

Joy, Happiness

(Happiness Is A Serious Problem by Dennis Prager)

Gal 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (G5479 – chara = cheerfulness, joy)

Introduction

- Happiness is not a selfish or frivolous concern; it is as **deep** and **worthy** a subject as good and evil. Human beings want to be happy, and they have a right to want to be. Far from being a selfish goal, this is one of the **distinguishing features** of human beings. To the extent that animals can be said to want anything, what they want is to avoid pain and to be sated, but not to be happy. For better and for worse, this is a **uniquely human** aim.



Part I - Premises (Things we assume to be true)

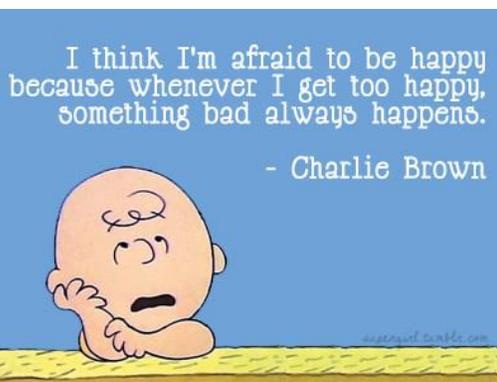
1 Happiness Is a Moral Obligation

- We tend to think that we owe it to ourselves to be as happy as we can be. It's True!
- We do not enjoy being around others who are usually unhappy.
- People act more decently when they are happy.
- Unhappy religious people reflect poorly on their religion and on their Creator

Psalm 144:15 Happy are the people whose God is the LORD!

2 Unhappiness Is Easy — Happiness Takes Work

- When I am unhappy I tell myself that I am taking the easy way out, that happiness is a *battle to be waged* and *not a feeling to be awaited*.



- Many (**wrongly**) assume that happiness is a “feeling” and that this feeling comes as a “result of good things that happen” to them. We therefore have little control over how happy we are, the thinking goes, because we can control neither how we feel nor what happens to us.

- **Happiness is** ... largely, though certainly not entirely, **determined by us**—through **hard work** (most particularly by controlling our nature) and through **attaining**

wisdom (i.e., developing attitudes that enable us not to despair).

Ecclesiastes 2:24 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should **enjoy good in his labor**. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.

3 The Mind Plays the Central Role

- While most people think of happiness as almost entirely a **heart-based feeling**—“I feel happy, I feel unhappy”—the focus should be on the mind. The use of one’s mind and intelligence is indispensable to achieving happiness. Why? Because in order to be happy, we constantly have to ask ourselves, “Will this—having this **thing**, taking this **action**, relating to this **person**, purchasing this **item**, even dwelling on this **thought**—make me **happier** or **unhappier**?” Answering these questions demands constant thought and reflection.

Deu 30:19-20 I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore **choose** life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days ...

4 There Is No Good Definition of Joy / Happiness

- Most of the important things in life cannot be precisely defined or measured (love, beauty)
- Happy = feeling or showing pleasure or contentment; fortunate
- To paraphrase the U.S. Supreme Court justice who, addressing the issue of obscenity, said, “I cannot define it, but I know it when I see it.”
- most of us *do think* we understand unhappiness and very much intend to avoid it.



Acts 17:20 For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean.

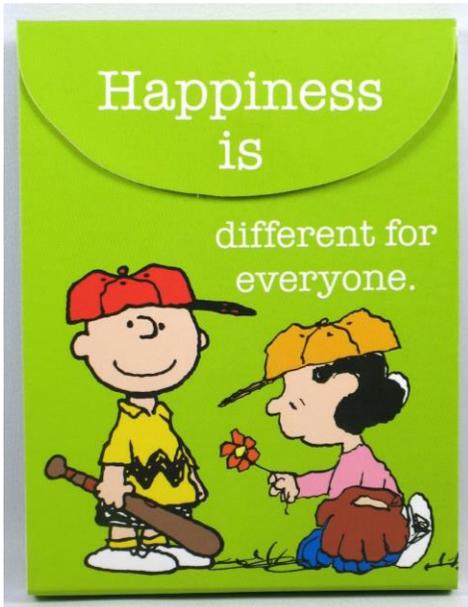
Ezekiel 37:18 When the sons of your people speak to you saying, 'Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?'

5 Life Is Tragic

- Suffering is real & yet sometimes motivates good actions
- Evil is real – not just “absence of good”
- Given how much unjust suffering and unhappiness there are, I am deeply grateful for how much misery I have been spared. Also, given the view that tragedy is normal, *I try to be happy unless something happens that makes me unhappy, rather than unhappy unless something makes me happy.*

Ecc 4:1 Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, But they have no comforter— On the side of their oppressors there is power, But they have no comforter.

Part II - Major Obstacles to Happiness and How to Deal with Them



6 Human Nature

- “If you are not completely satisfied with _____, give us a call.”
- Human nature is insatiable—and that is why no single obstacle to happiness is greater than human nature. Whatever our nature desires—**love, sex, money, attention, pleasure, food, security**—cannot be supplied in sufficient quantities to satisfy it completely.
- If it were in our nature to be “fully satisfied”, we would have **no motivation to accomplish anything** in either the worldly or the personal realm. Human dissatisfaction with disease has led to cures for illnesses; etc

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?

1Jn 2:16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

James 4:1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

Ecc 1:8 (NLT) Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content.

Rom 7:21-25 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

7 Comparing Ourselves with Others

- If all of us realized that the people with whom we (negatively) compare our happiness are plagued, we would stop comparing our happiness with others’. We do not know with what inner demons—emotional, psychological, economic, sexual, or related to alcohol or drugs—they have to struggle.

Gal 6:4 (NLT) Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else.

8 Images



- From childhood on, nearly all of us have **images of how our lives should be**. It might be an image of our **work**—how successful, famous, or affluent we will be; or an image of our **spouse**—how sexy a wife or how wealthy and loving a husband we will have; or an image of our **children**—how happy and loving they will be. The problem, of course, is that only in rare cases do people’s spouses, work, or children live up to their images. Images, after all, are perfect, and life is not.

- **The solution** to this problem If unhappiness is measured by the difference between your image and your reality, unhappiness can be reduced **by** either dropping your images and celebrating your reality **or** keeping your images and changing your reality.
- Just as comparing our **personal** reality to images often wreaks havoc with the *decent* but imperfect life that we lead, comparing **society** to some *perfect* image often leads to making a worse society (such as Russia, China, etc).

Ecc 6:9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

9 The Missing Tile Syndrome

- One of human nature’s most effective ways of sabotaging happiness is to look at a beautiful scene and fixate on **whatever is flawed or missing**, no matter how small.
- Once you have determined what your missing tile is and whether acquiring it will really make you happy, you should do one of three things: **get it, forget it, or replace it** with a different tile. If you do not do one of these three things, you will allow the missing tile to make you unhappy.

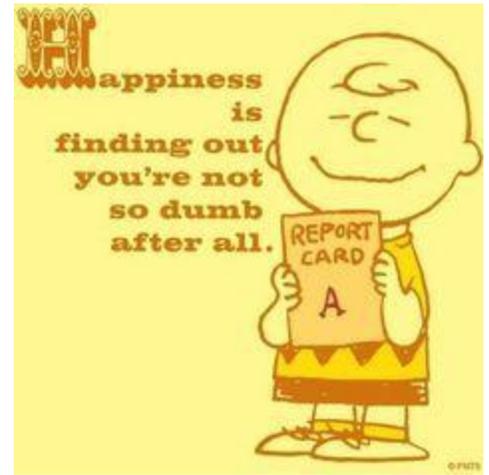


Mat 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Psa 20:4 May He grant you according to your heart's desire, And fulfill all your purpose.

10 Equating Happiness with Success

- When most people think of success they think of **professional** and **material** success. It is this type of success that **cannot** be equated with happiness. There are, however, myriad forms of success that do lead to happiness: success in love, in relationships, in child rearing, in touching others' lives, in becoming deeper, in gaining wisdom, in doing good, and in learning about oneself.
- Success at work cannot be equated with happiness, but work can still be a major source of happiness—if the work is joyful and meaningful.



Job_6:13 Is my help not within me? And is success driven from me?

Job_30:22 You lift me up to the wind and cause me to ride on it; You spoil my success.

11 Equating Happiness with Fun



- To a child, the notion that fun is distinguishable from happiness is simply inconceivable. As adults, many of us continue to hold on to this belief—which is unfortunate, because equating fun with happiness is a great obstacle to happiness.

- Most people believe that happiness and fun are virtually identical. Ask them, for example, to imagine a scene of happy people. Most people immediately conjure up a picture of people **having fun** (e.g., laughing, playing games, drinking at a party). Few people imagine a couple raising children, a couple married thirty years, someone reading a great book, or people doing any of the other **things that really do bring happiness**.

- The major difference between fun and happiness: fun is **temporary**; happiness is **ongoing**. Or to put it another way, fun is **during**, happiness is **during & after**.
- If you can have fun while doing what is significant—raising a family, working at your profession, volunteering with the needy—you will truly be a happier person.

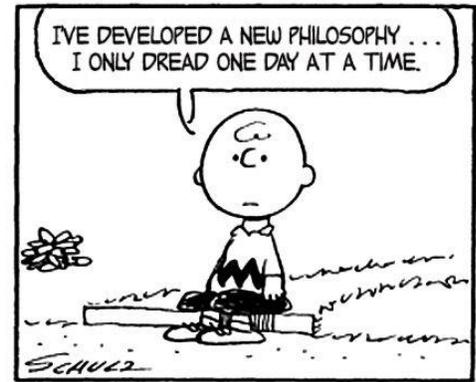
Pro_14:13 Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, And the end of mirth may be grief.

Ecc_2:1-2 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also was vanity. I said of laughter—"Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?"

Ecc_7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

12 Fear and Avoidance of Pain

- A problem with the idea that Fun = Happiness?? One of its worst consequences is reinforcement of the belief that if you want to be happy, you should **avoid pain**. After all, if fun leads to happiness, pain must lead to unhappiness.
- **Nothing could be less true. Everything that leads to happiness involves pain.** While it is widely acknowledged that success in professional life and in sports, to cite two examples, is associated with pain (e.g., hard work, self-discipline, delayed gratification), success in happiness is almost never associated with pain.
- As a result, many people avoid some of the very things that would bring them the deepest happiness, such as marriage, children, intellectually challenging pursuits, religious commitment, and volunteer work. They fear the pain that inevitably accompanies such things and therefore devote more time to “fun” things that bring little happiness, such as watching television.
- Many people seem to want this epitaph: “I led as painless a life as possible.” But the purpose of life is not to avoid pain. That is the purpose of an animal’s life—but animals cannot know happiness. Many today were raised to believe a pain-free life is possible.



Psa 126:5 Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy.



13 Expectations

- Buddhism teaches: Pain in life comes from unfulfilled **desires & expectations**. Based on this understanding, it aims to do away with both.
- Western society, whose religious and humanistic traditions **hold desires to be acceptable**, has been the source of most modern medical progress -- a desire for health, cause people to work to discover cures & vaccines for illnesses.
- Minimizing **expectations** is both realistic and highly desirable. In general, ***expectations lead to unhappiness***.
- For most people in most circumstances, **expectations** are unnecessary impediments to happiness. When expectations are unfulfilled they cause gratuitous pain, and when they are fulfilled, they diminish gratitude, the most important element in happiness.
- **Gratitude**, the most important component of happiness, is largely dependent upon ***receiving what we do not expect to receive***. That is why, for example, when we give

children so much that they come to *expect more and more*, we actually **deprive** them of the ability to be happy—because they have less and less gratitude. This is why it is so important to teach children always to say “Thank you”—not only because it is the decent thing to do, but because saying the words inculcates gratitude in the person saying them.



- This is one of many reasons that religion, when done correctly, is important to happiness—People who **give thanks to God** before each meal, for example, regularly inculcate gratitude in themselves.
- One should not assume for a moment that a **lack of expectations** means not being **ambitious**, not aspiring toward the highest **goals**, or not **thinking positively**. However, not having expectations does ensure two beautiful things: **minimum suffering** over unfulfilled goals and **profound gratitude** over goals that are fulfilled. There is little in life that gives so much at so little cost as not having expectations.

Pro 13:12 **Hope** (ie **expectation**) deferred makes the heart sick, But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.

Luke 6:35 (NASB) "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, **expecting** nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.

14 Family



- Little in life can bring us the happiness that we derive from our family. A parent’s love for a child is perhaps the most powerful positive force in human life, and the love between a husband and wife is unique in the intimacy and depth of its bond. The family, for good reasons, has been the building block of all higher civilizations. And **when good**, it is also our refuge in a hostile world. The operative words, however, are **when good**, for the family is not always good, and it can then present its members with serious obstacles to happiness.
- The family is a classic example of the rule that whatever brings the most happiness can also bring the greatest unhappiness - a living hell, such as when children are physically, sexually, or psychologically abused by parents or other family members, are raised by an alcoholic parent, or are abandoned by a parent

Pro 11:29 **Those who bring trouble on their families inherit the wind...**

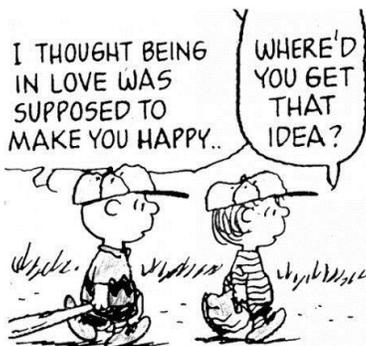
15 The World Has Too Much Pain

- General human suffering must affect the happiness of any sensitive and decent person. The ubiquity of human suffering—particularly the suffering of the innocent at the hands of those who deliberately hurt them (as contrasted with suffering due to natural causes)—has unquestionably affected many people’s happiness.
- So ... choose to fight evil
- Be happy, because unhappy people are usually less capable of doing good.
- You can look at the amount of suffering in the world and become **bitter** (this world stinks), **cynical** (nothing matters, it’s all just a roulette game), or **hedonistic** (with all this suffering, I’ll rack up all the fun I can)—or you can be **grateful** for your blessings.
- Our faith gives us confidence in a better World Tomorrow – the Kingdom of God



Isa_25:8 ... The Sovereign LORD will wipe away all tears... The LORD has spoken!

16 Seeking Unconditional Love



- Seeking **unconditional love** is a guarantor of unhappiness, because we would be seeking something that no one will give. **Adult love** is never unconditional. As much as any husband and wife love each other, there are—and should be—conditions under which a spouse’s love **can** be lost.
- Even God’s love of us is immense and forgiving (if we repent) but **not** unconditional.

Exo 19:5 Now if you will obey Me and keep My covenant, you will be My own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to Me.

17 Seeing Yourself as a Victim

- Given how destructive victimhood thinking is to happiness, one would think that people would do everything possible to avoid it. Unfortunately, this is not the case --we are usually the greatest obstacles to our own happiness.

2Co 4:8-9 We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.



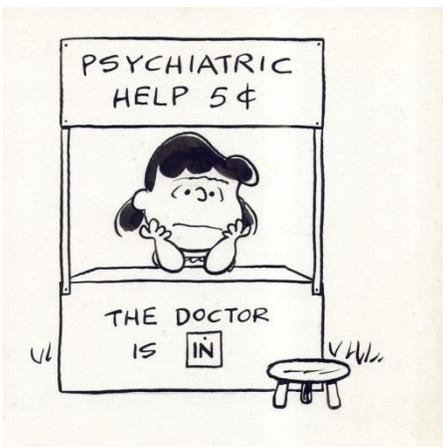
18 The Opposite Sex

- For most people, a loving relationship with someone of the opposite sex is an incomparable source of happiness. The marriage of a man and a woman can be the greatest antidote to loneliness & the greatest source of emotional growth and happiness.
- Nevertheless, men and women are so different from each other that the wonder is not that so many do “not” get along ... but that so many “do”.



Pro 30:18 There are three things that amaze me—no, four things that I don't understand:
Pro 30:19 how an eagle glides through the sky, how a snake slithers on a rock, how a ship navigates the ocean, how a man loves a woman.

19 Genes or Biochemistry



- This message is premised on the belief that unhappiness can be reduced ... by changes in one's **attitudes & philosophy of life**. Nevertheless, as much as any of us might wish that all unhappiness be **societally, psychologically, or philosophically treatable**, some just is not. Some of us are either born with a biological predisposition toward unhappiness or depression or acquire such a predisposition at some point

- As any parent can confirm—and studies increasingly show—we are born with certain personality traits. Some of us are born with a personality predisposed toward happiness and

some with a personality predisposed toward unhappiness; some of us have moody personas, and some of us have generally cheerful ones

Psa 34:18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
He rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

Pro 22:24 Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people

Coming soon ...

Attitudes and Behaviors

That Are Essential to Happiness

