



"We either make ourselves happy or miserable. The amount of work is the same."

—Carlos Castaneda

24-Nov-17

Be Happy (Part One)

At one time or another in our lives, we have all watched small children at play. Perhaps we saw them playing in a park or in a school playground. Most likely, they were carefree and happy. Their faces beamed with simple [joy](#), delighted to be having fun and being with their friends.

Is this what Jesus meant when He said to the disciples "I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the [kingdom of heaven](#)" ([Matthew 18:3](#))? Children have such a different attitude and demeanor than adults, one that is caring, hopeful, and trusting. When their basic needs are met, they tend to be happy and content.

As we become adults, though, the pressures of life, work, and experience all contribute to wearing us down, and our perspective changes. Only a few individuals seem to have learned to remain happy in life despite [the world](#) falling to pieces around them.

Instead, this world is filled with people who are tumbling deeper into the abyss of negativity and hopelessness. They see the culture becoming more violent and perverse, as well as hatreds rising quickly to the surface between

various groups. Despite our technological advances, depression and overwhelming sadness are a plague of our times, proving that humanity is being led by [Satan](#), the [god](#) of this age ([II Corinthians 4:4](#)), who is working continually to destroy mankind. What better way to do so than to promote the attitudes of negativity, perversity, hatred, and violence?

However, we know there is hope for positive change. Since our calling, we have been learning the way to live differently, becoming enriched by the [wisdom](#) and knowledge that the Creator God has revealed to us. His way is positive, looking forward to a very different future than what the world sees. We have the resources from Him to be happy even in a world that is headed toward Armageddon.

Researchers have found seven distinctive attitudes in happy people. What does it mean to be happy? Dictionaries define *happy* as "favored by luck or fortune; delighted, pleased, or glad; characterized by or indicative of pleasure, contentment, or joy; marked by an atmosphere of good fellowship; friendly." Some synonyms, among others are "cheerful," "contented," "delighted," "elated," "glad," "joyful," "upbeat," "blessed," and "chipper."

So, how do we become happy and maintain it? First on the list of attitudes of happy people is *gratitude*. Gratitude or thankfulness must be practiced, and it is most effective when done routinely. To be truly effective, it must become a part of a person's character. Researchers have learned that gratefulness increases positive emotions, dispelling the negative ones. Other studies have found that individuals who possess a strong sense of gratitude—who have it ingrained in their characters—score higher on life-satisfaction surveys.

The apostle Paul exhorts us in [I Thessalonians 5:18](#), "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Of course, our deepest gratitude needs to be directed at God the Father and [Jesus Christ](#). We probably thank God for our calling, His forgiveness, our spiritual gifts, His providence, our family, and many other "big" things, but do we thank Him for the little things? When we are grateful for the minor blessings we receive throughout the day—seeing a beautiful part of His creation, hearing a favorite song on the radio, finding a desired item on sale, enjoying a moment of rest and peace—we come to a greater awareness of how active He is in our lives. That should make us, not just thankful, but also content and at ease.

Appreciating the little things is what contentment is made of. If we are thankful for the minor things that make us smile, that we know are blessings from God, it is a good sign we are on the right path to happiness. The old saying about stopping and smelling the roses is a true one. If we do this, we will feel satisfied that we have enjoyed the years that God has given to us.

The psalmist writes, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations" ([Psalm 100:4-5](#)). Christians know that God is the source of everything and the One who provides for and prospers those on the earth. Being thankful to Him continually will put us in the proverbial attitude of gratitude.

The second attitude of happy people is that *they don't sweat the small stuff*. The "small stuff" are the things we have no control over, things we cannot change. If we are not careful, we will begin obsessing over things that do not matter, trying to micromanage minor issues, and allowing trivial irritations to sidetrack us. Research has shown that people who focus on things that go right instead of what goes wrong set themselves up for long-term contentment and greater resilience when dealing with negative events in life.

Jesus says something similar in [Matthew 6:25-27](#) (*New Living Translation*):

That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

Paul writes in [Philippians 4:6-7](#): "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the [peace](#) of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Third, happy people *see the glass as half-full*. They are generally optimistic. They beat down pessimism and look on the bright side by focusing their time and energies on areas where they have control, not allowing adversity in one area of life encroach into other areas. They are mentally nimble enough to change directions or strategies if something goes awry.

These kinds of people understand that everything in this life is temporary. If a person realizes that life's road will have bumps but that they will not last forever, he can manage his troubles with hope. Their attitude of optimistic realism tends toward greater success—and happiness.

Again, the apostle Paul gives apropos advice: ". . . while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things that are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things not seen are eternal" ([II Corinthians 4:18](#)). If we know that God's overall purpose—as well as His purpose for us as individuals—will prevail, we can face life with a smile and see the silver lining of any cloud.

In Part Two, we will cover the remaining four attitudes of happy people.

- Gary Montgomery

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Joy: What Is It?](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

There are difficulties in translating from Greek and Hebrew to English, as well as comprehending spiritual truths with a fleshly mind. It is only through God's Holy Spirit we can comprehend those truths at all. Even with God's Holy Spirit, we have difficulty. Our minds are too finite, earthbound, and dumb to comprehend what God is trying to get across to us. We are not equipped to comprehend the width, length, and breadth of the knowledge of God. Few of us are truly wise, knowing as we do only the rudiments of what is contained in the Bible. All of us are stumped on different biblical

concepts. The concept of joy may provide difficulty, as it has a broad range of meaning from spiritual to physical extremes. Even certain unsavory elements in society may bring people joy. Godly joy (New Testament) is on a higher plane than happiness and pleasure, what C. S. Lewis would describe as an "unsatisfied desire to be in total union with God." Joy comes from anticipating the future with godly hope. The fruits of the Spirit mortify and transcend the works of the flesh through the power of God's Holy Spirit. Without God's Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit (including joy) are unattainable. Godly joy buoys people in the midst of grave trials, providing hope for a future eternal reward, depending on the absolute faithfulness of God. A Christian (who by definition has Christ's mind in him) can express joy because he sees God, as well as precious things God has not even revealed to angels. If God is in us, we have all the power we will need, giving us exceeding joy, a positive perception of reality generating hope, ultimately seeing beyond any event to our incredible, inexpressible, eternal reward. Joy constitutes the pure elation of spirit that revels in knowing God, knowing that His eternal plan will culminate in our ultimate salvat

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Ecclesiastes and Christian Living \(Part Seven\): Contentment](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

A major theme of the book of Ecclesiastes is satisfaction. In his wisdom, Solomon assiduously sought out the answer to the question, "What brings a person true satisfaction?" John Ritenbaugh proposes that God desires far more for us than mere satisfaction: He wants to give us real contentment, a state that comes only through a relationship with Him.

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