

A Simple Way to Make the World a Healthier Place

"You can change the world. You really can. Oh, you can't fix the economy or solve world hunger or stop wars. But you can change your world. You can help a few people today, a few tomorrow."

That's a summary of my church's latest sermon series, "One Hundred Happy People." Renowned preacher and storyteller, Max Lucado (who also happens to be our pastor here in San Antonio), challenged the Oak Hills Church to make 100 people happy throughout the next 40 days. Our church body comprises 10,000 individuals.

If each one of us accepts this challenge and takes it seriously, positively impacting one million lives, what a difference could be made in our city! And beyond that, what a difference could be made in *us* ...

Mr. Lucado ended the sermon by expressing his eagerness to see how this challenge affects not just the people we seek to cheer up, help, or encourage, but how it will affect *us*, the happiness heralds, if you will. It's amazing how even the most curmudgeonly Scrooge can become the most beneficent saint when he allows the Holy Spirit to work in his life, replacing his heart of stone with the generous, gift-giving heart of our Father!

Jesus said that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and how true that is! Giving anything, be it a relaxing day at the spa for your spouse, an extravagant donation at a fundraiser, a ham sandwich to a beggar, or a simple smile to a crestfallen cashier at the supermarket, has the remarkable ability to bless both the giver and the receiver. I'm sure you would agree that there have been numerous occasions in which

you were on cloud nine just watching as someone unwrapped your gift or responded with a smile as you spoke light and life into their dreary day.

King Solomon wrote that a cheerful heart is good medicine. It's a poetic sentiment to be sure, but it also carries a substantial dose of medical truth! Take a look at a few facts and stats on the happiness-health connection:

- Studies have suggested that states of happiness may be associated with lower stress-related hormones and better immune function.
- Performing acts of kindness or altruism boosts moods.
- A 2012 review of more than 200 studies found a connection between positive psychological attributes, such as happiness, optimism and life satisfaction, and a lowered risk of cardiovascular disease.
- A study in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* found that people ages 60 and older who said they enjoyed life less were more likely to develop disability over an eight-year period.
- In studying the lives and deaths of the nuns, researchers were given clues to their emotional state and made this important discovery about happiness and health: Positive emotion is correlated with longevity! Of the most cheerful quarter of nuns, 90 percent was alive at the age of 85, whereas only 34 percent of the least cheerful quarter lived to that age. Similarly, 54 percent of the most cheerful fourth was alive at age 94, versus 11 percent of the least cheerful.

As you can see, happiness does much more than elicit a smile on one's face—it brings health to one's entire body! The One Hundred Happy People challenge, I believe, will inevitably reward the Oak Hills Church and its outreach with an all-encompassing sense of wellness, working its way from the inside out.

But whether or not you personally participate in this 40-day challenge (by the way, you can follow the challenge on social media via “#100happypeople”), why not do something today that will bless someone? Seek wisdom and direction from the Holy Spirit and let Him lead you as you endeavor to put others before self and Christ before all else.

Here are a few ways to share a bit of happiness today:

- **Engage** in meaningful, upbeat conversation and really listen.
- When inconvenienced, don't act inconvenienced. Instead, take a breath, slow down your pace and **initiate** pleasant conversation or **offer** a genuine, “Hello, how are you?”
- **Buy** an extra cup of coffee at Starbucks and **hand it** to a stranger.
- **Invite** a neighbor to go to the gym or on a leisurely walk outside before dinner.
- **Call** up a friend you haven't spoken to in months, maybe even years, and see if there's anything in their life you can **pray** for. Then pray for them.
- **Cook** dinner for someone you know who's got a lot on their plate (no pun intended!).
- **Volunteer!** (Check out for ideas.)
- **Invite** someone to go to church with you and your family this week.
- Pay someone a **compliment**.
- **Commend** a waiter, ticket agent, receptionist, etc. for a job well done, and thank them for what they do.
- **Thank** a soldier or a veteran for their service to our country.
- **Smile** at someone—it's contagious!
- **Smile** at someone, even if you don't feel like it!

Diana Anderson-Tyler is the author of *Creation House's Fit for Faith: A Christian Woman's Guide to Total Fitness* and her latest book, *Perfect Fit: Weekly Wisdom and Workouts for Women of Faith and Fitness*. Her popular website can be found

at , and she is the owner and a coach at CrossFit 925. Diana can be reached on Twitter.

For the original article, visit .