

What Is True Happiness?

Recently, I ran across a Chinese proverb worthy of serious introspection. Here it is:

*If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap.
If you want happiness for a day, go fishing.
If you want happiness for a month, get married.
If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune.
If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody else.*

Okay, okay, I know there will be agreements (or not) with some of the points of advice listed here, depending on where the reader is at this moment in your life.

But notice the wisdom of this proverb. The first two things are just momentary pleasures; obviously, they are not going to make you happy forever.

Getting married and inheriting a fortune are major circumstantial changes in life, but those are the kinds of changes people tend to adapt to over time. You get used to a new level of happiness, or a new level of wealth, and then you want more; that's part of human nature.

Research by Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky, a professor of psychology at University of California Riverside, into what determines our levels of happiness concludes that only 10 percent lies in our life circumstances.

"A lot of people are astonished to see that number being so small," she wrote. "They think: 'Oh, I'll be happier when I get a new job. Or when I get a boyfriend. Or when I have a baby.' But the truth is, those things don't affect our happiness as much as we think they will. Our research has shown that up to 40 percent of our happiness depends on our behavior and daily activities. Fifty percent of our happiness is dictated by our genes – a high percentage, but not as high as we sometimes think."

When it comes to pursuing activities that can boost our happiness, she said, the proverb gets it right. "Helping someone else is a surefire strategy. Studies that I and others have conducted show that practicing kindness generates significant increases in happiness."

We wholeheartedly agree. In the work we are called to do in Life Care and Century Park, helping others and the acts of kindness shown to our residents and families produce genuine happiness that can last a lifetime and produce a valuable sense of self-worth.

(more)

The Apostle Paul had some sound advice for his young protégé, Timothy:

Command those who are rich with things of this world not to be proud. Tell them to hope in God, not in their uncertain riches. God richly gives us everything to enjoy. Tell the rich people to do good, to be rich in doing good deeds, to be generous and ready to share. By doing that, they will be saving a treasure for themselves as a strong foundation for the future. Then they will be able to have the life that is true life (1 Timothy 6:17-19 NCV).

– Beecher Hunter

