

# Happiness Is

04/22/2018

Proverbs 14:21

*He who despises his fellow sins, but he who shows compassion to the humble is happy.*

I often say that three powerful ideas or attributes are Peace, Joy, and Love. Yet equally important is happiness in our lives. Happiness is the experience of feeling good. I've heard it said that everything and everyone we love makes us happy.

Happiness comes from happenings: moment to moment events. When we live in the moment, we raise our happiness level. Happiness increases as we focus on the small moments during the day, each moment's accomplishments, each small moment of inspiration, and how our lives are touched by other people. Happiness increases as we focus on our interactions with other people and treat each moment with them as important.

Psalm 68:3 reads: ... *may those who do what is right be glad and filled with joy when they are with him. May they be happy and joyful.* This Psalm distinguishes between happiness and joy, and both sound like good and valuable attributes. The Dalai Lama co-authored a book entitled *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. In it he says the purpose of life is to be happy. He says that happiness is not something readymade; it comes from our own actions and intentions. "It is very important to generate a good attitude, a good heart, as much as possible. From this, happiness in

both the short term and the long term for both yourself and others will come.”

Happiness can result from applying passion and enthusiasm toward our wants. Our wants are things we love; they bring us happiness. It is through our aspirations, dreams, and desires that we allow Spirit to move through us. As we get in touch with our wants in a childlike open manner, we can then learn to prioritize them; differentiating the meaningful and important wants from the idle and mundane. Spirit then guides us, through passion and enthusiasm, to pursue the important desires, and happiness is the result.

For instance – the dream to help people overcome illness, turned penicillin into a potent antibiotic, helping millions. From the desire to alert people to the dangers of a home fire, Randolph Smith and Kenney House invented the smoke alarm.

It is through important desires stirred up in the imagination that Spirit encourages us with passion and enthusiasm, and then moves through us, creating happiness for all.

According to Aristotle: “Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.”

Happiness may mean the experience of feeling good, but the benefits far exceed this simple definition. It is the single most important quality for developing success in every major life category.

In the last ten years there has been a profusion of studies and research on happiness. Studies reveal that happy people more often attract a companion, enjoy stronger relationships and marriages, and are better parents. Happy people are healthier, with increased immune systems, better resistance to cardiovascular disease, and live up to ten years longer than their unhappy counterparts.

Happy people have better mental health, are more resilient to life's challenges, and exhibit an increased ability to manage adversity and trauma. They enjoy greater success at work, performing better and generating a higher income.

Studies show that income is more a result of one's happiness than their education. In the words of businessman author Herman Cain, "Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful."

Companies with happy employees are more successful and profitable because happy people are more productive, more loyal, take fewer sick days, have less conflicts, and show up for work on time.

Happiness also benefits society at the broadest levels. One study showed that increasing the happiness of a country's population also increased its freedom and democracy.

So, developing happiness not only aids us individually, but benefits our families, our community, and society in general.

Science has identified the part of the brain that is associated with happiness – it is the left prefrontal cortex. Happiness alters our brain chemistry, resulting in a reduced prejudice for people that are different from us. The distinction between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ begins to fade when we are happy.

Studies illustrate that there is a connection between our personal happiness and the kindness, care, and compassion we show toward others. By increasing our happiness, we increase our compassion; by increasing our compassion, we increase our happiness. The act of concern for someone else’s well-being creates a greater sense of well-being within our self.

Not feeling happy? – show compassion and care for someone! It is how Spirit works. We are told in Luke 6:38 “*Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.*” As we open the channels for God’s love to flow through us, we are positively affected, as is anyone who gets in our love’s way.

The Buddha said: “Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.”

One long term study of happiness compared what were successful families as opposed to struggling families. ‘Success’ was measured in terms of their long-term achievement in careers, health and family relationships.

In healthy families, wants bubble to the surface swiftly and easily. Children from these families learn quickly how to prioritize wants – important wants from idle wants – because they express their wants so enthusiastically.

I believe this is how Spirit moves through us as children, to hone our receptivity as a vessel for unimpeded flow. This is how God uses us: filling us with ideas, wants, desires, and dreams so that the most important can pass into Creation.

Because of this, in healthy families children hear the word “No” a hundred times a day, as opposed to the struggling families where the children hear the word “No” only 3-5 times a day. These children learn quickly that their demands will be met with criticism and attack.

In struggling families, the flow of Spirit is suppressed, and the child suppresses their wants and dares not express their desires. Therefore, they rarely hear the word ‘No’; it is too emotionally costly to their self-esteem to verbalize a want. They begin to perceive their wants as bad, useless, and selfish, and so they must be a bad, unworthy, and useless person if they want something.

Children from healthy families learn that they are entitled to their wants, although they are not entitled to the things they want. What is important is that the child knows that the parent is listening to them; they are interested in their desires. Happiness flows.

In addition to living through their higher wants, another aspect that contributed to personal and family success in this study was that these happy, passionate, and enthusiastic people viewed their actions as a service and gift to others and themselves. Service means to give something to someone because it is the right thing to do and not requiring anything in return. The giving is fulfilling and satisfying in and of itself; it is not an exchange.

While this is difficult to do, what the successful people in this study did was identify the personal issue they had, and then use their service to others as an opportunity to work on themselves. Mother Teresa did this: she was clear to her novitiates that they were to use service to the poor as a means of learning to be a clear channel of love for God.

We do this as parents: we give service to our children, and as I recall from my childhood, like every child, I was not always real lovable or grateful, and there is no way I can possibly repay my Mom and Dad for what they gave and gave up for my well-being.

Still, as a parent we try to serve our children and simultaneously we learn lessons – patience, compassion, the ability to cope with stress and challenges – we have many opportunities to grow as we parent our children.

When we work on ourselves through our service to others we avoid the lower ego, where we edge God ot, and embrace the higher ego where we enjoy God's omnipresence.

When we show compassion, care, and charitably serve others, we increase our happiness. A study at Cal State Riverside had a group of people perform five random acts of kindness one day a week for six weeks. At the end of the study the people in the study experienced a measurable increase in their happiness and life satisfaction. It seems to reinforce what we read in Ecclesiastes 3:12: *I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live.*

In his book, *The Art of Happiness*, the Dalai Lama says this when asked if happiness was a reasonable goal:

“Yes, I believe happiness can be achieved through training the mind. When I say ‘training the mind,’ in this context I’m not referring to ‘mind’ merely as one’s cognitive ability or intellect. Rather, I’m using the term in the sense of the Tibetan word *Sem*, which has a much broader meaning, closer to ‘psyche’ or ‘spirit’; it includes intellect and feeling, heart and mind. By bringing about a certain inner discipline, we can undergo a transformation of our attitude, our entire outlook and approach to living.

This is what is meant in Romans 12:2: *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will.*

The Dalai Lama’s discipline is simple, although not easy: identify those factors that lead to suffering and those that lead to happiness. Eliminate the ones that lead to suffering and

cultivate those that lead to happiness. By doing so, we renew our minds, as Paul described, and are transformed.

There are now numerous studies demonstrating that happiness, compassion, caring, love, and service to others benefits not only the giver but the receiver. But when the Dalai Lama wrote his book in 1998, there was not much scientific corroboration of his Buddhist principles on happiness. Yet despite the scientific evidence, the Dalai Lama was so convinced of his views about happiness that he said, “If science were to conclusively prove that some part of the Buddhist scriptures or basic beliefs turned out to be untrue, then Buddhist scripture or belief would have to change.”

Of course, since then there has been explosive interest in the mind-body sciences validating everything that the Dalai Lama teaches regarding happiness. But I find his statement extraordinary. It is difficult for me to imagine other religious leaders making such a statement: if our beliefs do not align with what science uncovers, then we must change our beliefs.

But don't you think that Christ would also make that statement? Happiness, joy, peace, love, wisdom and all other spiritual values, if they are true they must be true in the face of science and spirituality; earthly thinking and Godly thinking.

If a belief system, religious or secular, does not result in happiness, then perhaps it requires some restructuring. If a system of thought is not compassionate, loving, and in service to all and not just a select group, then some rethinking may be in order.

And perhaps this is part of our human challenge: to spend more time trying to be happy and less time trying to be right; to spend more time expressing the Spirit of God and less time defending the thoughts of Man.

Happiness can be obtained from simple things and small moments as well as large idealisms. It is individual: what makes you happy may not make me happy. Yet, allowing you to be happy makes me happy, so we all can win. We can even be happy though it brings tears to our eyes: Seeing the birth of a newborn while remembering the passing of the grandparent.

Happiness is simple and complex. It is worthy of our time; a simple gift of Spirit, yet valuable and complex enough to pursue and ponder and dedicate a lifetime to attaining.

And I think as a species we are moving in the right direction. More and more we are allowing our light of happiness to shine. The Eskimos have a saying: "Perhaps they are not stars, but rather openings in heaven where the love of our lost ones pours through and shines down upon us to let us know they are happy." In that spirit, let us be living stars and allow our love to shine for all those around us, letting them know that we are happy.

Let us pray....