

Happiness: The Residue of a Holy Life

Not long ago I heard a speaker give an impressive message in which he attributed our moral free fall to the pursuit of happiness instead of holiness. It was a great message.

You have no doubt heard someone say, “God doesn’t want us to be happy; He wants us to be holy.” I understand the point.

But why do they have to be mutually exclusive? Since the Bible regularly talks about happiness, how can it be evil? To explain “holiness” by trashing “happiness” is just plain lazy. Some people are quick to spoil one concept to make another look better.

I think a better solution is to describe the correct relationship between happiness and holiness.

All Men Want Happiness

Pascal said, “All men seek happiness. This is the chief motive of every action of every man—even of those who hang themselves.” Wanting to be happy is part of what it means to be human.

What do you ask your spouse at the end of the day? “Did you have a good day?” Or, “How was your day?” Our common goal is to answer, “I had a great day.” Translation: I’m happy.

To be happy is normal, natural and healthy. The issue is not whether or not a man wants to be happy—we all do. The issue is how we go about pursuing it.

The BeHappyTudes

The worldly way to pursue happiness emphasizes attributes of strength and power. They might look like this:

- Blessed are the rich, for they don't need to depend on others.
- Blessed are the powerful, for they get to make the rules.
- Blessed are the famous, for people will respect them because they're well-known.
- Blessed are the strong, for they get to control others.
- Blessed are those with a beautiful home, for theirs is the praise of men.
- Blessed are those who have well-behaved teenagers, for they are the envy of their friends.
- Blessed are those who marry well, for they will have someone to care for their needs.
- Blessed are the beautiful people, for they get invited to the best parties.
- Blessed are those considered experts and exalted for their talents and accomplishments by being put on a pedestal. They should rejoice and be glad, for that kind of glory is the greatest reward.

The Problem

The reason people continue to pursue the BeHappyTudes is because they do lead to happiness—at least a type of happiness, and at least for a while. The problem, however, is that it's *a happiness of the fleeting kind*.

It is happiness that starts big, but shrinks over time. Everyone knows a man who got everything he wanted, only to end up miserable.

And if worldly happiness is a man's idol, he will cling to the shrinking remnants of his happiness and, in the process, become a bitter, angry person. At the end of the road, happiness without holiness is hellish.

The Great Reversal

When we lived as worldly men, we all believed the same

lies—the BeHappyTudes. Jesus understood this, which is why He made a counterproposal. His words in the Sermon on the Mount describe how we can find a different kind of happiness—a happiness of the lasting kind.

In fact, the word “blessed” means extreme happiness, great fortune, and transcendent joy. This kind of happiness starts small, but grows over time—think mustard seed, or yeast. So 40 years later, when happiness of the fleeting kind has shrunk to almost nothing, kingdom happiness will be in full bloom.

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matt. 5:3–12)

This is the great reversal of all human values. It is nothing less than the description of a holy life. Happiness, it turns out, is the residue of a holy life. The sure path to a happy life is to lead a holy life of obedience under the power of the Holy Spirit.

My wife, Patsy, struck up a friendship with a 90-year-old woman who lives down the street from us. Patsy has been dropping in on her from time to time. She’s a cheerful person.

She spent her working years as a bartender and waitress.

One day the woman wasn't feeling too good so Patsy asked, "Would you like me to rub your feet?" So now Patsy rubs the woman's feet on occasion when she drops by.

Patsy caught wind that the owners of the bar where the woman had worked (until not that many years ago!) were planning to throw her a 90th birthday party. Patsy said, "Oh, you must be so excited."

"I am, but I don't think I'm going to go."

"Why not?" asked my wife.

"My hair is just such a mess. I don't feel very good about myself."

Patsy arranged for her own hairdresser to make a house call and do all the girly things you can do to a woman's hair. Our 90-year-old neighbor loved the results, and it lifted her spirits enough that she decided to attend her birthday party. Patsy and I went, too.

It was touching to see all the people who she loved and who obviously loved her, too.

Patsy was simply being obedient to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It was, for her, how she could live out the Beatitudes—how she could express her faith in a holy life.

And the result? Extreme happiness—happiness of the lasting kind.

- So the world says the way to happiness is, "Be rich," but Jesus says, "Be poor in spirit."
- The world says, "Be powerful," but Jesus says, "Mourn."
- The world says, "Be famous," but Jesus says, "Be meek."
- The world says, "Be strong," but Jesus says, "Hunger and thirst for righteousness."

- The world says, “Have a beautiful home,” but Jesus says, “Be merciful.”
- The world says, “Have well-behaved children,” but Jesus says, “Be pure in heart.”
- The world says, “Marry well,” but Jesus says, “Be a peacemaker.”
- The world says, “Be beautiful,” but Jesus says, “Let yourself be persecuted for righteousness.”

The world says, “Blessed are you when you are accomplished and people praise you,” but Jesus says, “Blessed are you when people wrongly accuse you.”

When a man says, “I want money, fame or power,” is that what he really wants? I don’t think so. I think what he really wants is the feeling he thinks he will get from those things.

True happiness, however, is not the result of money, fame or power. Instead, it is a gift from God for those who adopt The Great Reversal of human values.

Teach men that the BeHappyTudes can make them happy, but only with happiness of the fleeting kind. To lead a holy life—the kind of life described by Jesus in the Beatitudes—brings happiness of the lasting kind.

Teach men that happiness is the residue of a holy life.

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