

Are You Happy?

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We have a God. We have a Savior who died for us. Our sins have been forgiven. We have hope of eternal life. But, are we happy?

God's people are to be happy. We are to be sustained by faith in the truth expressed in previous statements. The Psalms remind us to rejoice in the blessings of the Lord.

Psa. 40:16-17: "But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!" As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!"

Psa. 97:12: "Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!"

Psa. 98:4: "Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!"

Despite our blessings, many struggle to be happy. One in ten Americans will suffer from depression at some point in life. The number of people who are diagnosed with clinical depression increases about 20% annually. Of course, there are reasons for being unhappy and depressed. Loss is the primary reason for depression: death of a loved one, loss of a job, and divorce.

Everyone will experience unhappiness in life. Bad things happen to everyone. If we are unhappy, what can we do to ease our pain and become joyful?

How to Be Happy

1. Confront our problems. This may seem counter-intuitive to happiness. Why would we want to confront the reasons for our unhappiness? We may fear our problems will only increase our unhappiness. However, unless and until we confront our problems, we will never resolve issues hindering us from healing.

Confronting our problems mainly involves confronting our sin. No one enjoys looking at their sin. Self-examination is painful; however, this is essential to finding peace. Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount with these words: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:3-4). Blessedness only comes to those who acknowledge their sin and express sorrow.

In James' letter, he instructs us how we can become well-developed Christians. Proper training demands we expose our hearts to the Scriptures. Using God's word like a mirror, we can then make obvious, much needed adjustments to our character: "But the one who looks into the

perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing” (Jas. 1:25).

2. Become self-disciplined. Our society conveys that happiness is experienced through fast self-indulgent materialism. This is especially influenced by social media. A façade of happiness is carefully constructed. This deception puts pressure on people to live up to what they see. Rather than being self-disciplined, they pursue a lifestyle they cannot afford.

In a 2014 Time Magazine article entitled, “Self-discipline: a key to happiness?,” the following was described: “It’s easy to think of highly disciplined people as uptight goody two-shoes, denying themselves the pleasures of life. But it turns out that exerting self-control can make you happier not only in the long run, but also in the moment...Kathleen Vohs, professor at the University of Minnesota stated, “People who have good self-control do a number of things that bring them happiness-namely, they avoid problematic desires and conflict.” “Self-control may be less about resisting temptation and more about finding ways to happily avoid it.”

Of course, principles of self-discipline are Biblical. Jesus taught the need for self-denial (Matt. 16:24). Practicing restraint is essential to enjoying the blessings of being a Christian (1 Cor. 9:25-27). Peter wrote about how we can have good lives as Christians. Self-discipline was key: “For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it” (1 Pet. 3:10-11).

3. Share. We are blessed to live in an affluent society. However, this blessing can become a curse if not properly used. Paul wrote Timothy, “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life” (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

As Americans, we are *the rich in this present age*. Affluence can cause delusions of being self-made and self-reliant. As Christians, we are to be working to remove “self” and replace it with God. We are God-made and God-reliant. If this is how we understand ourselves, our relationship with wealth will be transformed.

We are to use our material blessings to care for our families. Parents are to sacrificially provide for their children. In time, children will need to sacrificially provide for their parents. Also, we are to be charitable with our resources. When we have an opportunity, we are to help those in need. Such a self-giving use of our resources is how we experience what life truly is. As Jesus was known to teach, it is more blessed to give than receive (Acts 20:35).

Conclusion

Christians will not be unaffected by the tragedies and struggles of life. There were times when Jesus was deeply grieved. Likewise, there are times when we will share His sorrow. However, we can be sustained by the hopeful knowledge of our salvation. Happiness comes in many forms. It can come in the sound of a joyful song and it can come in the quiet calm of faith.