

About Being Happy

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When I was young, happiness was different than it is now. It was the same quest, I suppose, but it had more to do with things than it does now. Happiness came from having. It came from presents, from approval among your peers, from scoring the winning run or the most points, from thinking you were so important to a project that it just wouldn't be as good without you. Then, happiness was more in having than in being.

Men have forever sought to explain happiness. I have, in my own little philosophical world, joined the hunt. It's hard to look in the dictionary and find a definition that fits what I think in my own little philosophical world. The lexicographers don't define happiness very well--no better, in fact, than I do. I'm not sure why it's so hard. Maybe because it runs in too many different directions. Maybe because it never settles in one place for very long. Happiness seldom comes when you think it should. It very often comes from some serendipitous occasion, some time when you least expected it. And when it leaves, the taste left is often more bittersweet than confectionery like you thought it would be.

By the process of living life you can eliminate some things which don't bring happiness. While it's a lesson never quite learned, time teaches all of us that having is not happiness. You don't have to be rich to learn that riches don't often bring happiness. Far too many examples exist of people who have had bundles of what this life offers and been miserable, totally forlorn. Experience also teaches that being comfortable is not what happiness is all about. Lots of folks don't hurt and they still aren't happy, while some live every day with almost intolerable pain and they are extremely so. Why is that? Neither is happiness guaranteed by having notoriety. I have known people in my time who have become what the world denominates as "superstars" and they have only endless complaints and chronic bouts of disconsolance, while some of my former classmates who, as the world views things, never even "made it", are ecstatically happy. Why?

I have made some small decisions about happiness. They aren't very impressive, perhaps, but they come from someone who cares.

First, we need to learn that happiness doesn't come from externalities, but from being right with God. Making God first in your life is what happiness is all about--because it takes your joy out of the realm of what happens and puts it up into eternity where it belongs. If you want to be happy--truly blessed--get right with God (Matthew 5:1-12). It's where you'll find the "peace that passeth understanding."

Second, put your confidence in small bunches of good little things, not in one big, bulky

aspiration. For instance, learn to enjoy some obscure thing: some good piece of art from someone who paints for fun; some good performance from some unknown artist; some delightful scene somewhere off the beaten path. Savor some good food; experience some new, exciting thought; give yourself to God in meditation and prayer--out loud--where no one can hear but you and Him. Read Philippians 4:6-8. That's what it says.

Third, be who you are. You can't be truly happy when you're trying to be someone other than yourself. There's great peace in being satisfied with who and what you are. And we'd all be a lot more pleased with our lives if we'd just stop trying to be the star of the show, too. After all, everybody can't be a star. Besides, it seems to me that I'm happier when I'm just one of the crowd. I rather enjoy just being part of the nameless number gathered around to watch the big guys do their thing. Read Galatians 6:3-4. It says that.

Happiness comes when you can learn to cry unashamedly or laugh confidently; when you can learn to tell the truth quietly; when you can be important to somebody else's happiness without being boastful; when you are willing to run the risk of being vulnerable by caring; when you can go ahead and get involved knowing you're going to get egg on your face. I guess what it all comes down to is humility, knowing that without God you're just not much. Read Romans 12:3-10. It says all that.

Well, I reckon I didn't help you much. Actually, I have done little to define happiness, less to describe it, really not much to even identify it. But I feel pretty happy about getting to try. And I'm sure happy you took time to read what I said. Thanks.

By the way--you can't possibly be truly happy if you don't come to Jesus.