 directives about how we are to love one another. Look in verses 11-13 as we study seven of them today. “Never be lacking in zeal, (that’s the first one) but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. (This is a participle that ties in with the two previous phrases.) Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (Then there are two more in verse 13) Share with God’s people who are in need, practice hospitality.”

Folks, that is not deep or mysterious or theological. Those are just basic, practical things that the Bible says we ought to be doing. We don’t do these things to become a Christian. We do these things because we are Christians. So I want us to examine these directives on how to enjoy life. We’ll put them under three categories.

I. WHEN COMPLACENCY CREEPS IN

When complacency creeps into your life, what do you do? When apathy or boredom creeps into your life, what are you going to do? Look at verse 11.

1. Serve Jesus with enthusiasm

I love that word. Sometimes people think that the more spiritual you are, the sadder you are, the less excited you are. But folks, the opposite is true. The word enthusiasm comes from two words, “en-theos.” “Theos” means God. The more in God you are, the more enthusiastic you will be. The apostle Paul was such an enthusiastic guy, with so much energy and drive, you could walk into a revolving door in front of him and he would walk out in front of you. He had that kind of excitement and drive.

In Colossians 3:23 he said, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord and not for men.” Do you know what I see as I look around me? I see people who are bored, because we are such an excitement, thrill-driven culture; we go from one adventure theme park to the next. We want to ride a roller coaster that is bigger and faster and goes further than the one we rode before. We are always looking for the next thrill. In between all of these artificial thrills and these action-packed movies and television shows, we sit back and say, “Boring, ho-hum, been there, done that, bought the t-shirt.” We have done it all.

The other day I was reading an article by William Bennett, a cabinet member under Presidents Reagan and Bush. He has sort of become a watchman for the morality scene. I was reading an article by him and came across a word I didn’t understand. Let me read you the sentence. He says, “A culture of *acedia* has taken root in the soil of the late 20th century America.”

Now, you may be smarter than I and know what that word means, but I had to go to Webster’s Dictionary, and look it up. It is an attitude of apathy and boredom. I found out it comes from the Greek word *kedos*, which means to care about something, and you put ‘a’ in front, *acedia*, it means you just don’t care. He said that in America and the church today, we have a culture of *acedia*. It is a cultural yawn. Complacency has set in.

So what are we going to do when complacency sets in? The Bible says to combat it with enthusiasm. Serve the Lord with enthusiasm. I have been excited about Jesus since I was a teenager. When I was a teenager, I looked around and saw people in their forties, fifties and sixties who seemed to be so bored and dull in their Christian life. I prayed a prayer back then, “God don’t ever let me lose my fire, my enthusiasm, my excitement about Jesus.” Folks, I believe it is a sin to make the Bible and Jesus boring.

Some churches are boring, I’ll grant you that. Some churches start at 11:00 sharp and end at 12:00 dull, you know what I mean? I never understood why Christians could go to a stadium on Saturday and holler like a bunch of wild Indians, and then come to church and sit like a bunch of wooden Indians. If the Bible teaches that you really know who Jesus is and you know what is

coming to you in the future, you are going to be so full of enthusiasm, that as it says in verse 11, you will never be lacking in zeal.

Now, I'm not talking about just plain enthusiasm, because you can be enthusiastic about the wrong thing. I heard about a young vacuum cleaner salesman who was enthusiastic. He had a sales method in which he would go to a farmhouse, throw a bunch of dirt on the floor, and use his vacuum cleaner to get it up. He went into one farmhouse, threw a handful of dirt on the kitchen floor and told the farm lady, said, “Madam, if my vacuum cleaner doesn't suck up every morsel of that dirt, I will eat it.” She said, “Here's a spoon, sonny; we don't have any electricity.”

I'm not talking about just plain old enthusiasm, I'm talking about spiritual zeal, spiritual enthusiasm. I have found it has nothing to do with your chronological age. I have known some folks in their sixties, seventies and eighties who were still enthusiastic about Jesus. I recall one fellow in my last church who didn't have a lot of money or education, but he was always enthusiastic, always positive, always upbeat. I used to greet him, “How are you doing, Jim?” He said, “I feel so good, I would pay 50 cents for a toothache.” That is enthusiasm, isn't it? On the other hand, I know some folks in their twenties and thirties who are bored with life. They don't have any enthusiasm about life or Jesus.

I came across an interesting little poem the other day:

STAYING YOUNG IN YOUR MIND
People grow old by deserting their ideals.
Years may wrinkle the skin,
But to give up enthusiasm wrinkles your soul.
You are as young as your faith,
As old as your doubt.
You are as young as your excitement,
And as old as your fear.
You are as young as your hope,
And as old as your despair.
In the central place of every heart,
There is a furnace,
So keep the furnace fed
With the fuel of excitement and zeal.
When your heart is covered
With the snows of pessimism,
And the ice of cynicism,
Then, and only then, will you grow old.
And then indeed, as the ballad says,
You will just fade away.

I know some young people who are already in a rut. Do you know what a rut is? A rut is a grave with both ends kicked out. They are just going along with no enthusiasm, no zeal in their life. Look at verse 11. Don't be lacking in zeal. Have you talked to a young married couple when they

have just gotten back from their honeymoon? You talk about somebody excited, enthusiastic. You talk to somebody like that, you say,
“How was the honeymoon, did you have a great time?”
“Yes, it was thrilling (with a bored tone).”
“Well, did you want to stay longer on your honeymoon?”
“Well, no, actually, we wanted to come back and go to work. We were in Hawaii you know, beautiful.”

Have you ever talked to newly married couple like that? No, they don't exist. If they have just gotten married, they are all excited. That reminds me of a lot of Christians. There are a lot of people who aren't Christians because they have looked at you and listened to you. This is the way some people share their faith, “You wouldn't want to come to Jesus, would you? (Speaking with a bored tone). I mean, He changed my life. I've never had so much joy.” You know what I'm saying? You know why those folks don't want to come to Jesus? They are looking at you and listening to you. The Bible says we ought to have zeal and enthusiasm.

2. Stay fired up for Jesus when complacency creeps in

Look at the last part of verse 11. Those words “spiritual fervor” mean a fire, boiling over. It means you are so fired up that people see you glowing for Jesus.

Look at the verse on the outline, Luke 12:49. Some people are so amazed when they hear that Jesus made a statement like this. Jesus said, “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.” In other words, He said, “I came to do something. I came to ignite a fire, and I wish it was already lit.” Is He talking about the destructive nature of fire that burns down trees and kills people? No, He is talking about the positive aspect of fire. It gives energy, it warms, it illuminates, it radiates. In the Bible, God's powerful presence is symbolized by fire. When He spoke to Moses, it was through a burning bush. When God answered Elijah on Mount Carmel, He answered with fire from heaven. Malachi writes in chapter 3, “Our God is like a refiner's fire.”

Do you know what Jesus is talking about here? He said, “I came to put in each person's heart a burning, penetrating fire of the powerful presence of God. I came to light your fire.” In fact, Jesus said, “John the Baptist baptized you with water. I'm going to baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire.” He said, “I want you to be so fired up with the very glory and presence of God that when people look at you, they will see you glowing.”

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church, was only 4 feet, 11 inches tall. He got kicked out of the Anglican Church because he preached the Bible, so he had to go out into the fields and preach in England. In one community some ruffians said, “If John Wesley comes here and preaches, we're going to beat him up and run him out of town.” That did not deter him. He set up in a field and started preaching. Halfway through his sermon, here came these ruffians, drunk, and carrying clubs and sticks. As they approached him, he didn't stop preaching in his fervent style. The leader of the ruffians stopped and looked at him and said, “Look. He glows; he glistens.” And he sat down. All of them got saved that day.

What was it in John Wesley that allowed God to use him? He had the fire of God in him. He was on fire for Jesus. That is exactly what that phrase says we all ought to have, “never lacking in spiritual fervor.”

Charles Spurgeon was a great preacher in England. A young preacher came to him and asked, “How can I have the same impact that you’re having?” Charles Spurgeon said, “Simple. Pour gasoline over your body, light a match, and people will come and watch you burn for Jesus.”

Let me ask you this. When somebody’s talking about the level of your commitment, your personal commitment, do they say about you, “That man, that woman, that teenager, is on fire for Jesus?” I think the biggest enemy we face in the church today is apathy and complacency. “I just don’t care.” Who will get fired up? Who will become enthusiastic for Jesus? That is what the Bible says we ought to do. So if you’re sitting there saying, “Boring,” it is your own fault. Get on fire for Jesus. Don’t lose that enthusiasm.

II. WHEN AFFLICTION CRASHES IN:

When afflictions, troubles and difficulties crash in, what are you going to do? Look at verse 12. “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” A lot of times a Christian is so confused because he thinks, “Hey, I’m a Christian, but I still have problems. I thought a Christian wasn’t supposed to have any difficulties.” Wrong. Christians have all kinds of difficulties.

I can’t tell blonde jokes, because I don’t want to offend blondes. I can’t tell Aggie jokes, because I don’t want to offend Aggies – when they catch it. I used to tell Oklahoma Sooner jokes, but my daughter is an Oklahoma Sooner, so I don’t do that any more.

Once there was a Baptist preacher who was sitting at a table working furiously on something. His wife comes in and says, “What are you doing?” He says, “I’m putting together a jigsaw puzzle. It’s supposed to be a picture of a rooster, but I can’t get it to work.” His wife looked at him and looked at the box and said, “Put the cornflakes back in the box.”

A lot of people are that way. They are trying to put together a puzzle of life and they don’t have the right pieces. “Why, pastor? Why, God? If I’m trying to live for Jesus, why am I still having trouble and affliction?” Affliction is going to come into your life. Tribulation will come. You have no control over that. One thing you can control is how are you going to react to it. This verse says there are three things you do when you’re in tribulation or affliction.

Number one, you look beyond the circumstances and rejoice. That’s what it says in verse twelve. Rejoice. Be joyful in hope. If I were to ask you what is the shortest verse in the Bible, you might say, Jesus wept, John 11:35. It has that reputation, but that’s not the shortest verse in the Bible. The shortest verse in the Bible is 1 Thessalonians 5:16 which says, “Rejoice evermore.” Because in the Greek text, John 11:35 has 16 letters and this has only 14 letters. This is the shortest verse in the Bible. Wherever you are, whatever’s happening, rejoice in the Lord.

You say, “How can I rejoice?” The key is to be joyful in hope. Hope allows you to look beyond your pain and see down the road and say, “You know what? It’s going to get better in the future, so I’m going to rejoice right now.” That’s the only way you can rejoice in difficulties. It’s like when a farmer plants a seed, he says, “I believe I’m going to have a future harvest. I believe that the life within the seed and the nutrients within the soil and the moisture and sun are going to work together and I’m going to have a harvest down the road.” When you’re going through pain like some of you are facing right now, whether it’s financial pain or physical or emotional pain or you’ve got all kinds of family pain, how can you rejoice right now? Look to the future and say, “It’s going to get better in the future, so I’m going to rejoice right now.” You say, “Pastor, my problem is, I don’t know it’s going to be better.”

I’m here to tell you upon the authority of the word of God, if you’re a child of God, it will get better. It may not be this life, but hey, there is a life after this life. That’s why the Bible says, “Jesus Christ, look to him.” He is our blessed hope. You rejoice in hope. Memorize the shortest verse in the Bible, “Rejoice evermore.”

The second thing you do when affliction crashes in is you maintain your patience. That’s what it says in verse 12. Patience doesn’t mean you sit there passively and twiddle your thumbs and wait out God. In the Bible, patience is an active trust in God, to believe that whatever pain and problems you’re going through, that Romans 8:28, that all of it in the end is going to work out for God’s good and God’s glory. And friends, trouble comes into your life. All kinds of things come to irritate you. Let me read you a little poem I came across entitled,

THE OYSTER

There once was an oyster whose story I tell,
Who found that sand had got under his shell.
Just one little grain, but it gave him much pain,
For oysters have feelings, although they’re so plain.
Now, did he berate the working of fate,
Which led him to such a deplorable state?
Did he curse out the government
Or call for election? No.
As he lay on the shelf,
He said to himself,
If I cannot remove it,
I’ll try to improve it.

So the years rolled by,
As the years always do,
And he came to his ultimate destiny – oyster stew.
And this small grain of sand
Which had bothered him so,
Was a beautiful pearl,
All richly aglow.

Now, this tale has a moral,

For isn't it grand,
What an oyster can do
With a morsel of sand?
What couldn't we do
If we'd only begin
With all of the things
That get under our skin.

It's true. There are a lot of things in life that get under your skin and irritate you and bother you and hurt you, and you can either complain about it and gripe about it and fight against it, or you can make something beautiful out of it. How can I do that? Rejoice in hope. Maintain your patience.

The third thing here is, don't stop praying. My friend, it is true that you cannot worry while you're praying. You may be worrying, but when you start praying, you stop worrying. By the way, when you stop praying, you start worrying. But you cannot do both at the same moment. Look what James says in James 1:2-3. “Consider it joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” – a word for patience.

Once there was a young Christian having trouble. He talked to an older gentleman who was a wise saint of God. He said, “Brother, would you pray for me, because I'm having a lot of trouble with patience.” Would you pray God would give me patience? This old friend said, “Sure, I will. Let's get on our knees and pray.” So the two of them got on their knees and began to pray. The old saint began to pray this. “Dear Lord, I pray that you'll give to my young friend here trouble in the morning, trouble in the evening, trouble at supper time, trouble all night long” – he was in the middle of the prayer, and his young friend began to shake him. “Wait a minute, I didn't want you to pray for me to have trouble. I wanted you to pray for me to have patience.” The old man very wisely said, “Well, friend, the only way you'll find patience is through trouble, tribulation and distress. There is no other way.”

You'd better be careful if you pray for patience. It's a whole lot better to start exercising patience, learn as quickly as you can to start exercising and keep on praying. Now some people say, “When I get some of these problems in my life, that's when I'll rejoice, that's when I'll start enjoying life.” The only time you're going to get rid of problems in your life is when you're in a cemetery. In life trouble is inevitable, but misery is optional. Think about that. You have a choice about whether you are going to be miserable about the problems in your life, and the way you deal with it determines whether you are miserable or not.

III. WHEN NEEDY PEOPLE COME TO YOU (13)

What do you do when needy people come to you? Look please at verse 13. It says, “Share with God's people who are in need,” and then it says, “Practice hospitality.” Let's look at each one of those.

1. Share your resources with other believers!

Now, while we are to be kind toward all people, this verse is not talking about all people. It is the word that means saints, people in the church, brothers and sisters in Christ.

It does mean financial needs, but it just means one part of that. Why is it when we think of a needy person, we picture a bum in tattered clothes, a homeless person holding out a hand saying, “Please give me some money?” There are a lot of people who don’t look like that but have needs. By the way, that’s why we do that corporately, as a church. That’s why every year our church gives thousands of dollars to members of our church who are in trouble financially. Don’t be too proud to ask for it, because if you are a hurting member of the body, the rest of the body wants to help you corporately, sometimes even individually. This is not just talking about material needs.

Look around you. There are people here today who have needs that are not financial. I would venture to say that most everybody in this room has all the money they need. I didn’t say all the money they want; I said all the money they need. But there are people right here sitting next to you and behind you and in front of you that have other needs that money can’t buy. They need love. Share love with them. They need friendship. Share friendship with them. They may need a hug. Share a hug with them. They may need a smile. Whatever they need, share it with them. They may need your time. You know, time is more valuable than money. You can make more money, but you can’t make more time. Look and see what they need and give it to them.

Here’s the second part of this verse:

2. Welcome strangers into your life

Now, every week when I study to preach, I learn something new. This week I learned that the word “hospitality” in verse 13 does not mean inviting your close circle of friends over to your house. That is a good thing to do, but that is not the biblical word “hospitality.” In the Bible, that word hospitality means *phileo xenos*. It is love to strangers. That is a good thing, to have Christian fellowship and invite strangers over to your house, but this word means you open your arms and welcome newcomers.

By the way, it’s a good thing to be nice to strangers. You know why? Look at Hebrews 13:2. The Bible says, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing, some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” Isn’t that neat that maybe somebody you meet as a stranger, and you are kind to them and later when you get to heaven, this person, who is not a person at all, comes up to you and says, “Do you remember when you did this for me?” Then you recognize them as an angel who was never a person at all. God sends angels incognito into our lives sometimes to see if we’re going to be kind. That person beside the road whose tire is flat that you didn’t stop for, don’t be too surprised if you see him in heaven and he says, “You remember that time you passed me by? I was an angel.” Open your arms to strangers. That’s what hospitality is.

Folks, do you know where you practice that? In your neighborhood. I told you before, every time you see a moving van in your neighborhood, it ought to set off bells in your mind. Here is a newcomer, here is a stranger to my neighborhood, and I’m going to go and open my arms to

them, welcome them into my church, into my community. But you also, my friend, must open your arms to those that come to Green Acres Baptist Church.

Let me ask you to write down four little letters, one right below the other one. P.W.H.R. Do you know what that stands for? It stands for post-worship hospitality radar. What that means is, when we finish the service here in just a moment, and any Sunday morning service, after we sing the closing song, you ought to punch on your post-worship hospitality radar. Start looking around you. Who do you see who is a newcomer? Go up to them and introduce yourself. You say, “I don’t want to risk embarrassing myself, because it may be somebody who’s been here for 40 years.” That’s okay. Greet them anyway. They’re not going to be embarrassed. We have had some people come to our church for the first time ever, and before they’ve left these doors they have already been invited into a member’s home for lunch that Sunday. Those people say, “This is a friendly church.” That happens a lot, and every time I hear of that happening, it just thrills my soul.

But about once a year, and that’s all, I get a letter from somebody who says, “I came into your worship and nobody spoke to me, nobody shook my hand.” I guess maybe during our welcome time, they went and hid in a corner or something. We try to make sure everybody is greeted. They say, “Nobody spoke to me,” and that breaks my heart. When we finish here in a moment, you ought to look around and say, “Whom can I invite to dinner? Who can I open my arms to as a newcomer?” Do it in your Sunday School class. The very worst thing that could happen in your Sunday School class is for you to become a little holy huddle joining hands, like we used to do as kids, saying, “Red Rover, Red Rover, send a visitor over,” and see if you can break into this group. That’s the worst thing any Sunday School class can do. You’re not practicing what this verse can do.

The whole context of this passage is love. Do you know what real love is? Love is when you love enthusiastically even though complacency is there. Love is when you love joyfully, even though you have affliction in your life. Love is when you share and show hospitality to other people. I’m here to tell you, with that kind of love, the world will take notice and say, “There’s something different about those people. I want to be a Christian.”

Who can tell me the very first time in the Bible we meet Paul the Apostle? It is in the book of Acts, chapter 7. There is a young, zealous Jewish Pharisee named Saul, who later becomes Paul, who is witnessing the stoning of Stephen. The Bible says Saul was holding the garments. When you read it, it almost sounds like he’s holding the clothes of the people throwing the stones. That may be the case. Maybe they want to get their arms free so they can throw the stones harder. When you study Jewish stoning, you understand they always strip the person being stoned of their clothing, leaving only a loincloth. Why? Because they didn’t want the fabric to deaden the force of the stones. So when it says the clothes, it literally says the clothes, so, yes, it was probably not only the clothes of those throwing the stones, but Stephen’s clothes, too. Here was young Saul hanging on to these clothes as he watched Stephen. Here are these people throwing their stones at Stephen, and they’re not just trying to hurt him but kill him. Saul is watching it all.

Here was Saul, who believed with all his mind and all his heart that Christianity was a fraud and a farce and that Jesus was a great pretender, watching Stephen the whole time. Stephen was

being stoned, and in the very last breath he ever spoke, it says in the Greek language he knelt up. What does it mean, ‘knelt up?’ Because I imagine he was laying flat in a pool of blood, and he knelt up and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he said, “Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge.” And then he died. Saul was looking at the people killing Stephen and looking at Stephen, and I believe it was that kind of love that totally knocked him off balance. How could somebody love his enemy? How could somebody love somebody who’s killing him? How could somebody pray for those who are stoning him to death? How? I believe when Saul lay down to sleep at night, he kept thinking and picturing Stephen showing love, and he just couldn’t get rid of that picture of love until a few months later, when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. And he falls down and says, “Lord, what would you have me do?” Then he became Paul who writes these very words we’re talking about. Love your enemies. Show hospitality, kindness.

When the world out there starts seeing that kind of love among the brothers and sisters in here, they will literally knock the doors off this church to get in, and say, “I want that kind of life.” When they see us enjoying life instead of just enduring it, they’ll say, “I want what they have.”

OUTLINE

WHEN COMPLACENCY CREEPS IN (11):

1. Serve Jesus with enthusiasm!

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men ... *Colossians 3:23*

2. Stay fired up for Jesus!

“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” *Luke 12:49*

II. WHEN AFFLICTION CRASHES IN (12):

1. Look beyond the circumstances and rejoice!

Rejoice evermore. *1 Thessalonians 5:16*

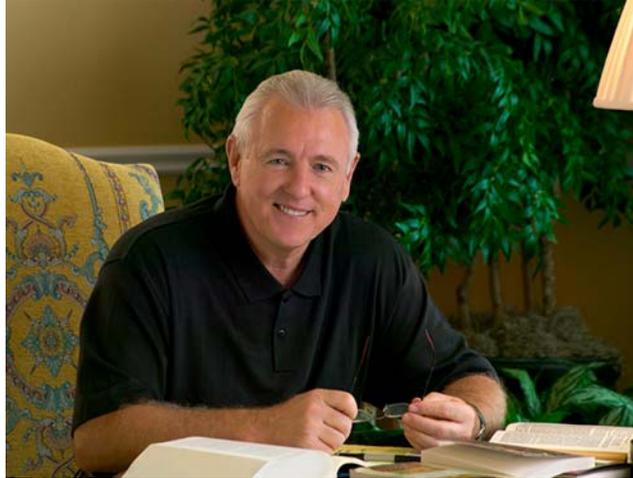
2. Maintain your patience!
3. Don't stop praying!

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. *James 1:2-3*

III. WHEN NEEDY PEOPLE COME TO YOU (13):

1. Share your resources with other believers!
2. Welcome strangers into your life!

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. *Hebrews 13:2*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes