

Men and Their Emotions: Happiness

As I continue this series about a man's emotions, I now move to Happiness that begins to counter our Sadness, Anger, and Fear, which are factors that prevent us from becoming more godly men.

I need to start off by saying there is a difference between happiness and joy, at least from a Christian perspective. One is more temporary and one is more eternal.

That stated, let's first understand what makes men happy.

Where Men are (Mostly) Happy

A recent Inc. magazine article revealed one very surprising thing that predicts happiness for men: their satisfaction at work.

That is based on research used from the 2018 Masculinity Report by the British Psychological Society which shows that American men are pretty happy overall. Job satisfaction is by far the strongest predictor of positivity for men; three times higher than the next in every region and across the U.S. overall. Far more than whether we're healthy, or have good relationships.

As the official summary put it:

“Men at work are men at peace: Everything else flows down from satisfying employment. Men who have high job satisfaction are more likely to feel optimistic, happy, motivated, emotionally stable, in control, and confident.”

However, this contradicts other research that good relationships are a vital ingredient to a man's happiness.



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One is the much-touted results of the Harvard Grant Study, which is an ongoing study of the lives of 724 men who

graduated together from Harvard in 1938. That study stated “The lessons aren’t about wealth or fame or working harder and harder. The clearest message that we get from this 75-year study is this: **Good relationships keep us happier and healthier.** Period.”

Another on Positive Psychology.com states that men tend to be happier in their most important relationships (usually our spouse or significant other, our children and/or our parents, other close family members, and our closest friends).

So let’s just say that most men are happy when they are satisfied in their career and when they have positive relationships with their family and friends.

Happiness Defined

Since Aristotle, happiness has been thought of as consisting of at least two aspects: hedonia (pleasure) and eudaimonia (a life well-lived, a life of meaning).



The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of "happy" is: "Feeling or showing pleasure or contentment."

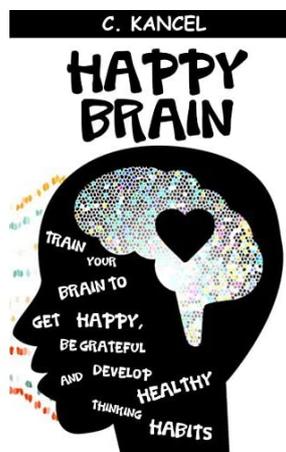
Vocabulary.com provides this helpful description: Happiness is that feeling that comes over you when you know life is good and you can't help but smile. It's the opposite of sadness. Happiness is a sense of joy or contentment. When people are successful, or safe, or lucky, they feel happiness.

Positive Psychology suggests that happiness is a state, not a trait. It is not a long-lasting, permanent feature or personality trait, but a more fleeting, changeable state. It's temporary and not forever.

Environmental and Physiological Reaction to Happiness

The National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) published a paper titled “The Neuroscience of Happiness and Pleasure” that suggests our evolutionary imperatives of survival and procreation, and their associated rewards, drive life as most animals know it.

Humans have the ability to consciously experience and even anticipate the outcome of our choices and actions, which allows us to experience the pleasures, desires, and perhaps even happiness of survival and procreation, due to knowing the certainty of the end.



Happy Brain: Train your Brain to get Happy, be Grateful and Develop Healthy Thinking Habits
by C. Kancel

For many though, the fact that life ultimately comes to an end, they enjoy life trying to maximize their happiness. You know, YOLO (You Only Live Once). For many, this pursuit of happiness through YOLO often leads to anxiety and depression.

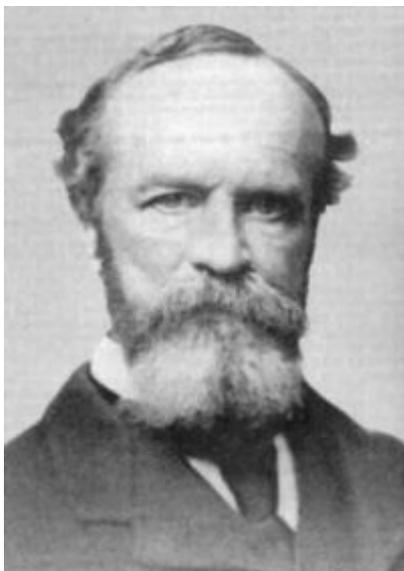
But science makes an important distinction between happiness and pleasure.

Pleasure is a visceral, in-the-moment experience. It is the sensory-based feelings we get from experiences like eating good food, getting a massage, receiving a compliment, or having sex.

Happiness is a state characterized by feelings of contentment and satisfaction with one's life current situation. While not permanent, happiness is a more stable state than pleasure since it generally stays around for a while, whereas pleasure can come and go in seconds.

So while pleasure can contribute to happiness, and happiness can enhance or deepen pleasure, the two are also completely mutually exclusive.

So happiness needs more eternal, longer-lasting thinking.



William James (1842-1910)

Philosopher and psychologist, William James had many insights concerning happiness and meaning. Chief among them was the idea that happiness comes from orienting yourself to a higher purpose and results from being active participants in the game of life.

James contrasts two kinds of people in his work on happiness: the "Once Born" and the "Twice Born."

The first are people who seem to be biologically predisposed to happiness and have a childlike acceptance of life as it is, but refuse to be bothered by the intense sufferings and evils in the world. The latter are generally unhappy with life.

However, he argues that "Twice Born" people can become some of the happiest people after a "crisis" (for example, a debilitating sickness, near-death experience, depression, loss of a job, family member, or close friend).

James suggests a sense of being "born again" is characteristic of religious and mystical experiences that can change our attitude towards life through a strong sense of renewal and desire to make sense of things. Instead of being defeated, blaming God or the world, "Twice Born" people exhibit a new enthusiasm and love of life with an optimism that "all will be for the best."

William James' main premise is that our challenges and tragedies should be seen not as obstacles to happiness, but

rather as the means to achieve a deeper, more lasting joy.

What the Bible says about Happiness

In a biblical sense, the word happiness is often used synonymously with joy. The Bible says a lot about these emotions since God wants us to be happy which comes from having an eternal view with joy, rather than a focus on your current circumstances.

The Psalms and Proverbs especially are full of verses about happiness and joy, such as:



Happy is he who trusts in the LORD.

–Proverbs 16:20

Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose

hope is in the LORD his God.

–Psalm 146:5

But the godly are happy; they rejoice before God and are overcome with joy.

–Psalm 68:3

Happy is the man who is always reverent, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

–Proverbs 28:14

We also find verses of encouragement and examples that joy comes from enduring life's difficulties:

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

–James 1:2-3

The Apostle Paul writes about contentment, another word for joy:

“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Christ who gives

me strength."

–Philippians 4:12-13

So while happiness is mostly dependent on our current circumstances, true joy comes from an eternal belief.

How God Buddies Respond to Happiness

Although many men find happiness solely from their job, I suggest God Buddies focus elsewhere: on their relationship with The Lord and their relationships with family and friends.

The good news is that our happiness with life can become a habit.

One way is to do life together with your God Buddy. This means study and service to others. It means doing recreation together to help offset the physiological effects of sadness which dulls our happiness. It means investing time with your family.

Patrick Morley of Man in the Mirror Ministries provides 6 Habits of Spiritually Happy Men that I suggest God Buddies practice:

- They read the Bible regularly.
- They pray with their wives.
- They tithe.

- They are in a small group.
- They are active in a church.
- They are serving the Lord.

These spiritual habits help us develop a habit of joy.

Pastor Rick Warren describes it this way:

“Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation”

–Rick Warren

The key to finding our eternal joy is that comes by trusting God; not by living the unsatisfying pursuit of temporary pleasures of our current circumstance. Simply trust God with the outcome and ask your God to Buddy help you find this new joy.

The next post is about the emotion of Pridefulness.