

How To Be Happy Series #1
The Enigma Of Happiness
By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. Happiness has become a hot topic

1. Psychology Today reported that in 2008, 4,000 books were published on the topic of happiness – up from a total of 50 in 2000.
2. Any informal survey of people will reveal that not too many people describe themselves as extremely happy, rather, most of us seem to be looking for the secret that will suddenly bring us that elusive feeling
3. Quite a number of people seem to be unhappy
 - a. these include people with personal or family problems, those who are depressed, or those who have experienced a serious defeat or stress
 - b. those who study human personality and other traits, tell us that some people have a temperament called Melancholy, that naturally tends to a more negative, critical view of life, and who find it difficult to enjoy a positive or happy disposition
4. Even our Declaration of Independence urges us to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, something that Americans spend most of their life's time, energy and money searching for
5. There are countless books, seminars, workshops, counseling professionals, drugs and more that exist for the main purpose of helping people become happy
6. Even among Christians, there is a rather intense effort to convince us that God really wants us to be happy
 - a. I won't dispute the idea, it's just that our methods are sometimes wrong
 - b. after all, even Jesus said he came to give us "life, and have it abundantly"

B. Illustration – Not everybody agrees with all this happiness stuff

Eric Wilson, professor of English at Wake Forest University, wanted to become a happier person. He at least wanted a smile on his face, rather than the scowl people were used to seeing. Friends urged him on to a sunny disposition. He purchased books to become happy, watched only uplifting movies, and inserted "Great!" and "Wonderful!" into his conversations. But none of these things helped, and the professor went back to being his usual melancholy self. Turning against what he calls "the

happiness movement," he wrote the book *Against Happiness*. He believes Americans are fixated on happiness—to the extent of even fostering "a craven disregard" for whatever shows a mere hint of melancholy.

The happiness movement bloomed in the 1990s, motivated by scientific studies on the brain and the rise of "positive psychology." But now there's a backlash against a philosophy that says "normal sadness is something to be smothered, even shunned." Further study has actually discovered that "being happier is not always better." Those who know some discontent are motivated to improve their lot in life and the condition of their community.

"If you're totally satisfied with your life and with how things are going in the world, you don't feel very motivated to work for change," says Ed Diener, an author who has written a book similar to Wilson's. Diener notes that when experiencing a negative mood, "you become more analytical, more critical, and more innovative. You need negative emotions, including sadness, to direct your thinking."

All of this seems to echo something Solomon wrote long ago: "There's a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." The greatest teacher of them all—Christ—was also quick to point out that those who mourn are those who are blessed indeed.

Happiness has its place, as does sadness—and they both have a place in the wider sphere of joy. -- Ted DeHass, Bedford, Iowa; source: Sharon Begley, "Happiness: Enough Already," *Newsweek* magazine (2-11-08), pp. 50-52

B. This month we're going to take a look at some of what the Bible says about happiness

1. We need to do this because, like it or not, we're immersed in a society that's over its head in a sea of purportedly happiness producing stuff
2. Advertisers know that your desire for happiness drives you to shop for everything from soap to fur coats
3. Religious and philosophical messages strive to pull you in one direction or another under the guise of helping you find happiness
4. The varying swelling and receding of spiritual interest and involvement often reveals more about the state of happiness among people than anything else
5. Popular Christian authors and speakers are often popular, not because they have a good or truthful message, but because they help people feel good
6. I've heard people say that the reason they go to church is because it is where they expect to come away happier, feeling better, etc.

C. I want you to be happy, but happy isn't the only thing you need

1. Let's see if we can better understand a biblical view of happiness
2. Then let's try to be happy like God wants us to be happy

I. LET'S GET SERIOUS ABOUT HAPPINESS

A. Begin by tossing out trite, frivolous approaches to happiness

1. A song from several years back – “Don’t Worry, Be Happy”
 - a. I liked the song, it’s catchy, sort of fun to sing
 - b. but there’s a message about happiness that just not true
 - c. the message is, just let all your troubles and problems roll off your back and don’t worry about a thing – just be happy

2. This is what I call the “ignore real life” approach to happiness
 - a. I’ll admit that it’s better than the guy who allows every little thing become a crushing blow
 - b. but real, abiding happiness doesn’t come from choosing to become voluntarily ignorant and immune to life

3. I wrote an article about this recently
 - a. I used an illustration of a guy who went to church where they had sung about 100 times, the chorus of a song that included the words, “hallelujah anyway”
 - b. he said a fellow took the microphone and confessed that he was broke, had lost his job, had lost his truck, was about to lose his house, and his kids were on drugs, but “hallelujah anyway”
 - c. the guy said that somehow things just didn’t make sense – and he’s right – that’s a false happiness waiting to crash

B. Maybe we ought to say that it’s OK not to be happy, at least occasionally

1. Here’s some truth you might need to hear – not everything that happens in life will make you happy
 - a. there are some things that make you sad
 - b. there are things that will break your heart and make you cry

2. I want you to know that even scripture tells us that’s OK
 - a. Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 -- 1 There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven— 2 A time to give birth and a time to die; A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. 3 A time to kill and a time to heal; A time to tear down and a time to build up. 4 A time to weep and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance. 5 A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. 6 A time to search and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep and a time to throw away. 7 A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; A time to be silent and a time to speak. 8 A time to love and a time to hate; A time for war and a time for peace. — NAS

 - b. John 11:33–35 -- 33 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, 34 and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” 35 Jesus wept. — NAS (Isa 53 – man of sorrows)

II. WHAT IS HAPPINESS

A. Illustration

Happiness is ... well, I don't really have to complete that sentence, do I? You know what happiness is. You've either experienced it, the opposite of it, or both. You know what happiness is as well as I do. And given the alternative, perhaps you'd agree with me that it is preferred to unhappiness, but do you agree with me that God cares about our happiness?¹

1. Well, I agree and disagree all at the same time
 - a. yes, I think I know what happiness is in the sense that we all do – we've experienced it, or its opposite
 - b. then again, some of us are never happy unless we have a dictionary definition to go by
2. To that end I offer the following
 - a. a state of well-being and contentment
 - b. a pleasurable or satisfying experience
3. Being the analytical sort I sometimes am, such a definition leaves me unhappy!
 - a. what about those who do not experience a state of well-being, in any sense, yet who are happy?
 - b. what about those who are content with life, but who are unhappy?
 - c. what about those who go from one pleasurable and satisfying experience to another, yet who are never happy
 - d. what about people who have nothing of the world's riches, have no status among people, have few trinkets and baubles, no money, no modern technology, but are happy?
 - e. when you think about it, happiness is pretty hard to pin down

B. Make a list of things that make you happy and you'll discover some odd things

1. Money – really? Did you know some of the most unhappy people are those who have tons of it?
2. Children – really? The very same child who makes you happy one moment can make you wish you'd never met them the next
3. A good job – really? What for? The money? Oops!
4. Make your list and what I want you to see is that while everything on it might at one time be a source of well-being and contentment, or provide a pleasurable and satisfying experience, it can turn around and bite you

C. Some say happiness is a state of mind, one that we can choose to have or not have

1. Some truth there
2. It does seem to be something of an attitude about life

III. HAPPINESS IS A CHOICE

A. The most surprising thing in this whole discussion is that you can decide to be happy

1. Part of our problem with happiness is that we think we should be happy all the time
2. We think happiness depends on all of life being enjoyable and pleasurable
3. If your happiness depends on your circumstances, then there will be plenty of times when you will not be happy at all
4. If happiness is something you choose, something you decide for yourself, then despite the circumstances of life, you can be happy
5. This sounds like double-talk until you take a look at scripture

B. In counseling, one of the most powerful methods to help people deal with depression, anxiety and other maladies that are marked by sadness or excessive worry, is to teach them how to think differently – it's called cognitive therapy

1. Many people suffer from two things gone wrong
 - a. thinking that focuses on the negative, hurtful things of life
 - b. emotions that relive the pain and misery of the hurtful things of life
 - c. experts tell us that a lot of depression (and lesser forms of general sadness) is a result of wrong thinking and wrong emotions
 - d. the result is that people think of themselves as unhappy
2. But change thinking and a person can eventually modify their emotions, and become happy instead of unhappy
3. Think that's not biblical – think again
 - a. Philippians 4:6–7 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. — NAS
 - b. Paul instructs us to exercise our faith
 - 1) prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
 - 2) make your requests known to God
 - 3) unstated here is something assumed – trust and confidence in God
 - 4) the result is a peace that goes beyond comprehension, a peace that does double duty
 - a) it guards your heart
 - b) it guards your mind
 - c) when that happens, you're going to be happy not unhappy

CONCLUSION

A. Most of the world believes that happiness depends on circumstances of life

1. If they're good and positive, then you can be happy
2. If they're bad and negative, then you're going to be unhappy
3. But this does not explain two things
 - a. those who are happy in the middle of bad, negative circumstances
 - b. those who are unhappy in the middle of good, positive circumstances
4. The truth is that real happiness comes from a different source

B. We're going to explore that source in future lessons

1. Let me say as we bring this lesson to a close, if you're unhappy, you need to know there is hope
2. Jesus came to bring good news to people
 - a. we sometimes limit that good news to salvation and eternal life
 - b. but salvation and eternal life are things that happen now, not just somewhere down the road at judgment day
 - c. Jesus came to make some things happen, and to teach you how to live a life of peace, confidence and strength
3. Those are much better keys to happiness than your circumstances are

C. Invitation