

HOW TO BE TRULY HAPPY

Article appeared in the Good News, May 1982 by Bernie Schnippert

Are you happy? Are you really? Perhaps no other question penetrates past our superficial masks of contentment as this one does.

For, when asked if we are happy, we are forced to dig deep into our hearts, past our goals, our problems, our possessions, our hopes and our dreams, into the most private recesses of our being. Here, deep inside ourselves in places where we rarely let the searching eyes or ears of others travel, we hold the answer.

And that answer, while it may be a joyous "Yes!", all too often is a somber "Sometimes" or a perplexed "I don't know" or an embarrassed and depressed "No, I guess not."

So, what about you? Are you happy? Do you have a right to expect to be? And, if you should or can be happy, how should you go about it? Just what should our attitude as Christians be toward this topic of "being happy"?

What Happiness is Not

It might seem that the place to begin explaining this important topic would be with a definition of the word happiness. But an understanding of what happiness is not will take us far indeed toward gaining a godly perspective of this subject.

Deep within the human heart lurks the erroneous belief that "If I just didn't have these problems or these worries, then I'd be happy!" But freedom from problems or worries would not make you happy because happiness is not freedom from these things.

Realize this: A person cannot be truly happy unless he is fulfilling the purpose for which God put him on this earth. And that purpose is not just to be happy as the world views happiness.

No, God put you here to go through trials and troubles and problems! Why? For the purpose of building within you the character necessary to enter His Kingdom. Trials and problems serve to help develop you into a very son of God!

If you somehow escape all problems, you will also "escape" becoming a son of God, and that is not a satisfactory alternative. No, happiness is not the opposite of problems -- boredom is! And boredom is one of the biggest causes of unhappiness in the world today.

Neither does having wealth mean happiness. Money can solve the problem of paying your light bill or the problem of buying groceries but it cannot solve your marital problems, your problem of depression, your problem with your teenagers or your friends. In fact many times money can cause a whole new set of problems that the person with meager means does not face.

As Christ said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"(Luke 12:15).

We live in the get generation. But happiness is not something you can get for yourself by pursuing it or trying to grab it from someone else. Indeed the very act of trying to get happiness for yourself drives it away because God designed life to work to our good only when we operate on the principle of giving rather than getting(Acts 20:35). Happiness is not something you can get for yourself. It is something that comes to you automatically but only when you obey the principles of life that produce it.

The Pillars Of Happiness

Happiness can be viewed as a spiritual shelter in this stormy life. Like the stately ceiling of a fabulous building it stands above and overshadows us while resting upon pillars that give it support. The more of these pillars we employ the more sturdily our happiness will stand. But if we neglect these pillars and allow them to fall into ruin the roof of happiness they support will also tumble.

Viewed in this light then what is happiness? Happiness is the positive serene state of mind that results automatically from living in accordance with the God ordained laws and principles on which our lives and the world around us function. Here are seven pillars of happiness that deserve our special attention.

The Purpose of Life

The first pillar is an understanding of why you were born and of the true God who set that purpose in motion.

No matter how materially successful one may become - no matter how many possessions he may acquire or how intellectually developed he is he will always flounder in life and not know true happiness until he knows the purpose of life.

True Christians have that knowledge and that hope and therefore that happiness. As God's Word says, "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Ps. 146:5). And elsewhere God says "Happy is that people that is in such a case: yea happy is that people whose God is the Lord" (Ps. 144:15).

We are that people if we are truly converted. We have the great God as our Lord. We know why we were born and where we are going. And we can know true happiness.

Family

The second pillar of happiness is a close loving family. God Almighty Himself knows that having a family is one of the greatest thrills that can be known. He has shown this truth in His desire for His own family to be expanded to include a wife (the Church) and sons and daughters (the members of the Church to be born into God's immortal spiritual Family at Jesus Christ's return).

This world today does not benefit much from the happiness proper family relationships provide. Divorce broken homes family squabbles husband-wife and parent-child conflicts

are main sources of heartache in this society. But when functioning as a loving caring unit the family gives probably the greatest satisfaction and happiness of any physical institution.

The companionship and love of a strong family relationship not only picture God's future Family in which God Himself will find great happiness but serve as a foundational pillar of happiness in our own life.

Achievement Through Work

The third pillar of happiness is a satisfying challenging job, role or career in which you can give by contributing of yourself. Solomon wrote: "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw that it was from the hand of God" (Eccl. 2:24). Solomon saw the value of work. He understood that men and women were made to be productive and to give something to their society. But be careful.

Your job or other responsibilities in life will only give happiness if your efforts are aimed at contributing instead of taking. Any person who operates by pulling rugs out from under others while seeking to build and build and build for himself in a selfish coldhearted manner will know only misery instead of happiness. For as stated earlier, happiness is driven away by the get frame of mind but is increased by giving. If your role or career is one in which you can give then you can find happiness in it. Of course, ideally your career or job should also challenge you and give you physical satisfaction.

But what if you find yourself in a job that offers no satisfaction because you dislike it? First make sure that the job is indeed what is at fault - that you are not dissatisfied merely because of your own wrong values. But what if your job truly is at fault and you find yourself unable for financial reasons or other constraints to change to a more satisfying job? Read on.

Character Growth

The next pillar of happiness is that of growing in character. Here we see the value of trials and tribulations. Trials and tribulations may strain us, but they nonetheless contain the germ of true happiness, for it is through these trials that we build character. And with character, we receive a dual blessing.

First, the very process of growing in character tends to give happiness and satisfaction. This is because God designed the character-building process to produce a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction - and happiness.

Second, building character is prerequisite to qualifying for the Kingdom of God. And the knowledge that the character we have built sets us in good stead for God's Kingdom, brings joy. As the apostle Paul stated, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). The apostle Peter proclaimed, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice..." (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Good Works

Doing good works is a powerful builder of happiness. Wise King Solomon wrote, "He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he" (Prov. 14:21).

Doing good works brings us happiness for more than one reason. When we do good works, we practice God's character, for God is the giver of every good gift (Jam. 1:17). When we imitate God, we gain the happiness that comes from being like God and living the way of outgoing concern.

Also, the act of giving sets in motion a series of domino-like events that bring good back upon ourselves: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38).

What are your good works? Can you point to them? Can you sit down and make a list of them and get past one or two small items? If not, then perhaps you are not doing good works as you should and therefore cannot expect the happiness that comes from doing so.

Wisdom

Wisdom is the sixth pillar of happiness. Wisdom is the ability to know what path to choose to reach the right goal. Wisdom also implies character, since the knowledge of the right path or route to take in life has no lasting value without the character to take it.

Notice these poignant words from the wisest man who ever lived, Solomon: "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding...Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her" (Prov. 3:13-18). Happy is the person who finds wisdom - therefore, seek wisdom and be happy.

Active Accomplishment

The seventh pillar of happiness is active accomplishment. The human machine was made to be active, to produce, to accomplish. To the old maxim "to rest is to rust" we could add "to rest continually is to be bored and unhappy".

Too many people in this world work at building houses upon the sand, houses that will fall when the winds and rain of future catastrophes occur. But we as true Christians should be actively engaged in building upon the right foundation (Matt. 7:24-27).

And just as there is no wisdom in building upon sand, there is also no wisdom in not building at all. Merely knowing the proper foundation! is not enough. We should try to busily build in every aspect of our lives - our education, our physical bodies, our mental health, our homes, our yards and our physical goods. We should be the example of busy building activity-whether it be in activities of God's Church, of our families, of our homes or of our possessions.

The fact that we are not mesmerized by the materialistic things of this world - that we don't seek them as our primary goal - is no excuse to let our physical possessions fall into disrepair, or to live slovenly. No. We should be bursting with activity, constantly striving to build our minds, our bodies and whatever else constitutes our "house" upon the proper foundation, as an example to others and a physical aid to our happiness

A Warning

Please do not be misled. It is possible to get the wrong impression from reading an article like this one. It is possible to slip into thinking that being happy is the most important thing in the world. It is not. There is more to this physical life than being happy. Read that again: There is more to life than being happy!

Our purpose in life is reaching the Kingdom of God! Perhaps we might better say that there is more to life than being happy now. For our true goal in life is not necessarily to be completely happy now, but to seek happiness in the world tomorrow, in the Kingdom of God. We achieve that goal by going through whatever is necessary now.

So if you must suffer trials that make you sad, do not be dismayed. There is more to life than being happy. Happiness is a mere side effect, a temporary result of properly seeking our great goal of eternal life, when we will enjoy never-ending, blissful spiritual happiness.

Therefore, ask yourself, "Am I happy?" No matter what your answer is now, you can know for certain that, if you obey God's laws and reach the goal of God's Kingdom, someday you will be - truly!