

Joy and Happiness: Two Sides of the Same Coin

For most of the history of Christianity, Joy and Happiness were viewed as synonyms and were encouraged by church leaders to be sought. In modern day Christian circles a distinction has been made, which some would say has been harmful to Christians and the appeal of the gospel to non-believers. Following is a quiz to get us thinking (answer True or False):

- T F Christians should seek Joy (which is spiritual) but not Happiness (which is worldly)
- T F The Bible makes a distinction between Joy and Happiness
- T F If we are honest with ourselves, we all seek to be happy (Christians and non-Christians alike)
- T F Christians should be the happiest people group
- T F How and where we seek happiness matters

Key Happiness Ideas (John Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, Randy Alcorn, others):

1. All people desire happiness.
2. The gospel of Jesus Christ offers people both eternal happiness *and* present happiness.
3. People are drawn to Christ when they see true happiness in his followers and are pushed away when they see us chronically unhappy. [Luke 2:10 "... good news of great joy ..]
4. God is the sole origin of true happiness, and we should wholeheartedly seek our delight in him.

Question #1: Has the church and it's leaders for centuries viewed Joy and Happiness together and encouraged Christians to seek after both?

Answer #1: YES. Randy Alcorn in his book *Happiness* gives a large number of examples supporting this. Following are just a small sample:

Key point: All people naturally desire to be happy. The desire to be happy is NOT sinful or unspiritual!

Augustine (considered by many to be the most influential theologian in church history): "Every man, whatsoever his condition, desires to be happy" and "the last end [goal] of human life is...happiness."

Francis of Assisi: "Let us leave sadness to the devil and his angels. As for us, what can we be but rejoicing and glad?"

Charles Spurgeon: "God made human beings as He made His other creatures, to be happy...They are in their right element when they are happy"

C.S. Lewis “It is a Christian duty...for everyone to be as happy as he can.”

Martin Luther “It is pleasing to the dear God whenever thou rejoices or laughest from the bottom of thy heart.”

French philosopher Blaise Pascal “All men seek happiness. This is without exception.”

Puritan preacher Jonathon Edwards “There is no man upon the earth who isn’t earnestly seeking after happiness ...”

Aristotle “Happiness, then, is something final and self sufficient, and is the end of action.”

Anne Frank “We all live with the objective of being happy ...”

John Calvin “Human happiness...is to be unite with God...The chief activity of the soul is to aspire thither.”

Jonathon Edwards “Jesus knew that all mankind were in the pursuit of happiness. He has directed them in the true way to it, and He tells them what they must become in order to be blessed and happy.”

Question #2: Why has a distinction risen in recent years between Joy and Happiness, and seeking Happiness has been vilified? Should there be a distinction?

Answer #2: Multiple reasons why distinction has arose; but no distinction is warranted.

a) Dictionaries make no distinction:

Google definition of joy. Joy = “a feeling of great pleasure and **happiness**”

Merriam-Webster dictionary: Joy = “a feeling of great **happiness**” and “a source or cause of great happiness”

American Heritage dictionary: Joy = “intense and especially ecstatic or exultant **happiness**”

Collins English dictionary: Joy = “a deep feeling or condition of **happiness** or contentment.”

Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Joy = “**happiness** over an unanticipated or present good.”, and “On the spiritual level joy refers to the extreme **happiness** with which the believer contemplates salvation and the bliss of the afterlife.”

Dictionary of Bible Themes: Joy = “a quality or attitude of delight and **happiness**.”

b) Meanings of words change over time;

Multiple Hebrew & Greek words that mean blessed, joyful, gladness, happy, merry, etc.
Overlapping meanings.

Hebrew word *asher* and Greek word *makarios* - best modern day English equivalent is **happy**.
Phil 4:4 can be translated “Be happy in the Lord always, and again I say be happy”
Ps 37:4 GNT “Seek your happiness in the Lord, and he will give you your heart’s desire.”
John 16:24 CEV & GWT “Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask so that you can be completely happy.”

Many traditional translations often use blessed (which used to be defined closer to happy but meaning has drifted away from happy over the years e.g. 1828 Webster’s Dictionary: Blessed is defined as “made happy or prosperous; extolled; pronounced happy. Happy; prosperous in worldly affairs; enjoying spiritual happiness and the favor of God)

Read following subsisting Happy for Blessed:

Psalms 1

Psalms 119

Matthew 5:2-12 (Luke 6:20-23)

c) Joy and Happy are found in the same verses. Examples:

Ps 68:3 NET “The godly are happy; they rejoice before God and are overcome with joy.” NIV
“May the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful.”

Joel 2:21 (NCV) “Be happy and full of joy because the Lord has done a wonderful thing”

Joy and Happiness are synonyms in many verses across multiple translations. Example in NIV:
Esther 8:16; Ps 68:3; Zec 8:19

Question #3: Is God Happy? Does God want us to be happy?

Answer #3: YES and YES

God is happy! I Tim 1:11 and 6:15 “blessed God” can be translated “happy God”

Luke 15:6 GNT “I am so happy I found my lost sheep. Let us celebrate!”

God created a world of goodness (Genesis 1:31).

God rejoices over His people (Zeph 3:17)

God wants us happy now and for eternity!

All Christians will be eternally happy, living an eternal embodied life on a physical new earth (Is 51:11; Ps 16:11). New Heaven and New Earth (Mat 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rev chapters 21 & 22; Isaiah ch 60, ch 65; Luke 13:29; Is 25:6). God wants us to share in His happiness for eternity (Matt 25:19-23)

Great parties are thrown by God: the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14) and the great banquet (Luke 14:15-24). When God invites you to a party, say yes. You'll be happy you did!

Westminster Shorter Catechism "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

We should also be full of joy and happy now. Ps 118:24 "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Ps 16:9 NET "So my heart rejoices and I am happy."

Jesus wants us to live an abundant life (John 10:10)

(See also Ps 40:16; Ps 81:1; Ps 97:12; Ps 98:4; Prov 5:18; Eccl 9:7; Mat 5:12; Rom 12:15; Phil 2:18; I Thes 5:16-18; Zeph 3:14)

Question #4: Does it matter how and where we seek to find happiness?

Answer #4: YES. Seeking happiness through God and the teachings of His word will lead to present and eternal happiness. Seeking happiness in the things of the world MAY result in some short-term happiness, but NOT long-term and eternal happiness.

Question #5: What are ways to seek after meaningful, long-term happiness?

Answer #5: See below:

Happiness is fostered by eight factors according to a Duke study and the Bible:

- 1) Avoiding suspicion and resentment. Nursing a grudge was a major factor in unhappiness. Refer to Mark 11:25.
- 2) Not living in the past. An unwholesome preoccupation with old mistakes and failures leads to depression. Refer to Philippians 3:13-14.
- 3) Not wasting time and energy fighting conditions that can't be changed. People are happier when they cooperate with life instead of trying to run from it. Refer to Matthew 6:25,27.

- 4) Staying involved with the living world. Happiness increases when people resist the temptation to become reclusive during periods of emotional stress. Refer to Ecclesiastes 4:9-10.
- 5) Refusing to indulge in self-pity when handed a raw deal. It's easier for people to achieve happiness when they accept the fact that nobody gets through life without some sorrow and misfortune. Refer to Phil 4:11-12.
- 6) Cultivating old-fashioned virtues – love, humor, compassion and loyalty. Refer to 2 Peter 1:5-7.
- 7) Not expecting too much of oneself. When there is too wide a gap between self-expectation and a person's ability to meet the goals he or she has set, feelings of inadequacy are inevitable. Refer to Hebrews 4:16.
- 8) Finding something bigger to believe in. Self-centered, egoistical people score lowest in any test for measuring happiness. Refer to Matthew 6:33 and Philipians 2:3-4.

How can we experience consistent joy and happiness in our lives (I The 5:16 "Be joyful always")?

- 1) Focus on God, who is the ultimate source and object of our joy! Rejoice in God's works and in His empowering of us; remember God is the source of every good thing and every good gift (Ps 9:1, 16:8-9, 28:7, 35:9, 43:4, 92:4, 126:3; Lk 1:47; Rm 5:11; Acts 14:17; Phil 3:1, 4:4; James 1:17).
- 2) God's constant presence can bring us happiness (Joshua 1:9; Isaiah 41:10; Matt 28:20; I Cor 3:16; John 14:15-27). Brother Lawrence' "practicing the presence of God"
- 3) Keep an eternal perspective. Consider it joy even when we encounter various trials (Rm 5:3-4; II Cor 1:3-4; Jm 1:12; Acts 13:52; Rm 8:28). The hope of God and the hope of heaven should fill us with joy. We have eternal pleasures awaiting us in heaven! We will live happily ever after!! (Ps 16:11; Is 35:10; Rm 5:2, 12:2, 15:13; Rev 21:4).
- 4) Avoid worry! Pray instead (Phil 4:6-7; Mt 6:25-34).
- 5) Be filled with the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23; Rm 14:17; I Thes 1:6)
- 6) Be joyful when we are hated, ostracized, insulted and spurned for the sake of Jesus (Lk 6:22-23; Acts 13:52); persecution for Christ's sake enhances joy (Mt 5:11-12; John 15:18-21; Acts 5:41).

- 7) Follow the example of the angels, who experience joy and happiness over every sinner that repents (Lk 15:10). Sharing the gospel and believing in Jesus brings happiness (Luke 15:10; John 4:36; Acts 8:39; 13:48)
- 8) Ask Jesus, who said to ask in His name and then we will receive and have our joy made full (Jn 16:24). Remember that Jesus wants to give us His joy and have our joy full (Jn 15:9-17, 17:13). Abiding in Jesus brings joy (Jn 15:11).
- 9) There is great joy in having our children walk in the truth, so we should train them in the truth (II Jn 4; III Jn 3-4; Pv 10:1, 15:20, 22:6).
- 10) Being a good steward and serving the Lord (and other people) can bring joy and happiness (Mt 25:21,23, 23:11-12; Gal 6:9,10; Titus 3:8; Prov 14:21). Giving is a source of happiness (Acts 20:35; I Chron 29; 2 Cor 8 & 9).
- 11) Faith is a source of joy (Phil 1:25; Rm 15:13). Trusting God brings joy (Rm 15:13; Ps 28:7).
- 12) Learning and obeying the Word of God is a source of joy and happiness (Luke 11:27-28; James 1:25; Ps 19:7-8, 119, 128:1-2).
- 13) We can share in the joy and happiness of others; other believers can bring us joy and we can bring joy to them (Rm 12:15; I Cor 12:26; I Thes 2:19-20, 3:9; Phm 7; 2 Jn 12; Pv 15:30). Our obedience creates joy in others (Rm 16:19; Heb 13:7). We should rejoice with those who rejoice (Rm 12:15).
- 14) Remember that experience of sorrow can enlarge our capacity for joy (Jn 16:20; Rm 5:3-5; II Cor 1:4, 8:2; Heb 10:34; Jm 1:2)
- 15) Righteousness leads to joy and happiness (Pv 10:18, 23:24).
- 16) Making wise choices produces on-going happiness (Prov 1:26-27, 2:19,22, 3:35, 4:14-15, 6:27, 29, 32-33)
- 17) Confession and repentance leads to happiness (Prov 28:13; I John 1:9; Ps 32)
- 18) Making short-term sacrifices for sake of Christ leads to eternal happiness (Mark 10:29-30; Luke 14:12-14; I Cor 3:11-15, 4:5, 9:24-25; 2 Cor 5:9-10; Psalms 16:11)
- 19) Focusing on God's tremendous love for us can make us happy (Eph 2:4, 3:18-19)

- 20) Gratitude and focusing on God's grace and mercy stimulates happiness (I Thes 5:18; Psalms 30:12, 35:18; Phil 2:14, 17-18; Eph 2:4)
- 21) Focusing on God's forgiveness stimulates happiness (Romans 5:8-11; I John 1:9; John 10:27-28; Psalms 32)
- 22) Happy are those who are also holy (Rev 20:6)
- 23) Happy are those that are prepared for Christ's return (Rev 16:15, 22:7; Titus 2:13)
- 24) We can find joy in a job well done (Eccl 2:10, 3:12, 3:22)
- 25) Sin and unrighteousness kills ultimate happiness (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:23; Matthew 5:29)
- 26) Self-control is essential to happiness (Prov 25:28; 2 Peter 1:5-6)
- 27) Becoming a new person in Christ is the essence of happiness (2 Cor 5:17)
- 28) Happy are those that see unhappiness as a warning sign (Gal 4:15; Psalms 51:12)
- 29) Seeing the risen Jesus brought ultimate happiness to the disciples; so it will be for us! (John 20:20; Luke 24:33-53)
- 30) Laughter is healthy! Some benefits: distracts our attention; reduces tension; increases production of endorphins which are the body's natural painkillers.

Beware of False Expectations that Can Diminish Our Happiness!

- 1) God should give us whatever we want (glorified genie) (Phil 4:19)
- 2) Life will go smoothly and we'll always have health and wealth
- 3) Life will be fair and people will treat us nicely (John 16:33; Luke 6:34-35)
- 4) Church will always be a positive experience (Hebrews 10:25; Matt 16:18)
- 5) We won't be persecuted for our faith (John 15:18-21; I Peter 5:9)