

INTRODUCTION

In this message, I want to share one of my life motto verses with you. Hopefully, you'll make it one of your life mottos also. If you do, it will bring out some positive changes in your life.

A motto, or a slogan, is a short statement that summarizes the mission of a person or group. For instance, the motto of Elvis Presley was TCB, which stood for Taking Care of Business. Let's do a little trivia game just for fun. I'm going to give you some famous mottos, or slogans, and I'd like for you to tell me the company or organization connected to the motto.

The first one is, "Finger lickin' good." That's the motto for KFC. How about the motto "Be Prepared." That belongs to the Boy Scouts of America. Have you ever heard, "Have it your way?" That's the slogan for Burger King. How about "Just do it?" That belongs to Nike. "Be all that you can be" is the motto for the U.S. Army.

Do you know which company says, "When you care enough to send the very best?" That would be Hallmark Cards.

Who says, "I'm lovin' it?" McDonalds. Here's an old one: "Melts in your mouth, not in your hands." That is the slogan for M&M candies. Here's one you may not know.

How about old cigarette commercials that are now banned? Do you remember which cigarette claimed that "It tastes good like a cigarette should?" Winston. And which cigarette brand aimed at females stated, "You've come a long way, baby!" Virginia Slims.

All 50 states have official mottos. Do you know which state has as its motto, "Friendship?" That became the official motto of Texas in 1930. Here's an easy one: "In God We Trust." That became the official motto of the U.S.A. in 1956.

We are still in John 3. It's one of the most important chapters in the Bible. It begins with Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night, and Jesus tells him he must be born again. In today's passage we are introduced again to John the Baptist who shares four attitudes for success. Just remember that in God's dictionary success is not money, position, or power. In God's eyes, success is finding and doing the His will.

John 3:22-30 (CSB). "After this, Jesus and his disciples went to the Judean countryside, where he spent time with them and baptized. John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. [Let me remind you that the word "baptize" means to "dunk" to "immerse." I will translate it dunk for the rest of the passage.] People were coming and being DUNKED since John had not yet been thrown into prison. Then a dispute arose between John's disciples and a Jew about purification. So they came to John and told him, 'Rabbi, the one you testified about, and who was with you across the Jordan, is DUNKING—and everyone is going to him.' [Note: In John 4:2 we read that Jesus himself was not DUNKING, but his disciples were.] John responded, 'No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him

from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of him.' He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom's friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom's voice. So this joy of mine is complete. He must increase, but I must decrease."

John the Baptizer was an interesting character. One of my favorite images of him is found in the Academy Art Gallery in Venice. Tiziano Vecellio (known as Titian) painted him pointing to a lamb, which was his ministry. I don't think this picture makes him look wild enough. From his birth, he never cut his hair and he wore camel skin garments. He ate locusts and wild honey. He probably looked like a cross between a homeless man and Bigfoot.

Can you imagine John walking into the local McCamel's restaurant? He said, "I'll take a McLocust burger, heavy on the honey." The kid taking his orders asks ... wait for it ... "Would you like flies with that?" Sorry.

But John was a spiritual giant, the last of the long line of Old Testament prophets. John was beheaded in his thirties and some would call him a failure. But he was successful at being the forerunner for Jesus. In this passage we see four amazing attitudes that led to his success.

1. AVOID THE TRAP OF JEALOUSY.

John's disciples came to him to report that they were losing followers. The Bible says, "So they came to John and told him, 'Rabbi, the one you testified about, and who was with you across the Jordan, is baptizing—and everyone is going to him.'" We call him John the Baptizer, but he wasn't the first Jew to dip people into water for spiritual cleansing. For many years the Jews had baptized Gentile converts. At the ruins of Qumran where the Dead Sea scrolls were found, there is evidence that the Essenes regularly immersed themselves in a ritual bath called a mikveh. But John called upon everyone to repent and be baptized. In our text we learn that John was dipping people place called Aenon near Salim because there was plenty of water there. Take a moment and think about that. If John was pouring or sprinkling water on people, any place in the river would have worked, even if the water was ankle-deep. But as the word itself means, John was immersing people so he needed deeper water. John's baptism and every baptism in the New Testament was by full immersion.

We see that the disciples of John were alarmed at the growing popularity of Jesus and the shrinking numbers following John. So they were jealous, and complained to John. I can imagine they said something like, "Hey, boss, that Jesus guy is taking away all our disciples. If this keeps up, we won't have anyone following you!"

Let me give you a definition of jealousy. Jealousy is resentment at someone else's success or favor. Do you have a tendency to be jealous of others? When someone gets a promotion at work, and you thought that job should have been yours, the Green Monster of jealousy raises its head. For students, jealousy can strike when someone gets named to the cheer squad, or the dance team, or first string on the team. Jealousy can strike when someone seems to have better looks, or more friends, or a bigger house or a shinier car.

Jealousy exists within the church. I've known people through the years who got upset because they didn't get to sing enough solos. I've known people to get upset because their name was mistakenly left off a list of appreciation for working at VBS. Or I've known teachers to get jealous when another class had more members attend, or a better room. Or they resent when class members leave to go to another class. We must guard against jealousy.

When I was a young pastor, I was irritated when church members would leave to join another local church. However, God cured me of that jealousy, and now my reaction is, "If they find a body of believers where they can serve and have their needs met more than Green Acres, I'm happy for them, and I pray they will stay involved in the Lord's work." You see, we aren't in competition with any churches, we are cooperating together for the Kingdom of God.

Truth: Everything good in life is a gift from God.

How did John avoid jealousy over Jesus? He understood the following truth: Everything good in life is a gift from God. The Bible teaches this in many places, but one of the key verses is James 1:17. The Bible says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

When John's disciples complained about the growing popularity of Jesus, John said, "That's great! I can receive only what I've been given from heaven. I'm not the Messiah—He is." He was thankful for the gift of being the forerunner for the Messiah. We should be thankful for the gifts and positions that God has given us.

Maybe you've heard the name of F.B. Meyer. He was a brilliant Baptist pastor in England in the late 1800s. He was a prolific author, writing over 75 books. At the zenith of Meyer's ministry, a new young pastor came to London and started drawing huge crowds. His name was Charles Haddon Spurgeon. This continued for years. Meyer would stand outside his church on Sunday morning and watched as the thousands of carriages passed by filled with people on the way to the Metropolitan Tabernacle to hear Spurgeon.

In his autobiography, F. B. Meyer admits that when Spurgeon first arrived in London, he was filled with envy. He wrote, "I took it to the Lord; got down on my knees and on my face before the Lord and said, 'It's not right, this feeling of envy that I have in my heart.'"

So Meyer believed he couldn't be jealous of a preacher if he was praying for him. So he started praying for the success of the boy-preacher, Spurgeon. He started asking God to give Spurgeon a double portion of the Spirit from Heaven. He asked God to give Spurgeon a fame that circled the world ten times, not just once. And as he continued to pray that, the envy disappeared. Meyer said he started celebrating all the successes of Spurgeon, as if they were his own. And God blessed Spurgeon's ministry until he died at age 57. Meyer continued to be used of God in England and in the U.S. until God called him home at the age of 82.

Like, John the Baptist, we should guard against jealousy. Rejoice in what God has given you, and rejoice in what God has given others.

2. RECOGNIZE YOUR ROLE IN RELATION TO JESUS.

The reason John was not jealous of Jesus was because he recognized who he was in relation to Jesus. He said, "I am not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of him. He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom's friend... stands by and listens for him."

Early in his ministry thousands of religious leaders from Jerusalem flocked out to see John the Dipper. But he refused to accept their accolades. Over and over again, he insisted he wasn't the Messiah. He was just a voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Lord.

To put it another way, John knew who he was, and he knew who he wasn't.

One of my favorite sports movies was Rudy. Even though I'm not a big fan of Notre Dame, that was a great story. Rudy is an undersized guy who dreams of playing football at Notre Dame. I won't spoil it by giving you the whole plot, but in the movie, there is a Catholic Priest named Father Cavanaugh, who advised Rudy. There's a famous line where Father Cavanaugh says, "Son, in 35 years of religious study, I've come up with only two hard, incontrovertible facts—there is a God, and I'm not Him." Have you learned that important lesson yet? There really IS a God—and I'm not him and you're not him.

The most important relationship in your life is with your Creator. And once you recognize who you are in relationship with Him, life starts making sense. For instance, John knew he wasn't the bridegroom. He was just the friend of the bridegroom. Jewish weddings are different than Western weddings because in our culture, all the focus is on the bride. She dresses up in white and comes walking down the aisle and every eye is on her. But in Jewish weddings, the groom is the star. John recognized he was the best man at the wedding, not the groom.

Truth: We shouldn't detract from the heavenly groom.

So what's the TRUTH we should learn? We shouldn't detract from the heavenly groom. I served as the best man in a wedding once when I was in college. How many of you have ever been in a wedding as a best man, maid of honor, or one of the bridesmaids or groomsmen, would you hold up your hand? Good for you. I'm sure you realized you were there that day for the bride and the groom—it wasn't about you. You were there to celebrate with the bride and groom, not to call attention to yourself.

If you are ever going to be a best man, there's a book you can read. It's called *Being the Best Man for Dummies*. It's on sale at Amazon for \$11, or I can save you the money by giving you this advice. "It's not about you, it's all about the groom." You never take center stage. In other words, you're there to shine the light on the groom so he and his bride can have a wonderful wedding experience.

The worst thing a best man can do is to try to grab all the attention. I don't really follow celebrity marriages, but I did Google "Worst Best Man." I found out that when Kanye West and Kim Kardashian were married in Italy in 2014, that Kanye invited Jay-Z to be his best man, and

Jay-Z was a no-show. There were at least as many headlines about the no-show best man as there was the wedding. Jay-Z was an awful best man.

And here are some actual toasts from some other worst best men:

One best man toasted, "Finally John has found someone with low enough self-esteem to marry him." Boo. Another best man ended his wedding toast by saying, "And brother, I'll be there for you at your next wedding when this one doesn't work out." Boo. Hiss. But probably the worst was when a best man said, "I am so happy for you and Sarah." Unfortunately, Sarah was the name of the ex-girlfriend. The bride's name was Kim.

We don't want to follow the example of these lousy best men. We want to be like John the Baptist. We are friends of the groom, and we should commit our lives to making the bridegroom famous. Remember it's not about me and it's not about you—it's all about Jesus. And when you come to understand who you are in relationship with Jesus, all your other relationships will be healthier.

3. DISCOVER THE SOURCE OF REAL JOY.

We tend to think of John the Dunker as a loveless, joyless gloom-and-doom prophet. But he spoke about his joy when he said, "But the groom's friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom's voice. So this joy of mine is complete."

In Jewish wedding customs, the friends of the bride and groom were stationed along the streets that led to the bride's house. Jewish young people created a fun competition between the bridesmaids and the groomsmen. The groom would sometimes try to sneak into his bride's house to claim her without being seen by their friends. Instead of hide 'n seek, it was more like "hide the bride." You catch some of this game in the story Jesus told in Matthew 25 about the ten bridesmaids. In this story, the groom didn't show up until almost midnight.

So John was saying that the thing that gave him great joy was to hear and recognize the voice of the groom. Can you just see these guys hiding out in the dark? They are so excited for their friend who is getting married. They are waiting, watching, and listening. And finally, they hear his voice. They are filled with joy because they know that the wedding celebration is about to begin.

John knew he came to announce the arrival of the bridegroom. And when he heard the voice of Jesus, joy flooded his soul.

Truth: Recognizing the Lord's voice produces great joy.

We can learn a great truth from this: Recognizing the Lord's voice produces great joy. Jesus is the source of our joy as well. Jesus said, "I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete." (John 15:11 CSB)

In John 10:27 Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me." Back in Jesus' time, several flocks shared a large sheepfold. The sheep weren't branded like cattle, but it was simple matter to separate them. Each member of the flock recognized the voice of their shepherd. When one shepherd called, "Let' go!" Only sheep belonging to him would leave the sheepfold. There are many, many voices calling for your attention these days and most of them are coming from some kind of screen. Can you recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus? Jesus is calling. Are you following?

Most people in America say they want to be happy. But happiness comes from the word "hap" which means "luck." When your hap is good, you're happy. And when your hap is bad, you are unhappy.

But Jesus promises something much greater than happiness: He offers joy and it's found in Jesus. Happiness is like a thermometer that measures the emotional temperature. Joy is like a thermostat that can set your emotional temperature, whatever is happening around you.

The joy of Jesus shines the brightest when our situations are the darkest.

A few months later when John's head was separated from his neck, I wouldn't say he was happy. But I would say with certainty that he was filled with joy, because He had heard the voice of the blessed bridegroom. How's your joy today? Have you discovered that Jesus is the source of joy?

4. ALLOW JESUS TO CONTROL MORE OF YOUR LIFE DAILY.

John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." John the Dunker had a healthy self-image. In light of the growing popularity of the ministry of the Messiah, John didn't panic and hire a new marketing firm. He said, "That's God's plan. He must keep getting bigger and bigger, and I must be getting smaller and smaller. And I'm okay with that."

In Greek mythology, Narcissus was a handsome god who saw a reflection of his face in the water, and fell in love with himself. He took the first selfie. John the Baptist never took a selfie. Someone said that the toughest instrument to play is second fiddle. John was comfortable in the role of being second fiddle.

Both secular and Christian counselors agree that one of the most important factors that lead to a balanced life is to have a healthy self-image. You can err on either side. You can think of yourself as so unimportant that it produces a sense that you are worthless and nobody cares for you. Instead, you are someone who was created by God for a purpose—to know God and to love God. Others err on the other side and think they are God's gift to the world. Have you ever been stopped at a traffic light and the person in the car in front of you turns their rearview mirror just so they can see themselves? I've been told some people are so self-obsessed they drive like that all the time. They are the kind of person who looks in a mirror and sing, "How Great Thou Art."

As I mentioned at the beginning, John 3:30 is one of my life verses. I often sign a letter or email with that reference. Many times when I am doing a book signing, that is the verse I add with my name. In a sense, it is my life motto. Let me suggest it for you as well.

Life Motto: Jesus must increase; I must decrease.

That's the desired progression of the Christian life. Paul wrote, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."
(Colossians 3:2-3 CSB)

It's an easy motto. It only has six words. Will you repeat it with me? Is that your desire? That Jesus would grow larger and larger in you? That can only happen when you keep humbling yourself and getting smaller and smaller in yourself.

I had a pastor friend in college named Mike Walker. He's a pastor in Louisiana and doing great things for God. Mike married his girlfriend, Paula, who was also in our school. She was an amazing singer. She used to sing a song that I think she wrote. I can remember all of the words, but there is one verse that I think is profound. She sang, "I'm nobody. I'm nothing. I'm no one. But I'm someone in Christ who's in me. So I'll put on His flesh and walk in His bones; and a part of His body I'll be." What a great understanding. In myself, I'm nothing. But I am someone because Christ lives in me. That's a healthy self-image.

CONCLUSION

So, these are four spiritual attitudes that will lead to success in God's eyes: Guard against jealousy; recognize your role in relationship with Jesus; discover the source of joy in Jesus; and make this your motto: Jesus must increase, and I must decrease.

Arturo Toscanini was one of the world's greatest conductors. Once he led the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in playing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Toscanini was a passionate director and when they played the last note, the audience jumped to their feet and gave a thunderous standing ovation. Toscanini, filled with emotion turned to the orchestra and said, "I am nothing. And you are nothing.. But Beethoven is everything! Beethoven is everything!"

And that's a great way to end this message. I am nothing. You are nothing, but Jesus is everything!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
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