

# Happiness

Snoopy the philosopher: Happiness is.... a warm blanket.

I read another one that went like: "Happiness is two kinds of ice cream"

ALBERT SCHWEITZER:

Happiness is nothing more than good health and a bad memory.

AMY LOWELL:

Happiness: We rarely feel it. I would buy it, beg it, steal it, Pay in coins of dripping blood for this one transcendent good.

FELIX ADLER:

The truth which has made us free will in the end make us glad also.

FRAN LEIBOWITZ:

Remember that as a teenager you are in the last stage of your life when you will be happy to hear the phone is for you.

JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER:

I can think of nothing less pleasurable than a life devoted to pleasure.

KIN HUBBARD:

It's pretty hard to tell what does bring happiness. Poverty and wealth have both failed.

ABD ER-RAHMAN III OF SPAIN:

I have now reigned about 50 years in victory or peace, beloved by my subjects, dreaded by my enemies, and respected by my allies. Riches and honors, power and pleasure, have waited on my call, nor does any earthly blessing appear to have been wanting to my felicity. In this situation, I have diligently numbered the days of pure and genuine happiness, which have fallen to my lot. They amount to fourteen. (960 C.E.)

MARK TWAIN:

Sanity and happiness are an impossible combination.

I am convinced that Eugene Peterson is correct when he pens, "Faith itself is in tune with what God has done and is doing. The road we travel is the well-traveled road of discipleship. It is not a way of boredom or despair or confusion. It is not a miserable groping but a way of blessing."

## **Read Psalm 128**

Many people consider themselves to be Christian. Many people respect the Church. Many people worship regularly. And many try to live decently. Rumor has it though, that it is extremely hard to be a Christian.

Respecting the church, going to worship and living decently are good things but they are also deceptive things. Being an ordinary Christian has a way of watering down Christianity. Many have a tendency to understand that in order to really take the Bible (all of the Bible) seriously, will require some kind of a radical saintliness disposition, and extraordinary willpower and discipline that most people can not acquire nor manage.

But...this is simply untrue. In light of this lesson I assert that being a Christian is the easiest thing for us to be. What is really hard is to be a sinner. God created us to be Christians. The God who made the heavens and the earth made it for us so that we could live and live happily as his children. God has repeatedly entered into the history of humankind. God has entered into the world in his Son, Jesus Christ. God entered in Jesus to show us and to help live our lives the way he intended for us to live. A life filled with faith and purpose.

The truth is, and most of us realize this only after walking with Jesus for some time that when we try to live a life of faith and purpose without Jesus we are essentially living life the hard way. "It is not Christians who have it hard, but non Christians."

Blessing is the word for this lesson. Blessing is the word that describes the happy state of our lives. Psalm 128 makes it a point to use the word blessing. This Psalm begins with promises and ends with pronouncements.

**The three promises are:**

**Psa. 128: 1-2**

1. Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways.
2. You will eat the fruit of your labor; (the message- you will get what you deserve.)
3. Blessings and prosperity will be yours.

**The three pronouncements are:**

**Vv. 4-6**

1. Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD. (v.4)
  2. May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem (v.5)
  3. And may you live to see your children's children. (v. 6)

**In between these verses is the illustration of blessing:**

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table.

You know what this is? This is really the good life! On one side this good life has the promise of real blessings, on the other side it has the pronouncements of blessings to come and in the middle of it all, the good life experiences these blessings.

I love the Word of God! The Word is one expression of the blessings of the good life. The Word tells us in Genesis 1:28, after God created male and female, that He **blessed them**. In Gen. 12:2, God called Abraham, and he promised-- **2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.** In Gen. 49 Israel receives a blessing according to their tribe.

King David, a man after God's own heart. A man whose life was filled with blessing and hardship. King David, had a life that was rich in blessing.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches about the eight qualities that are a part of the Christian's life. Each one of these qualities begins with the word "blessed." Jesus is not saying--be less. Jesus is saying--be more! Jesus is able to fill our lives so much that our lives will overflow with joy!

The Bible ends with the powerful words of Revelation. In the book of Revelation there are seven blessings.

**1:3**Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

16:15 "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."

**19: 9**Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' " And he added, "These are the true words of God."

20: **6**Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

22: **7**"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

22: **14**"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

Revelation stands in the midst of the blessings of God.

Those of us who experience the blessings of God know that His blessing is not about having a good day, or having some luck from time to time.

Here we are remembering the devastation of 911 tomorrow and yet we can still talk about the joy and the blessings that come from God.

Blessing is a matter of what God has done--to us--with us. It's about what God has done to our souls. When we are strong because of what God has done, it creates happiness in the life of a Christian. Real happiness, true joy is not something that lies outside of a man or a woman. True happiness is not getting the right job, or having the right children, or living in the right house or town. True happiness is not about avoiding terrorism, or not suffering through the loss of loved ones. True happiness is not about having the right body. It is not about being with the right people.

But true happiness and true joy has everything to do with what God has done on the inside of a woman or a man. What I'm saying is--no blessing from God...no power! No blessing from God...no

real living! The person who is on the journey of faith is a person whose life is surrounded with the blessings of God.

It is the center of this Psalm that shows how the blessings of God works. **V. 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table.**

Hmm... This is a great illustration of how God works if you lived in Hebrew culture more than 2000 years ago. In Hebrew culture, happiness for a man was to have a wife who was fertile! It was about having many children... like olive shoots...who gather around the table. This illustration of God's blessing is just that--it's an illustration. In our culture we don't try to have as many children as possible. In this culture we don't try to get them to stay home all of their lives. Truth is--that's why they invented college! It was to get them out!

So the illustration might not apply, but the meaning is not lost. One theologian (Johannes Pederson) says that the characteristic of blessing is to multiply. In the example of Abraham being blessed, his seed (his family line) is multiplied. But the blessing doesn't end with his family. Abraham's blessing has everything to do with blessing others. What I'm saying is God's blessing is about what God has done on the inside and it naturally overflows out into others. **Gen. 12:2-3 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."**

This is why I said true happiness is not getting the right job, or having the right children, or living in the right house or town. True happiness is not about having the right body. It is not about being with the right people. Rather it is about what God does in you, so that you can let his blessings overflow from your life into the life of another.

Christians believe what Paul said--**"it is more blessed to give than to receive."** The more we give and share in the lives of others, the more people around us become fruitful vines and olive shoots.

Being a disciple is about walking with God. The road we're on is a road of blessing because the Christian accepts the truth that God is the Creator, and that God has provided salvation. The Psalmist says it this way: **" Psa. 128:1 blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways.**

I find it interesting that the bible really isn't interested in whether or not we believe in God. It pretty much assumes that we do. The bible is more interested in our response to God. Will we let God be God? Will we let God be majestic and sovereign and holy--or will we be bent of trying to shrink him down to human size--forming and shaping him into what we want him to be so that our lifestyles wont have to change? If so, we're not dealing with the God of the bible and the God of creation, and the Jesus of the Cross-. Instead we are "dealing with a dime store reproduction of a god made in our own image." So the bible talks about the fear of the Lord... the AWE of the Lord. It is the bible's way of telling us to shut up our complaining and our fidgeting so that we can listen to God speak his merciful, life-changing words of love and forgiveness.

When we walk in his ways, we not only let God be God, but we begin to do the stuff he created us to

do. Now I know we know that we live in a fallen world. We know we are nowhere near perfect. **Walking in his way** is not about being perfect! Walking in his way is about doing it his way and not ours. It's about being on the right road. In other words--I don't get to make new rules about how to live. God has already given us the rules about how to live.

I'm convinced that everyone wants to be happy. But I'm also convinced that there are many unwilling to pay attention to God, the very one who wills our happiness and joy, because they are convinced that being a Christian is a harder way to live, and a harder way to get what they want, so they do it all on their own. I suppose the hardest way to live is to claim Christianity and claim that it's harder to live this way than the way they were before they became Christians. They are wrong! God's way has always been the way to happiness and joy. Do it the easy way: **Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways.**

Peace to the Israel of God... peace to you.

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