

What Makes You Happy?

“Who do you think is happier?” asks Marc Reklau in his book *Destination Happiness*. “Is it people who have won the lottery or people who have become paralyzed after an accident?” You may be surprised at the answer.

“Yes, the lottery winners were very happy, but not for very long,” Reklau continues. “After six months, they went back to their previous levels of happiness.”

On the other hand, “the accident victims were sad, but surprisingly after six months, they also went back to their previous levels of happiness,” he said.

Think about that: Six months later, both groups – those who had won the lottery and those who had an accident and were paralyzed – had returned to their previous state of happiness. The study suggests to me that happiness is an inside job. Our circumstances don’t determine how satisfied we are with our lives. Something else – on the inside – makes the difference.

The same studies on happiness were conducted with a group of college professors. They were asked how happy they would be if they got tenure. For a college professor, tenure means that they are given a permanent post from which they can be removed *only* under extraordinary circumstances. These professors answered that if they got tenure, they would be very happy for the rest of their lives. Another group of professors was asked how unhappy they would be if they did not get tenure. They answered, “Very unhappy; for a very long time.”

And again, when researchers went back to them six months later, every one of these professors had gone back to their previous level of well-being, whether they received tenure or not.

You and I count as part of our heritage the blessings of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But what is happiness? Is it a product of our circumstances or surroundings? Is it to be equated with money in the bank, a diploma on the wall, the respect of one’s friends and neighbors? Or does it depend on something entirely different?

Jesus talked about happiness, but not in the same way we would talk about it. In fact, He turned our understanding of happiness upside down. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, He made some unique and unusual statements about happiness, which we know as the Beatitudes. Here is a condensed version of some of those stirring statements:

Happy are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Happy are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Happy are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Happy are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven (from the Gospel of Luke).

(more)

Most of us are more comfortable with the word *blessed* than the word *happy* in these circumstances. But the Greek word *makarios*, which most translators of the bible translate as *blessed*, can also be translated as *happy*.

In fact, many authors who have studied the pursuit of happiness have observed that the happiest people on earth are not those who pursue happiness, but those who seek God and serve others.

The conclusion: Happiness is not dependent upon circumstances but on an inner certainty that we are loved, accepted and that we belong to God.

– Beecher Hunter

