

"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.