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# How To Be Happy

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Everyone longs for happiness, but few possess it. The pursuit of it is universal and timeless. Generations ago, the writers of the United States Declaration of Independence recognized that longing. In it they wrote that every man is endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, one of which is the pursuit of happiness.

For most people, however, happiness is elusive. To make it even more elusive, many Christians have been told that holiness and happiness just don't go together. That's because in the church, there has been an emphasis placed on Jesus as a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

However, that is not the whole story. The same Bible that says Jesus suffered also says He was anointed with the oil of gladness above everyone else and that the joy of the Lord is our strength.

"You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions." (Heb. 1:9).

Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Neh. 8:10).

No joy—no strength. This is one of the reasons we have a lot of weak Christians.

So, is true happiness obtainable? And if so, how do we get it?

First, let me say there are many scriptures that command us to rejoice and be glad (Ps. 32:11, 40:16, 68:3, 70:4, to list a few). Some specifically command rejoicing in the midst of trouble (Ps. 34:1, Matt. 5:12, and John 16:33). The people of Israel were even punished because they didn't serve the Lord with joyfulness and gladness of heart for the abundance of all the things the Lord had done.

"Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you." (Deut. 28:47-48).

So, if joy was a command and people were punished for not rejoicing, then happiness is something we can control. Otherwise, the Lord would have been unjust in commanding us to do it.

Today people think happiness is a result, instead of a choice. They believe that if they didn't have any problems and if they had an abundance of good things, happiness would be the inevitable result. That's not true.

**Happiness isn't a state of being; it's a state of mind.**

A person can be happy when everyone and everything around them is in turmoil. They can be content no matter what the financial or physical conditions might be. True happiness and contentment isn't dependent upon circumstances.

Take Paul as an example. The Apostle Paul wrote the book of Philippians while he was in prison in Rome. He had been in prison for two years in Israel, one year in transit to Rome and an undisclosed amount of time in Rome. He was facing possible execution.

Yet, his letter to the Philippians is the happiest letter of any he wrote. He mentioned rejoicing seventeen times in this short letter. How could this be? What was Paul's secret? The book of Philippians gives us the keys Paul used to obtain such success.

**“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Phil 4:11)**

Notice that contentment is something the Apostle Paul learned. It didn't come naturally or without effort. None of us came out of the womb reading and writing; we had to learn through years of effort. Likewise, contentment, which is a major component of happiness, has to be learned. It doesn't come on us like a seizure, and we don't catch it like a cold. It is an acquired trait.

How do we acquire happiness? First, we need to deal with what's on the inside. Most people take a different approach. They want to deal with the outside. They pray for their problems to be solved and that only good things and good people will come their way. Let me give you a clue: That ain't going to happen!

As long as we are in this world, we will have problems (John 16:33). And if we are living for God, we will have persecutions (2 Tim. 3:12). If you never bump into the devil, it's because you're going in the same direction. When you turn around and start swimming upstream, you will always encounter resistance. People and circumstances might start working against you.

You can't always control what goes on outside, but you can totally control what goes on inside when faced with that resistance. When you understand that, you will have discovered one of the greatest keys to happiness. In addition, you will be on your way to eliminating grief in your life.

I have written a little booklet called “Self-Centeredness: The Root of All Grief.” It shows how selfishness really is at the root of all our grief. I know that's a hard pill to swallow for many. But that's because we live in a society that has learned to blame circumstances and other people, rather than taking personal responsibility.

For example, Proverbs 13:10 makes it very clear that the way others treat us is not the root of contentions; it's our pride: “Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.”

**If we weren't so in love with ourselves, so prideful and self-centered, we wouldn't be so sensitive to all the things that rub self the wrong way. It really comes down to our love of self.**

One of the most liberating things in the world is to love someone else more than yourself. And when the one you love more is God, you will rejoice when He is glorified, even if that happens through your suffering.

That's what Paul did. In Philippians, chapter 1, the Apostle Paul was trying to comfort the Philippians. These were special people to Paul, and he was special to them. In Philippians 4:15-16, Paul said the Philippians were the only church that ever gave to him after he left their area. They did this not only once, but they did it twice and would have partnered with him more if they had known where he was.

He wanted to assure them that everything was all right with him. How did he do that? He told them that all his suffering had furthered the kingdom of God.

“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to

all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.”

That says volumes! Paul loved God and the furtherance of His kingdom more than he loved himself. If the kingdom of God was better off because of Paul’s imprisonment, then it was all worth it. What a great attitude. We would do well to adopt it.

When God and others are more important to you than yourself, then you are well on your way to happiness. But if you are all wrapped up in yourself, you make a very small package. And therein lies the number one obstacle to contentment and happiness.

Most people are addicted to self like addicts are to drugs. They are never satisfied. And this self-centered dissatisfaction is Satan’s greatest open door for temptation. He used self-interest to tempt Adam and Eve, even though they lived in a perfect world without a single problem.

“But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ”Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3:3-5).

Even Jesus’ disciples weren’t satisfied with Him. Despite all they had seen Him do, they still wanted more outward proof of who He was.

Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” (John 14:8).

We can never truly satisfy self. We just have to deny it. We have to die to self and place God and others ahead of self. That’s easier said than done, but once we die to ourselves, happiness is just around the corner.

Second, we need to deal with what’s outside, our circumstances. Paul gave great insight into how to do that in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, which says,

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Paul said his affliction was only light. He didn’t say that because he didn’t have problems. You can read a list of his “light afflictions” in 2 Corinthians 11:23-30. The list includes beatings with whips and rods, prison, shipwreck, hunger and thirst because of his mission work, and many more. So, how can we speak about our heavy load when Paul called all his problems, which were much worse than anything we have suffered, just light afflictions?

You see, it’s not your problems that are the problem; it’s the way you see your problems and the value you place on them that makes them a problem.

**Paul said all his afflictions were but for a moment. That was saying they were short-lived compared to eternity. Paul put everything into the perspective of eternity.**

Regardless of how bad things are in this life, we have such a wonderful eternity promised to each of us that all our

troubles pale in comparison.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18)

**Our future is so bright, we have to squint to look at it. All the sufferings of this life are short and insignificant compared to eternity and all the pleasures the Lord has in store for us. Keeping this in mind will shrink our problems down to a manageable size.**

Paul also said in 2 Corinthians 4:18 that he didn't look at the temporary things of earth but that he was focused on the eternal things of heaven. If we are only looking for happiness in this life, then we are going to be miserable (1 Cor. 15:19). Our true happiness lies in Jesus and our future with Him. If we are in faith, we can have joy unspeakable and full of glory now, in this life (1 Pet. 1:8). It's our anchor in eternity that keeps our hearts from being troubled (John 14:1-3).