

## Happiness Through a Spiritual Perspective

Happiness is first and foremost a mindset, a way of thinking, even an attitude. Most people are chasing after happiness through material goods and worldly pleasures. If they capture it, it is for a short time only. The reality is that physical pleasure and material happiness is fleeting. Everyone knows in the back of their mind that if we are currently healthy, it will not last; and if we are wealthy, we cannot take it with us. I have never seen a hearse with a U-haul trailer.

I am reminded of the story of the guy being lectured by his doctor, “You have a heart problem. You must lose weight and exercise every day. Eat no fat or sugar, limit your alcohol, no more sex, and take these five different prescriptions every day. There is no reason why you can’t live a completely normal life as long as you don’t try to enjoy it.”

### Rejoice Always

The Bible commands us to be joyful, to rejoice in all things. This is only possible if your circumstances do not determine your joy. The authors of the Bible had mastered the art of being joyful in all circumstances through a spiritual perspective. Their joy was determined by their relationship with Christ, and what He was doing in their life. My favorite example of this was Paul in his Letter to the Philippians. Paul’s circumstances could hardly be worse. When he wrote Philippians, he was in jail in Rome awaiting a possible execution. He had spent 3-4 years in prison awaiting a trial. The Philippians were legitimately concerned about Paul’s well being and his future. Paul wrote to them to alleviate their fears and report on what God was doing in the midst of his circumstances.

Instead of detailing the humiliation of being a prisoner, how unfair it was that he was falsely accused, and the physical pain involved; Paul reported that his “circumstances had actually turned out for the greater progress of the gospel”. The whole Praetorian Guard had been exposed to the gospel. The imperial guards of Caesar, by guarding Paul, were coming to Christ. Also, the Christians in Rome by way of Paul’s example were becoming bolder in sharing their faith. Paul said he was rejoicing because no matter what happened to him, Christ would be exalted.

I can just imagine Paul’s opponents who were trying to stop him and trying to halt the spread

of the gospel. When they said “let’s throw him in prison”, Paul said, “Fantastic, I get to share Christ with these guards that I would never have had access to without being in prison”. When they said, “Oh yeah, then we will execute him”, Paul said “Even better, Christ will be even more exalted by my death, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain, for to go and be with Christ is very much better”. Therefore they said, “We will fix him, we’ll let him go”. Paul said, “Super, if I am to live on it will mean fruitful labor for Christ, for I long to continue with my disciples for their progress in the faith”.

What can an angry world do to suppress such joy? Many of the people of Paul’s world were drawn to him. They wanted the joy he had, to know the source of such rejoicing.

### The Gift of Joy

God has given us the gift of joy in Jesus. From time to time, we get distracted and lose sight of that gift, yet it is always there to be found. Jesus always loves us and is always patiently waiting for us to come back to Him. No matter what happens, we have Jesus, and no tragedy or problem can take Him away. As the song says, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” Victor Hugo said it well, “The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved, loved for ourselves, or rather loved in spite of ourselves”. This type of unconditional love only comes from above, and it is a heavenly love. It is received through our abiding relationship with Christ. This is what C.S. Lewis meant when he said, “God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.”

People can find some rest in tranquilizers, but they wear off. They can find some distraction in recreation, but you must return to reality. They can anesthetize their troubles with alcohol, but wake up with a hang-over. You can try to stay so busy you escape reality, but it will not go away. God made us to have a loving relationship with Him and nothing else will do. Our difficulty is in yielding control over our life to Jesus. When we are immersed in this world and the things of this world, we are controlled by our desires and our circumstances; this is why Jesus said, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be added”. One theologian commenting on the importance of letting the Lord control our life said, “Joy is the flag that flies over the castle of our hearts announcing that the king (Jesus) is in residence sitting on the throne of our heart.”

## Seeing Yourself Biblically

When you carefully study the characters and stories in the Bible you see a bunch of very flawed people making mistakes. In spite of their flaws, in spite of their sins, God loves them, reached out for them, forgave them, and took steps to change them from the inside out. Are we any different? We must approach God humbly as sinners, but knowing that God loves us and has a wonderful plan for us. Since God has forgiven you, you must forgive yourself for being selfish, unlovable, irritable, and much more. You must live as a forgiven person. Define yourself as one loved by God. You are very valuable and worthwhile to the Lord. This is a spiritual perspective. The worldly perspective is that my self worth is based on my possessions, my accomplishments, and my human relationships. When I draw life from being loved by God instead of love from the world, I am spiritually alive. I have traded the riches of this world for the “pearl of great value” (Matt.13:46) which is the kingdom of heaven. When we live this way, we acknowledge that we are weak but He is strong.

This spiritual thinking makes you immune to the disapproval of people. In John 5:44, Jesus told the Pharisees that one of their problems that prevented their belief in Him was that their value system was built on seeking glory or approval from each other instead of from God. This type of “relative righteousness” has always controlled the thinking of people. It is only when we identify our true identity as a child of God that we gain autonomy from the peer pressure and the bondage of human approval that makes the world go round.

## The Flesh vs. the Spirit

Romans 8:6 says, “the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace”. That is quite a contrast and the author assumes that everyone will choose the mindset on the Spirit, especially when he goes on to say, “those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Practically, how do we get this mind set on the Spirit? Romans 6 tells us what we must KNOW, what we must CONSIDER (account as true), and what we must physically do or as he says PRESENT.

KNOW—that in Christ you are a new person with a new Master. You are freed from sin, freed from the chains of this world, and freed from the fear of death. Know that the life you now

live, you live for the Lord.

CONSIDER—yourself dead to sin, meaning separated from it, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore you no longer have to let the desires of your flesh rule over your life, and control your thinking.

PRESENT—your physical body to the Lord in service, worship, and devotion; as opposed to the old self that presented yourself to lusts and sinful pleasures. Present yourself dedicated to “renewing your mind” by the Word of God. Kill off everything that is still trying to hold you prisoner. You have had massive input from the world we live in, now you need new spiritual input to transform your thinking. Rom.12:1-2 expresses this, “present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”. Go to God in prayer constantly seeking God’s thinking as Isaiah said to God, “You will keep in peace all whose thoughts are fixed on You”. Participate in memorials like the Lord’s Supper remembering that the bread represents Jesus’ body broken for us, and the wine represents His blood shed for us. Bible studies are vitally important to reveal spiritual truth, transform your mind, and convict you of God’s will. Be immersed in the Word. Seek experiences in service—you won’t know where your gifts are and what you enjoy doing until you serve in many capacities. The “foot washing” experience is all-important to getting out of yourself and into the Lord.

Let me close with Paul’s words in Phil.4:8, “Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things...and the God of peace will be with you.”

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