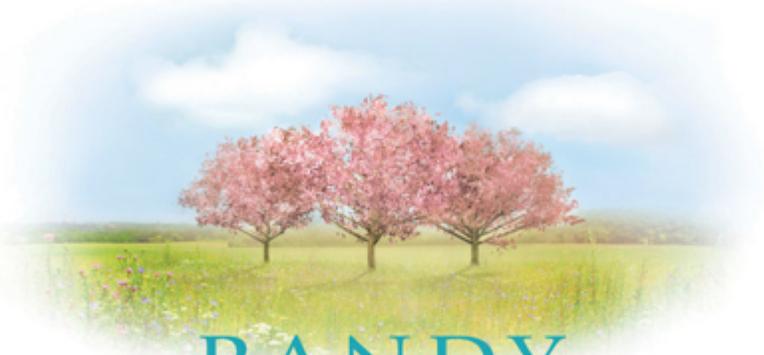


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HAPPINESS



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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- 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.
- 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

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

HAPPINESS



RANDY
ALCORN

Happiness

Part 1: Our Compelling Quest for Happiness

Chapter 1

Why Do We Long For Happiness?

Cornerstone Community Church

IMPACT Hour

Clay Stidham, Jr.

Chapter 1: Why Do We Long for Happiness?

The people the LORD has freed will return and enter Jerusalem with joy. Their happiness will last forever. They will have joy and gladness, and all sadness and sorrow will be gone far away.

ISAIAH 51:11, NCV

The most essential and active desire in human nature is to happiness. . . . There is nothing more uniform and inviolable than the natural inclination to happiness.

WILLIAM BATES

Chapter 1: Why Do We Long for Happiness?

- The feverish pursuit of happiness in our culture might lead us to believe it's a passing fad
- Not so. The desire for happiness isn't, as many misrepresent it, the child of modern self-obsession.
- The thirst for happiness is deeply embedded both in God's Word and in every human culture.
- Timothy Keller says,
 - “While other worldviews lead us to sit in the midst of life's joys, foreseeing the coming sorrows, Christianity empowers its people to sit in the midst of this world's sorrows, tasting the coming joy.”

Chapter 1: Why Do We Long for Happiness?

- A study indicates that children laugh an average of four hundred times daily, adults only fifteen. _So what happens between childhood and maturity that damages our capacity for happiness?
- **SEEKING HAPPINESS IS AS NATURAL AS BREATHING.**
- Alcorn quotes many sources to demonstrate that this view of happiness isn't a narrowly held belief but a consensus throughout church history.
- Augustine, considered by many the most influential theologian in church history, wrote 1,600 years ago,
 - “Every man, whatsoever his condition, desires to be happy.”
- In the fourth century AD, Augustine asked,
 - “For who wishes anything for any other reason than that he may become happy?”
 - He also said, “There is no man who does not desire this, and each one desires it with such earnestness that he prefers it to all other things; whoever, in fact, desires other things, desires them for this end alone.”

Chapter 1: Why Do We Long for Happiness?

- Nearly 1,300 years after Augustine, the French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) wrote,
 - “All men seek happiness. This is without exception.”
- Pascal’s contemporary, English Puritan Thomas Manton (1620-1677), said,
 - “It is as natural for the reasonable creature to desire to be happy, as it is for the fire to burn... But we do not make a right choice of the means that may bring us to that happiness that we desire.”
 - He went on to say that human beings “choose means quite contrary to happiness.”
- English theologian Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) echoed this sentiment:
 - “Happiness being by all men desirable, the desire of it is naturally engrafted in every man; and is the centre of all the searchings of his heart and turnings of his life.”
- In 1639, Puritan Robert Crofts wrote,
 - “All men naturally desire happiness. All their plots, purposes, and endeavors aim at this end only.”
- Scottish churchman Thomas Boston (1676-1732) said,
 - “Consider what man is. He is a creature that desires happiness, and cannot but desire it. The desire of happiness is woven into his nature, and cannot be eradicated. It is as natural for him to desire it as it is to breathe.”

Chapter 1: Why Do We Long for Happiness?

- Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) said,
 - “There is no man upon the earth who isn’t earnestly seeking after happiness, and it appears abundantly by the variety of ways they so vigorously seek it; they will twist and turn every way, ply all instruments, to make themselves happy men.”
- Evangelist George Whitefield (1714-1770) said,
 - “Is it the end of religion to make men happy, and is it not every one’s privilege to be as happy as he can?”
 - Whitefield asked an audience, “Does [Jesus] want your heart only for the same end as the devil does, to make you miserable? No, he only wants you to believe on him, that you might be saved. This, this, is all the dear Savior desires, to make you happy, that you may leave your sins, to sit down eternally with him.”
- None of these men of God had an argument against happiness-seeking.
- Their message was simply that true happiness could be found only in Christ.

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Chapter 1: Why Do We Long for Happiness?

- If we don't understand what these figures from church history knew, we'll imagine that we have a choice whether or not we want to pursue happiness.
- In fact, *we don't*.
- Seeking happiness is a given—a universal constant.
- It's present in every person of every age, era and circumstance.
- It's entirely unrealistic and counterproductive for Christians to tell people they shouldn't want to be happy. They can't help it!
- Any pastor who tries to motivate people to stop seeking happiness, any parent who tries to make his or her child repent of being motivated by happiness, is fighting a losing battle.
- Neither will succeed, and both will do damage by distancing the gospel from the happiness everyone craves.

WHAT IF WE WANT TO BE HAPPY NOT BECAUSE WE'RE SINNERS BUT BECAUSE WE'RE HUMANS?

- Alcorn states,
 - “Based on the books I’ve read, the sermons I’ve heard, and the conversations I’ve had, I’m convinced that many Christians believe our desire for happiness was birthed in humankind’s fall.”
- But what if our desire for happiness comes from God?
- What if he wired his image bearers for happiness before sin entered the world?
- How might this perspective change our approach to life
- Augustine asked,
 - “Is not a happy life the thing that all desire, and is there any one who altogether desires it not? But where did they acquire the knowledge of it, that they so desire it? Where have they seen it, that they so love it?”
- Not only has God written his law on our hearts (see Romans 2:15); he has written a love of happiness on them.
- The Fall didn’t generate the human longing for happiness-it derailed and misdirected it.

WHAT IF WE WANT TO BE HAPPY NOT BECAUSE WE'RE SINNERS BUT BECAUSE WE'RE HUMANS?

- Even those who have never been taught about the Fall and the Curse intuitively know that something is seriously wrong.
- Why else would we long for happiness and sense what a utopian society should look like even if we've never seen one?
- We are nostalgic for an Eden we've only seen hints of.
- If this desire is “deeply planted” in our hearts, who planted it?
- Our answer to that question will dramatically affect the way we see the world.
- Did Adam and Eve want to be happy before they sinned?

WHAT IF WE WANT TO BE HAPPY NOT BECAUSE WE'RE SINNERS BUT BECAUSE WE'RE HUMANS?

- **IS GOD HAPPY?** (This is a KEY question and theme of the book)
- If we believe God is happy, then wouldn't he make us with the desire and capacity to be happy?
- Christ-followers say things like,
 - “God wants you blessed, not happy”;
 - “God doesn't want you to be happy. God wants you to be holy”;
 - “God doesn't want you to be happy, he wants you to be strong.”
- But does the message that God doesn't want us to be happy promote the Good News or obscure it?
- When we separate God from happiness and from our longing for happiness, we undermine the Christian worldview.
- We might as well say, “Stop breathing and eating; instead, worship God.”
- People must breathe and eat and desire happiness-and they can worship God as they do so!

PUTTING GOD ON THE SIDE OF HOLINESS AND SATAN ON THE SIDE OF HAPPINESS IS A DANGEROUS MANEUVER

- The devil has mastered this strategy.
- His lie from the beginning was that God doesn't care about our good.
- The truth is, God wants us to seek real happiness in him, while Satan wants us to seek imitation holiness stemming from our self-congratulatory pride.
- The modern evangelical "opposition" to happiness backfires when it portrays Christianity as being against what people long for most.
- **While it is true that we chronically seek happiness in sin, the core problem isn't seeking happiness but choosing sin instead of God.**

FEW FIND THE LASTING HAPPINESS THEY CRAVE.

- Why are many people so unhappy?
- Because we were made for greatness, the world's superficiality is unsatisfying.
- We sense that unhappiness is abnormal, and we ache for someone, somehow, to bring us lasting happiness.
- That someone is Jesus, and that somehow is his redemptive work.
- As Adam and Eve's descendants, we inherited their separation from God, and therefore from happiness. We retain a profound awareness that we were once happy-and that we should be happy.
- This compelling desire for genuine happiness, while at times painful, is God's grace to us.
- Longing for the happiness humankind once knew, we can be drawn toward true happiness in Christ, which is offered us in the gospel.
- The gospel is good news only to those who know they need it.
- If we could be happy without Jesus, we would never turn to him.

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HAPPINESS



RANDY
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Happiness

Part 1: Our Compelling Quest for Happiness

Chapter 2

WHAT DOES OUR LONGING FOR HAPPINESS
REVEAL ABOUT US?

Cornerstone Community Church

IMPACT Hour

Clay Stidham, Jr.

Chapter 2: What Does Our Longing for Happiness Reveal About Us?

Happy are the people who know the joyful shout; Yahweh, they walk in the light of Your presence.

PSALM 89:15, HCSB

Give me an explanation, first, of the towering eccentricity of man among the brutes; second, of the vast human tradition of some ancient happiness.

G. K. CHESTERTON

Chapter 2: What Does Our Longing for Happiness Reveal About Us?

- We fail to see the futility of our own attempts to find happiness.
- Many people try the age-old practices of turning to money, sex, power, beauty, sports, nature, music, art, education, work, or celebrity for happiness.
- In the end, each of these proves as big a lie.
- **ASK PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT OUT OF LIFE, AND THEY'LL ANSWER, "TO BE HAPPY."**
 - How many subjects do Puritans, philosophers, atheists, and agnostics emphatically agree on? One of the few is our innate longing for happiness.
- **WHERE DOES OUR DESIRE FOR HAPPINESS LEAD US?**
 - The human race is homesick for Eden. We spend our lives chasing peaceful delight, following dead ends or cul-de-sacs in pursuit of home.
 - We know intuitively that we've wandered. What we don't know is how to return.
 - Our lives are largely the story of the often wrong and occasionally right turns we take in our attempts to get home to the only true Happiness that exists-God himself.

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Chapter 2: What Does Our Longing for Happiness Reveal About Us?

- **WE ANTICIPATE GREATER HAPPINESS THAN LIFE SEEMS TO OFFER.**
- C. S. Lewis called this anticipation *Sehnsucht*, a German word for “yearning.”
 - *Sehnsucht* is used to describe a longing for a far-off country that’s, for now at least, unreachable. Lewis connected the yearning itself and the foretastes of it with the joy that is longed for.
- The things Adam and Eve anticipated in Eden likely exceeded their imaginations, after the Fall, the opposite is true.
- A. W. Tozer wrote,
 - “For whatever else the Fall may have been, it was most certainly a sharp change in man’s relation to his Creator. He . . . destroyed the proper Creator-creature relation in which, unknown to him, his true happiness lay.” Without that understanding of the Fall, we can’t appreciate the gospel’s reinstatement of our lost happiness: “Essentially salvation is the restoration of a right relation between man and his Creator, a bringing back to normal of the Creator-creature relation.”

Chapter 2: What Does Our Longing for Happiness Reveal About Us?

- **HUMAN HISTORY IS LARGELY THE STORY OF OUR SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS.**
- Yet without the miraculous intervention of God, our default is to choose our imaginary self-sufficiency over dependence on God . . . which requires humility.
- **ONLY A GOD-SIZED GOSPEL CAN ENABLE US TO FIND TRUE HAPPINESS.**
- Satan is aware of a truth we often fail to see: *sin sabotages happiness.*
- According to Spurgeon,
 - “Man was not originally made to mourn; he was made to rejoice. The Garden of Eden was his place of happy abode, and as long as he continued in obedience to God, nothing grew in that Garden that could cause him sorrow.”
- The apostle John, aided by an angel, time-traveled to the New Earth.
 - There he saw “the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life.”
 - He went on to explain what life will be like for those who live in the New Earth:
 - “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face” (Revelation 22:1-4, NIV).
- **That’s how much God wants us to be happy-He’ll recreate the universe, raise us from the dead, and give back the wonders of Eden multiplied a thousand times over. There we’ll live with him for eternity-ALL BOUGHT AND PAID FOR WITH HIS OWN BLOOD!**

Chapter 2: What Does Our Longing for Happiness Reveal About Us?

- **THE BIBLE PROMISES EVERLASTING HAPPINESS FOR GOD’S PEOPLE.**
- World peace and universal happiness seem like utopian dreams, but these dreams are not far fetched, because according to God’s Word, utopia once existed and will again.
 - (What is far fetched is believing we are capable of creating this utopia ourselves!)
- Jesus promised his disciples that one day there will be a “renewal of all things” (NIV), which the English Standard Version translates as “the new world” and the Complete Jewish Bible renders as “the regenerated world” (Matthew 19:28).
- Just as we’ll take on our eternal, resurrected bodies, the world itself will be resurrected.
- Peter preached that Christ would not return “until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago” (Acts 3:21).
- The New Century Version translates this as “when all things will be made right again.”

Chapter 2: What Does Our Longing for Happiness Reveal About Us?

- Our entire experience on the New Earth will be of happiness far greater than Adam and Eve could have ever imagined!
- The past will be remembered as that temporary period of rebellion when God's creatures turned from him. We'll celebrate endlessly that Jesus entered our history to redeem us and to restore the shared happiness of God and his people.
- As God's children, we have a history of his faithfulness in the past and an assurance of a secure future, which should define how we view our present.
- This perspective can infuse us with happiness even in what would otherwise be the unhappiest times of our lives.
 - “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18, NIV).

Chapter 2: What Does Our Longing for Happiness Reveal About Us?

- **THERE'S NO TRUE HAPPINESS WITHOUT GOD.**
- Charles Darwin, near the end of his life, spoke of what he called his “loss of happiness”.
- Darwin may not have traced his diminished happiness to his gradual change in worldview, but it's likely that the naturalistic perspective he embraced gradually undermined his early delight in studying God's creation, resulting in a joyless, machinelike indifference.
- Loving nature and beauty should indeed be enhanced by loving the God who made them and reveals himself in them-how could it be otherwise?
- For the present, by God's grace and kindness, people can reject God but still receive the benefits of his common grace, including the enjoyment of loving relationships, natural and artistic beauty, and pleasure. However, we live on borrowed time.
- After the termination of this life, we can have one of two combinations:
 - Both God and happiness
 - Neither God nor happiness
- **What we won't be able to have is God without happiness or happiness without God.**

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

HAPPINESS



RANDY
ALCORN

Happiness

Part 1: Our Compelling Quest for Happiness

Chapter 3

DOES GOD WANT US TO BE HAPPY?

Cornerstone Community Church

IMPACT Hour

Clay Stidham, Jr.

Chapter 3: DOES GOD WANT US TO BE HAPPY?

Sing, Jerusalem. Israel, shout for joy! Jerusalem, be happy and rejoice with all your heart.

ZEPHANIAH 3:14, NCV

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

CHARLES SPURGEON

Chapter 3: DOES GOD WANT US TO BE HAPPY?

- **HAPPINESS IS GOD'S COMMAND**
- C. S. Lewis said, "It is a Christian duty . . . for everyone to be as happy as he can."
- Happiness is a privilege.
- However, since God repeatedly calls upon us to rejoice, delight, and be glad in him, we have an obligation to actually do so.
- This makes sense only if:
 - the God we love is happy,
 - if the gospel message we embrace and proclaim is happy,
 - and if Heaven is a happy place.
- It makes sense if we understand that people long to be happy and won't turn to Jesus if they believe there's no happiness in him.
- Others will judge whether there's happiness in Jesus by whether they see happiness in his followers.
- Hence, our happiness is, indeed, a Christian duty.

Chapter 3: DOES GOD WANT US TO BE HAPPY?

- **HAPPINESS IS GOD’S COMMAND**
- Paul’s words in Philippians 4:4 are often translated “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.”
- They could also be translated, “Be happy in the Lord always, and again I say be happy.”
- Commenting on this verse, Spurgeon said,
 - “It is intended that we should be happy. That is the meaning . . . that we should be cheerful.”
- This passage commands us twice to be glad in God.
- A command carries with it the duty to obey, and when it’s repeated, that expectation is intensified.
- Fortunately, when God commands us to rejoice, his Holy Spirit empowers us to obey.

Chapter 3: DOES GOD WANT US TO BE HAPPY?

- **HAPPINESS IS GOD'S COMMAND**

- God could have stated, “You have cause to rejoice.” But a command is different from a statement. A command doesn't leave us the option to passively wait for joy, hoping it comes to us. Rather, we must take action to lay hold of joy in God.
- The command to be sexually pure and abstain from immorality requires proactive choices (see 1 Thessalonians 4:3).
- Similarly, to glorify God in all we do requires actions on our part.
- The same is true of the command to rejoice.
- The fact that “rejoice” is followed by “always” and is repeated (“*again I say rejoice*”) makes it one of the most emphatic directives in Scripture.
- If we've given up on happiness, we're missing out on what God intends for us.

Chapter 3: DOES GOD WANT US TO BE HAPPY?

- **HAPPINESS IS GOD'S COMMAND**
- Only if we truly want to experience the happiness-driven desires of our hearts will we be drawn to God by verses such as this:
 - “Seek your happiness in the LORD, and he will give you your heart’s desire” (Psalm 37:4, GNT).
- Judging by what we hear, we might expect Scripture to say, “Obey God, and say no to your heart’s desire.” Not so!
- Jesus says,
 - “Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).
 - The Contemporary English Version and God’s Word Translation both render the final clause in John 16:24 this way: **so that we will be “completely happy.”**
- Can our joy be full if we’re not happy? No.
- The CEV, a translation from the original biblical languages (not a paraphrase), says:
 - Be happy and shout to God who makes us strong! (Psalm 81:1)
 - Be happy and excited! You will have a great reward in heaven. (Matthew 5:12)

Chapter 3: DOES GOD WANT US TO BE HAPPY?

- **HAPPINESS IS GOD’S COMMAND**
- The Bible clearly *commands* us to be happy. “But that’s just one English version,” someone might say.
- Correct.
- But every other version echoes the same command even when using other words. The CEV isn’t alone in its translation of these and similar passages.
- The Good News Translation says:
 - Be happy with your wife and find your joy with the woman you married. (Proverbs 5:18)
 - Go ahead-eat your food and be happy; drink your wine and be cheerful. It’s all right with God. (Ecclesiastes 9:7)
 - Be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep. (Romans 12:15)
- You may not be accustomed to thinking that God commands us to be happy. But it’s a fact, and a command most of us would like to obey!
- Some have an intuitive resistance to the notion that happiness is unbiblical, and so we should.
 - A blogger says,
 - “Happiness isn’t in the Bible? But what about all the commands to rejoice? What about laughter? Please tell me I’m not supposed to always be heavy-hearted, trudging along and begrudging obedience. I want to be a happy Christian!”

SCRIPTURE CONFIRMS THAT GOD WANTS US HAPPY.

- There are more than 2,700 Scripture passages where words such as *joy, happiness, gladness, merriment, pleasure, celebration, cheer, laughter, delight, jubilation, feasting, exultation, and celebration* are used.
- Throw in the words *blessed* and *blessing*, which often connote happiness, and the number increases.
- God is clear that seeking happiness-or joy, gladness, delight, or pleasure-through sin is wrong and fruitless.
- But seeking happiness in Him is good and right.
- Alcorn most often cites the English Standard Version (ESV) in this book, which doesn't use the word *happy* nearly as often as many translations, but it's still there:

SCRIPTURE CONFIRMS THAT GOD WANTS US HAPPY.

- Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? (Deuteronomy 33:29)
- Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy. (1 Kings 4:20)
- Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! (1 Kings 10:8)
- How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness. (Isaiah 52:7)
- Even without the word *happiness*, the concept is unmistakable in passages such as these:
 - Enjoy life with the wife whom you love. (Ecclesiastes 9:9)
 - All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the **cheerful of heart** has a continual feast. (Proverbs 15:15)
- Most translations render the phrase “cheerful of heart” or “cheerful heart.”
 - Two say “glad heart,” and one says “gladness of heart.”
 - Four, including the King James Version, say “merry heart.”
 - Five, including the New Living Translation, render it “happy heart.”
- **Which is correct? All of them. These words are synonyms.**

SCRIPTURE CONFIRMS THAT GOD WANTS US HAPPY.

- Even Jeremiah, who's called "the weeping prophet" since he was brokenhearted over the tragic suffering of God's people, spoke prophecies of happiness.
 - Hear the word of the LORD. . . . [My people] will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD. . . . They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. JEREMIAH 31:10, 12-13, NIV
- That's a lot of joy for a weeping prophet!
- Consider the Psalms, which reflect both great sorrow and great happiness:
 - I will be happy and rejoice in you! I will sing praises to you, O sovereign One! (Psalm 9:2, NET)
 - You will fill me with joy when I am with you. You will make me happy forever at your right hand. (Psalm 16:11, NIRV)
 - God, your love is so precious! . . . [People] eat the rich food in your house, and you let them drink from your river of pleasure. (Psalm 36:7-8, NCV)
 - I will go to your altar, O God; you are the source of my happiness. I will play my harp and sing praise to you, O God, my God. (Psalm 43:4, GNT)
- As Jeremiah and Jesus wept, we, too, will sometimes weep-and we should.
- But if we're not experiencing happiness in God, then we're not obeying God's commands and we're missing out on the abundant life Jesus came to give us. (John 10:10)

MODERN CHRISTIANS NEED TO SPEAK MORE, NOT LESS, ABOUT HAPPINESS.

- Many people believe that following Christ is the right thing to do, but they are certain it means sacrificing happiness.
- It isn't in our nature to continually say no to what we believe would make us happy-or say yes to something that would make us unhappy.
- Why do so many people have this view of Christ, and the Church; that being a Christian comes at the expense of happiness?
- What are we doing? What are we missing? What creates this impression?
- Why do we think it is unspiritual to live a Christian life centered on what God calls the "Good News of Happiness" (Isaiah 52:7)
- Celebration and gladness of heart have characterized the church, including the suffering church, throughout history.
- Scripturally, the culture of God's people is one of joy, happiness, gratitude, eating and drinking, singing and dancing, and making music.
- It's not the people who know God who have reason to be miserable-it's those that *don't*.
- When our face to the world is one of anger, misery, shame, cowardice, or defensiveness, the gospel we speak of doesn't appear to be the good news of happiness.
- And we shouldn't be surprised if people, both outside and inside the church, aren't attracted to it. ***Why should they be?***

JOY AND LAUGHTER SHOULD BE THE CHURCH'S NORM, NOT THE EXCEPTION.

- Children who grow up seeing church as a morose, hypercritical place will turn their backs on it in their quest for happiness.
- Those who have found happiness in the church will usually stay or return.
- Sadly, many non-Christian young adults today view Christ's followers as "hypocritical," "insensitive," and "judgmental."
- These words all describe unhappy people.
 - (If the world judges us, so be it, but it shouldn't be because we're chronically unhappy.)
- It seems to me there are two extremes of Christians when it comes to happiness.
 - Some ignore the sufferings of this world while grabbing on to superficial living.
 - Other Christians are perpetually somber, never laughing or poking fun at themselves, rarely celebrating, and quick to frown when they see someone having fun. They believe that happiness is ungodliness
- The Bible presents a more balanced perspective.
- Paul said he was "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10). Sorrow and joy can and do coexist, for now.
 - If we constantly focus on all that's wrong with the world, then sorrow or anger will be our default.
 - But the apostle Paul, writing from prison in Rome, calls on us to **rejoice in the Lord** not periodically, but **always**.

JOY AND LAUGHTER SHOULD BE THE CHURCH'S NORM, NOT THE EXCEPTION.

- It's not insensitive, unkind, or wrong to be happy.
- By being happy in Christ, we lay claim to the fact that God is bigger than the Fall and affirm that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will reverse the Curse and reign over a new universe.
- Our happiness shouts that our God is present with us and at work in the world every minute of every hour of every day.
- The narrower our view of God's presence in this world-and in our daily lives-the less happiness we'll experience.
- Parents repeat instructions to children because kids tend to miss it the first time. Hence Paul said, "Again I will say, rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).
- He wanted to make sure we'd get it.
- Synonyms for happiness appear repeatedly throughout Scripture.
- If God says it enough, shouldn't we get it?
- Still, most of us have failed to notice the cumulative force of the biblical revelation that we are to be consistently happy in God.

GROWING IN OUR HAPPINESS IN CHRIST IS A PROCESS.

- The bride of Christ matures incrementally. As we “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), we grow in joy.
- Paul depicted the gradual process of growth in Christlikeness this way:
 - “We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV).
- With ever-increasing glory comes ever-increasing happiness in our Lord. Sin loses its hold on us-largely because we see the misery it brings.
- We begin to ask ourselves, “How could I believe for a moment that sin could bring me happiness?”
- We also learn from adversity.
- When our perspective and our faith are put to the test, our happiness can flourish.
- That’s why so many passages surprise us by connecting rejoicing with trials (see James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-9; 2 Corinthians 8:2-3; Hebrews 10:34).

OUR PURSUIT OF GENUINE HAPPINESS IN GOD HONORS HIM.

- Puritan Jonathan Edwards made a resolution that speaks volumes:
 - “Resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigour, and vehemence . . . I am capable of.”
- Puritans, Richard Sibbes did not demean the quest for happiness; rather, he saw Jesus as the proper object of that quest:
 - “Only to a true Christian, by a supernatural light, is discovered both the right object, and the right way to felicity (Happiness).”
- C. S. Lewis said,
 - “The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water.”
- Alcorn states,
 - “When we obey God we do it first for him, but *also* for ourselves,” is biblical. We should seek to please and find pleasure in God, and we’re right to oppose the superficial self-centered happiness of prosperity theology. But we’re wrong to suppose that God doesn’t care about our happiness.”

SCRIPTURE'S GOOD NEWS IS OF "GREAT JOY," NOT "GREAT DUTY."

- Obeying God and worshiping him really *should* make us happy! And God finds pleasure in that kind of happiness.
 - “Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant” (Psalm 135:3, NKJV).
- Whom is it pleasant for? Hopefully for God, but the inspired text speaks of *our* pleasure in worshiping God.
- The Puritans, never accused of being trendy, talked a great deal about Christian happiness.
 - Scottish theologian Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661) wrote,
 - “I have neither tongue nor pen to express to you the happiness of such as are in Christ.”
 - Baptist pastor Octavius Winslow (1808-1878) said,
 - “The child of God is, from necessity, a joyful man. His sins are forgiven, his soul is justified, his person is adopted, his trials are blessings, his conflicts are victories, his death is immortality, his future is a heaven of inconceivable, unthought-of, untold, and endless blessedness *joyful* man?”[\[12\]](#)
- Who could possibly have more reason to rejoice than one who knows Jesus?

SCRIPTURE'S GOOD NEWS IS OF "GREAT JOY," NOT "GREAT DUTY."

- When the gospel is viewed primarily as laying burdens and obligations on people, the Good News gets buried.
- Burdens and obligations are not good news; good news is about liberation, deliverance, newfound delight, and daily celebration.
- Duty is real and the gospel calls us to a life of obedience, but it's *glad* duty and *joyful* obedience.
- There's an age-old tradition of Christ-followers who have found their deepest happiness in their Lord.
- We should eagerly join them and say with English Puritan John Flavel (1627-1691),
 - "Christ [is] the very essence of all delights and pleasures, the very soul and substance of them. As all the rivers are gathered into the ocean . . . so Christ is that ocean in which all true delights and pleasures meet."