

"I can give no higher recommendation than this book—I want to give this one to everyone I know. Ten stars." —ANN VOSHAMP, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Our Thousand Gifts* and *The Greatest Gift*

# HAPPINESS



RANDY  
ALCORN

# Happiness Randy Alcorn Introduction

Cornerstone Community Church

IMPACT Hour

Clay Stidham, Jr.

# INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

*Be happy and full of joy, because the LORD has done a wonderful thing.*

JOEL 2:21, NCV

*In him the day-spring from on high has visited the world; and happy are we, for ever happy, if that day-star arise in our hearts.*

MATTHEW HENRY

# INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

- Randy Alcorn states in the introduction to this book:
- Nothing is more annoying than reading a book by a naturally gleeful person who's a cheerleader for happiness.
- I've known a few people with perpetually sunny dispositions, but my own nature is reflective and, at times, melancholic.
- I've experienced seasons of depression, both before and since coming to faith in Christ
- Rest assured, this book is not about pasting on a false smile in the midst of heartache.
- It's about discovering a reasonable, attainable, and delightful happiness in Christ that transcends difficult circumstances.
- This vision is realistic because it's built on God's all-encompassing sovereignty, love, goodness, grace, gladness, and redemptive purposes in our lives.

# INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

- Until Christ completely cures us and this world, our happiness will be punctuated by times of great sorrow.
- But that doesn't mean we can't be predominantly happy in Christ.
- Being happy as the norm rather than the exception is not wishful thinking. It's based on solid facts: God secured our eternal happiness through a cross and an empty tomb. He is with us and in us right this moment.
- **And he tells us to be happy in him.**
- “Positive thinking” says we can always be happy if we look on the bright side and don't deal with negative things (such as sin, suffering, judgment, and Hell).
- I don't believe that.
- Nor do I embrace the God-as-genie prosperity gospel preached by name-it-and-claim-it folks, which promises happiness through perpetual health, wealth, and success.
- Of course, we should be grateful when God sends us fun surprises. But it's one thing to be happy when such things occur and another to expect, demand, or lay claim to them.

# INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

- This book is about the surprising “settled happiness” that God makes possible despite life’s difficulties.
- Rich and durable, this happiness is ours today because Christ is here; it’s ours tomorrow because Christ will be there; and it’s ours forever because he will never leave us.
- What I’m writing of is *not* a superficial “don’t worry, be happy” philosophy that ignores human suffering.
- The day hasn’t yet come when God will “wipe away every tear from [his children’s] eyes” (Revelation 21:4).
- **But it *will* come.**
- And this reality has breathtaking implications for our present happiness.

# WE ALL KNOW HAPPINESS WHEN WE SEE AND EXPERIENCE IT

- Webster's Dictionary defines happiness as "a state of well-being and contentment, a pleasurable or satisfying experience"
  - Synonyms include *pleasure, contentment, satisfaction, cheerfulness, merriment, gaiety, joy, joyfulness, joviality, delight, good spirits, lightheartedness, and well-being.*
- The *Dictionary of Bible Themes* gives a more biblical definition of happiness: "***A state of pleasure or joy experienced both by people and by God. . . .***"
- **True happiness derives from a secure and settled knowledge of God and a rejoicing in his works and covenant faithfulness."**

# WE ALL KNOW HAPPINESS WHEN WE SEE AND EXPERIENCE IT

- Among Christ-followers, *happiness* was once a positive, desirable word.
- Only in recent times have happiness and joy been set in contrast with each other.
- I believe this is biblically and historically ungrounded and has significant downsides, as we'll see later.
- Are laughter, celebration, and happiness God-created gifts, or are they ambushes from Satan and our sin nature that incur God's disapproval?
- Our answer determines whether our faith in God is dragged forward by duty or propelled by delight.
- The God we love is the enemy of sin *and* the creator and friend of fun and laughter.

# LIKE ALL GOD'S GIFTS, HAPPINESS CAN BE TWISTED

- Many Christians in church history knew that happiness, gladness, feasting, and partying are God's gifts. Can these good things be warped, selfish, superficial, and sinful?
- Of course. In a fallen world, what *can't* be?
- Believers and unbelievers alike recognize that there's a negative form of happiness, which is all about self-gratification at others' expense.
- The philosophy "do whatever makes you happy" gets considerable press, but people who live that way end up pathetic and despised.
- Is there selfish and superficial happiness?
- Sure. There's also selfish and superficial love, peace, loyalty, and trust. We shouldn't throw out Christ-centered happiness with the bathwater of self-centered happiness.
- Although the quest to be happy isn't new, people today seem to be particularly thirsty for happiness.
- Our culture is characterized by increasing depression and anxiety, particularly among the young.
- Studies show that more people feel bad than good after using social media; photos and updates of everyone else having a great time leave observers feeling left out

# LIKE ALL GOD'S GIFTS, HAPPINESS CAN BE TWISTED

- Numerous Christians live in daily sadness, anger, anxiety, or loneliness, thinking these feelings are inevitable given their circumstances.
- They lose joy over traffic jams, a stolen credit card, or increased gas prices. They read Scripture with blinders on, missing the reasons for happiness expressed on nearly every page.
- Research indicates that there is “little correlation between the circumstances of people’s lives and how happy they are.”
- Yet when people respond to the question “Why aren’t you happy?” they tend to focus on their current difficult circumstances.
- In our fallen world, troubles and challenges are constants.
- Happy people look beyond their circumstances to someone so big that by his grace, even great difficulties become manageable

# HAPPINESS IS OFTEN ELUSIVE

- For many people, happiness comes and goes, changing with the winds of circumstance.
  - We say to ourselves, *I'll be happy when . . .* Yet either we don't get what we want and are unhappy, or we do get what we want and are still unhappy.
  - Sometimes happiness eludes us because we demand perfection in an imperfect world.
  - Sometimes happiness eludes us because we fail to recognize it when it comes or because we fail to contemplate and treasure it.
  - Some people are only happy when they're unhappy.
- Our happiness will remain unstable until we realize our status in the light of eternity.
- We can find lasting and settled happiness by saying yes to the God who created and redeems us and by embracing a biblical worldview.
- When we look at the world and our daily lives through the lens of redemption, reasons for happiness abound.
- And while these reasons are at times obscured, they remain permanent.

# EVERYONE HAS A THEOLOGY OF HAPPINESS

- Theologian J. I. Packer writes, “Every Christian is a theologian. Simply by speaking of God...you become a theologian. . . . The question then is whether you are good or bad at what you are doing.”
- In order to be competent theologians when we speak about God and happiness, we need to go back centuries and millennia rather than months or decades.
- C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) spoke of “chronological snobbery,” the flawed belief that newer ideas are inherently better.
- The people of God who went before us lived the Christian life in difficult times and places.
- What Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, John Bunyan, John Wesley, and Charles Spurgeon said about happiness cries out for attention.
- Let the Puritans serve as a wake-up call as well.

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- C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) spoke of “chronological snobbery,” the flawed belief that newer ideas are inherently better.
- My hope is that this book will bring balance to your worldview and your walk with Christ by correcting-through Scripture and Christian history-widespread and deep-seated misconceptions about happiness.
- Why such a big book?
- Because what God’s Word says about happiness, and what God’s people have said about it, is not a puddle, a pond, or even a lake. It is an ocean.
- I invite you to join a long line of God-worshipers in celebrating the Creator’s happiness, his design for his image bearers to enter into his happiness, and his willingness to take extreme measures to purchase our happiness.

# AN OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK'S DIRECTION.

- Many people spend their lives waiting to be happy.
- Anyone who waits for happiness will never be happy.
- Happiness escapes us until we understand why we should be happy, change our perspective, and develop habits of happiness.
- In researching this book, I've experienced a deeper, more biblical, more Christ-centered happiness than I've ever known.
- Knowing where we're headed will help you make sense of this journey.

*Part 1 examines our longing and search for happiness.*

- We'll address God's desire for our happiness and how he has wired us to seek happiness
- We'll see that statements such as "God isn't concerned about our happiness, only our holiness" and "God calls us to joy, not happiness" are misguided and unbiblical.
- We'll look at the modern evangelical Christian skepticism concerning happiness and see how it skews our worldview and undermines our effectiveness in sharing the gospel.

## *Part 2 explores the happiness of the triune God.*

- Though I was happy as a young Christian, there's a paradigm-shifting doctrine I was never taught in church, Bible college, or seminary: the happiness of God himself.
- I've read many Christian books on joy that make no mention of God's joy. It's something I now believe should be at the heart of a Christian worldview.
- This is why I give considerable attention to the biblical teaching that God is happy.
- Only when we understand this can we believe that God wants *us* to be happy.
- Scripture makes this statement about imitating Jesus: "Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 John 2:6).
- If Jesus walked around mostly miserable, we should be miserable too. If he was happy, we should be happy. (If we're to be Christlike, we'd better learn what Christ is like!)
- If God is happy, then this world's unhappiness is a deviation from God and his original design.
- Scripture reveals that even our present struggles, which trigger unhappiness, are part of his larger plan to bring greater and everlasting happiness.
- Even here and now, God's children have every reason to be the world's happiest people.

*Part 3 surveys the numerous biblical passages that speak of happiness, joy, and gladness.*

- We'll observe the astounding scope and frequency of the Hebrew and Greek words for happiness, which demonstrate how the Bible repeatedly shows that our Creator wants us happy. Here are just a few:
  - May all those who seek you be happy and rejoice in you! (Psalm 40:16, NET)
  - You are the LORD's people! So celebrate and praise the only God. (Psalm 97:12, CEV)
  - Shout triumphantly to the LORD, all the earth! Be happy! Rejoice out loud! (Psalm 98:4, CEB)
  - You also should be happy and full of joy with me. (Philippians 2:18, NCV)
  - Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NKJV)
- We'll discover that some of the Hebrew and Greek words used to convey the meaning of *happy* or *happiness* aren't translated as such in most English Bible versions.
- We'll see how words translated *joy*, *gladness*, and *delight* are synonyms of *happiness*.

*Part 4 addresses ways to live a Christ-centered life of happiness.*

- When we seek holiness at the expense of happiness or happiness at the expense of holiness, we lose both the joy of being holy and the happiness birthed by obedience.
- God commands holiness, knowing that when we follow his plan, we'll be happy.
- He also commands happiness, which makes obeying him not only duty, but also pleasure.
- Many Christians live as if their faith has drained their happiness!
- But the same Jesus who calls for sacrifice, promising that we'll share in his suffering, also tells us to lay our burdens at his feet.
- We're to take up our crosses daily, yet he promises that his burden is light.
- Life isn't easy, but believers have the benefit of walking the hard roads side by side with a loving Father, a Son who's our friend, and a comforting Holy Spirit.

## *Part 4 addresses ways to live a Christ-centered life of happiness.*

- Thomas Watson (1620-1686), a Puritan preacher and author, said,
  - “He has no design upon us, but to make us happy. . . . Who should be cheerful, if not the people of God?”
  - Did you catch that? A Puritan is saying that God’s design is to make us happy. What did Watson know that we don’t?
- British preacher Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) said,
  - “Those who are ‘beloved of the Lord’ must be the most happy and joyful people to be found anywhere upon the face of the earth.”[\[10\]](#)
  - Our happiness makes the gospel contagiously appealing; our unhappiness makes it alarmingly unattractive. But is the church today known for its happiness or unhappiness?
- We’ll discover how we as individuals and the church as a whole can be known for being genuinely happy.
- When we search for happiness apart from Christ, we find loneliness, confusion, and misery.
- When we focus on God and others, we find untold happiness.
- I hope that as you read you’ll ask God to speak to you and you’ll contemplate the Scripture at the book’s core.
- May you find greater happiness in God than you’ve ever known. And may you experience more delight in sharing with others the startlingly “good news of great joy”: eternal happiness in Jesus . . . starting right now.

-Randy Alcorn