

Like many of you, I don't follow football all that closely. I don't have a strong favorite to win tonight's Super Bowl. I'm not going to pray for either team to win. However, I did come across a story that piqued my interest relating to Cincinnati Bengals quarterback: Joe Burrow.

Tonight, Burrow is playing in the Super Bowl in just his second season as a professional. He was injured during his first season and spent last year's off-season in rehabilitation. But not only did he rehab his knee, he spent hours and hours working with coaches to improve his throwing mechanics. He learned how to improve his footwork and how to read pass protections.

In this article, Burrow explained that what he learned in last year's off-season made him a much better quarterback. He thinks it's part of the reason his team made it to the Super Bowl. Even after all his accomplishments: named "Mr. Football" for the state of Ohio, a national championship at Louisiana State University, the Heisman Trophy, being the very first player chosen in the 2020 NFL draft, Burrow is still willing to learn and take instruction.

To borrow a phrase from the 16th century leader in the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin, I would say Joe Burrow has "a teachable spirit." He remains open to instruction. He takes direction from those around him. He's ready to learn new things. And you can't argue with results. There's a lot of happiness in the city of Cincinnati these days.

I share this because I just find it refreshing to see an example of such a person. I'm not convinced everyone has a teachable spirit. I think, at certain times, I do, but at other times, maybe not so much. In our society, there is an emphasis on being self-reliant or self-made. Wanting or needing help is interpreted as a sign of weakness.

In addition, there's a tendency to cling to our positions. When the facts don't fit our worldview, instead of adopting new understandings, we reject the facts. We "dig in" rather than learning. We miss teachable moments. Some don't broaden their horizons by reading or experience other cultures by traveling to new places. Some want to prevent the learning of certain aspects of American history in schools.

Do you have a teachable spirit? I would suggest it's part of what is required to be a healthy, mature human being. The composer of Psalm 1 asserts that having a teachable spirit leads to happiness. Listen to the opening verses of Psalm 1 again. It begins with the word happy. Some translations use the word blessed.

"Happy (or blessed) are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night."

I want you to hear those verses a little differently. The word law is a translation of the Hebrew word "Torah." According to professors of the Old Testament such as Walter Brueggemann, the word Torah can mean "law" in the sense of a collection of rules; however, it essentially means "instruction."

Therefore, a more helpful way to read those verses is to say: "Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in **the instruction** of the Lord, and on God's **instruction** they meditate day and night."

Think about what an amazing gift the Torah, God's instruction, was for the Hebrew people. God liberated them from slavery in Egypt and brought them to what is known as the Promised Land. The Bible tells us that, in order to ensure that they would thrive and prosper in this new land, God gave Moses a set of instructions. Those instructions are the first five books of the Bible.

God so desires human flourishing and happiness that life comes with a set of instructions. If the people heeded God's instructions, they would prosper. If they neglected God's instructions, they would perish. That means God relied on Moses and the people to have a teachable spirit. Happy are those whose delight is in the instruction of the Lord. On that instruction, they meditate day and night.

The psalmist is very clear. Those who are happy and blessed are those with a teachable spirit. It's those who are willing to take God's instructions: to read them, to learn them, to meditate on them, and to integrate them into one's life. In fact, for the psalmist, it's really about life and death.

He offers a wonderful image. The righteous, those who delight in God's instruction, are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season. Their leaves do not wither. In all they do, they prosper. The wicked are like chaff that the wind drives away. Chaff is what's left over after harvesting wheat. Chaff is dried out, unfruitful, disconnected, driven away by the wind.

Those with a teachable spirit, those who meditate on God's instruction, take root near streams of life-giving water. They're connected. They are able to stand in the face of terrible storms. They are able to produce fruit in its season. They have purpose. Those with a teachable spirit find themselves grounded in that which is life-giving.

Do you know who else had a teachable spirit? Jesus. A Gentile woman came to him asking him to heal her daughter. At first, he refused, indicating he came only for his own people, "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." After she persisted and engaged him in dialogue, he changed his mind. Eventually, he said, "Woman, great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish." And the young girl was healed.

Do you have a teachable spirit? Do you believe God desires your well-being and that God offers a way to happiness and fulfillment? Are you open to instruction? Are you curious and able to taking direction? Do you long for God to loom larger in your life? Allow me to offer a few suggests as to how to adopt and maintain a teachable spirit.

First, make growth your number one priority. Realize that no matter how old we are, we are not too old to learn something new or to gain a different perspective. Make the time to read. Open up your Bible to the New Testament and read a chapter a day. Do a little pleasure reading, fiction and nonfiction.

Some of you may have seen the "Change My Mind" memes on social media. There's a photo of a guy with a coffee sitting behind a card table on the street. Attached to the front of the table is a big sign on which you can put a topic for discussion followed by the words "change my mind."

Some are goofy. One of them said, "You can't stand backwards on stairs. Change my mind." I saw another that said, "Pop Tarts are ravioli. Change my mind." Some are more serious. I recently saw, "Male privilege is a myth. Change my mind."

I love the concept. It's a way of saying this is what I think, but I'm open to learning. I'm open to changing my mind. That's the teachable spirit. They say you learn something new every day. I think you do if you're open to learning and if you make it a priority.

A second way to maintain a teachable spirit is to keep track of what you've learned. I started a practice when I went to seminary. Everywhere I went, I carried a notebook around with me. If I came across a quote, if I heard a powerful story, if I read something of particular interest, I would write it in my little notebook.

Today, I have multiple notebooks that I have filled with all the best learnings, poetry, and most insightful bits of wisdom I've come across over the last 25 years. I flip through them regularly and remind myself of these things. It's the only way I can integrate learnings and new ideas into my life. It has helped me to grow closer to God and deepen my faith.

The last way I want to suggest to maintain a teachable spirit is by sharing what we've learned with others. Those of you who have ever taught, at any level, know that something happens when we share knowledge and insight. The more we share something, the more it becomes anchored in ourselves. The lesson becomes our own. God's blessings come to us on their way to someone else.

In 2017 a national poll indicated that only 33% of Americans indicated they were happy. Last year, a similar poll indicated that folks in America are more unhappy today than they've been in nearly 50 years. I don't think it has to be that way. I believe God created each of us with a teachable spirit, because God desires our happiness and well-being.

Let's adopt a teachable spirit.

Let's make growth a priority.

Let's keep track of what we learn.

Let's share what we learn with others and see if we don't find ourselves truly blessed.

