

What Makes You Happy?

I had to laugh when I read this *USA Today* newspaper headline: “Psychologists now know what makes people happy.” I didn’t know happiness was a secret to be discovered by my noble profession! Curious, I kept reading. What were these exciting new findings?

If you are a student of the Bible, you won’t be surprised. Research only validates God’s way of doing things.

1. The happiest people are those who spend the least time alone and pursue intimacy and personal growth. When I read this, I immediately thought of Jesus. He was proactive when it came to community. He poured His life into a faithful band of followers and developed an intimate circle of 12 men. And through those men, He established the church. The early church was all about community, intimacy and personal growth.
2. Happy people don’t judge themselves by what others do or have. That is, they don’t compare themselves with others. The Bible is clear that we are not to measure ourselves by the yardstick of others, only by the Word of God. As we obey God’s Word and choose to please Him, blessing and contentment follow.

3. Materialism is toxic for happiness. The parable of the rich young ruler in Matthew bears this out. Despite this man's riches, he wanted something more—eternal life. Jesus stressed the importance of keeping the commandments but told him something more was required. He must sell his possessions and follow Him. Sadly, the young man chose material possessions over Christ and walked away feeling "sorrowful."
4. Optimism is important, even in dark times. Because of Christ, hope abounds. Jeremiah 32:17 proclaims, "'Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You'" (NKJV). In the last chapter of Job, after Job suffers much and has been tested, he cries out, "'I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You'" (Job 42:2). Over and over, we are given biblical examples of people who refused to be downtrodden because of circumstances or events. Their hope was in the Lord. The end result is rest and peace.
5. Actions matter. It's not just what you believe or your outlook on life that contributes to happiness. People who give to others and aren't self-absorbed are more satisfied with life. No surprise here. God gave

His only begotten Son, the ultimate sacrificial gift. Giving is a biblical principle whether it involves finances, service, food, shelter, time or talent. The result of giving is blessing.

6. Happy people know their strengths and use them. We are stewards of God's gifts and are to use them for His glory. When you move in those gifts and do what God has equipped you to do, you are happy. Psychologists call this moving in the "flow." People of faith "flow" in the Spirit.
7. People who feel gratitude are happy. We are eternally grateful for Jesus and His sacrifice and for all God has done in our lives. Out of that genuine gratitude flows happiness.
8. The strongest link to happiness is a willingness to forgive others. The benefits of forgiveness are well documented psychologically. And for the believer, forgiveness is not an option; it is a command from Jesus. We forgive others because He forgave us.

The search for happiness will fall short if it doesn't lead to the One in whom contentment can be found. Authentic happiness is unrelated to events, money, power, fame or anything else our culture associates it with. Happiness is a choice, as the Scriptures declare: "Happy are the people who are in such a state. Happy are the people whose God is

the Lord" (Ps. 144:15).

This new year, make it a goal to choose happiness by following the guidelines above. Look to God for your satisfaction and learn to trust in His sovereignty and omniscience. Obey Him and believe that He works all things for your good. Remember, His joy is available to you, and it is that which gives you strength.