

Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet Lesson 10 2Q 2007

The Bible and Happiness

Read key thought – thoughts? What is happiness?

a : a state of well-being and contentment : **b** : a pleasurable or satisfying experience.

Do both of these apply to the Christian experience?

Should we ever be “content” in a world of sin? Do you think God is currently content? If you have a child on drugs can you feel truly content? Or does your love for that child cause your heart to ache for their healing and restoration?

Can you experience contentment in your own personal relationship with God, your own condition before God while at the same time being discontent with the condition of the world and those you love?

Is it important to make this distinction? Extremely, many of my patients fail to distinguish their individual personal sense of well being, contentment and peace with God from their love and concern for others. Thus when others they care for are not doing well their peace is gone. Jesus of course had contentment with Himself in relationship with God, but was not content with the condition of men’s hearts and He longed for their salvation.

SUNDAY

Read memory text at the top and then the first set of bolded questions – thoughts?

What is included in the abundant life? It is common to preach in some circles that if you trust God and have real faith you will have great abundance of health, wealth and influence- is Jesus promising us greater of these things here and now? How do you know? Job, the blind man, Jesus prediction of how His followers would be treated...

Why is it important to know this reality? What happens if you believe it means temporal blessings and then financial loss occurs, health fails, loved ones die?

What then is the abundant life Jesus is speaking of? An abundance of love? An abundance of meaning and purpose? Is life more abundant

when you are involved with something of significance? World changing?
When your life really makes a difference?

Read first paragraph “At the foundation...” thoughts?

What is eternal life? What does this paragraph imply? Living for all time???? What does Jesus say eternal life is? John 17:3 knowing God, what difference does it make to see eternal life not as measured by time but as intimacy with God?

What about the second portion of the paragraph – if there was no eternal life (i.e. living for eternity) would whatever else Jesus does for us be in vain?

Have you ever loved, genuinely, deeply, and lost that person – maybe they died? Would you prefer you had never met that person and therefore never lost them? Or even though the pain of losing them was great you would still want them in your life because your life was enriched by them?

Isn't our lives better knowing Jesus and having Him in our lives even if there were no eternal life (i.e. living forever)? If we don't live eternally, would knowing God intimately be in vain for whatever years we have?

Is the only reason to get to know God for us to get something from Him i.e. eternal life. If you don't give me eternal life God then spending time with you is in vain?

Did Jesus, on this earth, know God intimately? And was Jesus willing to give up His life forever? Do you think Jesus then thought His relationship with God was in vain?

MONDAY

Read third paragraph “Study after study...” thoughts?

Can religion in one's life increase levels of happiness? Does all religious experience do this? Can religion sometimes undermine happiness? What makes the difference?

Can it depend on how we come to see and know God?

Religion and Happiness

by Michael E. Nielsen, PhD

Many people expect religion to bring them happiness. Does this actually seem to be the case? Are religious people happier than nonreligious people? And if so, why might this be?

Researchers have been intrigued by such questions. Most studies have simply asked people how happy they are, although studies also may use scales that try to measure happiness more subtly than that. In general, researchers who have a large sample of people in their study tend to limit their measurement of happiness to just one or two questions, and researchers who have fewer numbers of people use several items or scales to measure happiness.

What do they find? In a nutshell, they find that people who are involved in religion also report greater levels of happiness than do those who are not religious. For example, one study involved over 160,000 people in Europe. Among weekly churchgoers, 85% reported being "very satisfied" with life, but this number reduced to 77% among those who never went to church (Inglehart, 1990). This kind of pattern is typical -- religious involvement is associated with modest increases in happiness.

Of course, church attendance is a simple way of measuring religiousness. When researchers have examined how religious experiences relate to happiness, they find the same sort of pattern. Religious experiences, particularly when they happened during prayer, has been the most powerful predictor of happiness in some studies. (For more information, see Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle, 1997). This relationship seems to be stronger among older people.

Why might this pattern hold? Psychologists tend to focus on three kinds of explanations:

1. *Social Support*. Religious involvement is a way of gaining social support. People in general are happier when they are around others who are supportive. Religious groups tend to offer this. This explanation is supported by the fact that the overall pattern of religious people being happier is more pronounced among people who are single, elderly, or in poor health. Related to this is the idea that religion helps people feel closer to God, who might also be viewed as personally supportive.

2. *Firm Beliefs*. Happiness and life satisfaction increase when we have a sense of where we are going and what is important in life. Of course, many people find this in religion. This might also be related to the rise of 'strict' or conservative churches, which offer more certitude than do more liberal churches.

3. *Religion Itself*. Religious experiences can be very positive. They offer a person a feeling of being in contact with God (also known as "transcendence") and contact with others. These are usually positive things and, of course, if someone is more involved in positive things, they will tend to feel happier than someone who is less-involved in those things.

These are three common ways of accounting for the link between religion and happiness. Unfortunately, most research in this area is correlational, meaning that we cannot claim that religion causes happiness. It could just as easily be the case that happy people also tend to be more religious, or some other factor may account for changes in both religiousness and happiness.

One important exception to this trend, however, is found in one of the most famous studies in the psychology of religion. In the days before research boards reviewed research proposals before the studies were conducted, Pahnke devised an experiment to induce people to have a religious experience. On a Good Friday, when they were to meditate in a chapel for 2.5 hours, twenty theology students were given either psilocybin or a placebo. The students who were given the psilocybin reported intense religious experiences, as you might imagine. Their levels of happiness also were significantly greater than the control group reported. But what is especially interesting is that these effects remained 6 months after the experiment, as the psilocybin group reported more "persistent and positive changes" in their attitudes to life than did the placebo group.

It appears, then, that intense religious experiences may lead to long-lasting increases in a person's happiness. Of course, the experiences in Pahnke's experiment were truly different from the kinds that the typical person encounters in their everyday life. Just how easily we might generalize from one type of experience to the other is a tricky and complex question. The more mundane, everyday experiences people have in their churches, synagogues or mosques are qualitatively different from the intense kinds of experiences that Pahnke's study investigated.

All of this leads to the interesting question of whether there are occasions where religion is associated with less happiness. It appears that this may actually be the case. Remember, important differences may emerge when we measure variables in different ways. **One dimension of religiousness is known as mysticism, which is the term used to convey a sense of timelessness and a loss of sense of self. A study by Argyle and Hills (2000) found a modest negative correlation between mysticism and happiness, meaning that people who had mystical experiences also tended to report lower levels of happiness.** One possibility is that a mystical experience may result in a sense of being disconnected from others. The social support that occurs when involved in religious worship with other people is not part of the mystical experience, and this might be at least part of the reason for the negative correlation Argyle and Hills found. Certainly, this needs additional study.

Another way that religion may be associated with decreases in happiness is when religion is involved in religious conflicts. When family members or friends experience conflict over religion, the wounds can be deep and long-lasting. In such cases, religion's effect on happiness is mixed. On the one hand, it causes conflict and dissension with loved ones, while on the other hand, it may generate a sense of certainty and yield associations with other like-minded people. This characterized many of the conflicts in research that I conducted a few years ago (Nielsen, 1998).

Whenever considering studies such as these, it is important to keep in mind that they report trends in groups of people; there are individual exceptions to these trends. Clearly, there is much remaining to be uncovered in this area of research. More studies using different methods will help us to understand when and how religion affects happiness.

In TQ page 117 it states:

“We are not our own, but God’s. We belong to God by creation (Gen 1:26,27) and by redemption (1 Cor. 6:19,20). A sense of God’s ownership of us is perhaps the first step we need to take to be stripped of any self-delusion that we can find our own happiness.” Thoughts?

How do you contrast this idea with Jesus statement in John 15:15? Does God consider us His slaves? Are we slaves or are we free beings?

Is it true that God is our Creator and Redeemer? Yes, does this mean He created us and redeemed us in order to own us? In order for us to be His

property? Or is it God's ideal that, even though He did create us and redeem us He intends for us to be free sentient beings?

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:34-36

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
Luke 4:18,19

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Gal 5:1

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. Gal 5:13

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Gal 5:22,23

Thoughts? Are we free or are we slaves? Are we property or are we beings created by God who God Himself surrendered "ownership" of and set us truly free to be self governing and self directing?

Where does true happiness come from?

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all his creatures the service of love,-- homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of his character. He takes no pleasure in a forced allegiance, and to all he grants freedom of will, that they may render him voluntary service. {GC88 493.2}

TUESDAY

Read first paragraph – thoughts?

What does it mean for “God to join together”? Does it mean it is God who decides who will marry who? Does it mean that all marriages were arranged by God? Does it mean all marriages are blessed by God? If a coven of Satan worshippers have a wedding and ask Satan to bless their marriage has God joined them together.

God has placed the husband at the head of the family, and until Sister D shall learn her place and duties as a wife, it will be best for him not to be connected with her in any way. The wife is to respect and obey, but if she utterly refuses to keep the marriage vow, she will be more and more the sport of Satan's temptations; and if her husband consents to keep her by his side, to wear out his life, he will become discouraged and unfitted for the Lord's service. He is under no obligations to keep one by his side who will only torture his soul. I was shown that he has already been losing his manhood, and has been influenced and molded by his wife. Their marriage was a snare of Satan. {TSB 77.2}

Does it sound like God joined these two together?

Is it possible to get into a marriage that God cannot bless? How? Why?

If you are about smoke a cigarette and first pray over it and ask God to bless it to your body, will God bless you with greater health?

If you ask God to bless you with healthy teeth but refuse to brush and floss and drink lots of coca cola will God use His power to bless you with healthy teeth? Why?

Can someone enter into a “marriage” in such a way that they preclude God from being the one joining them together and therefore preclude God’s blessing?

How does God join a couple together?

When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness. Then as the Lord looks upon us He sees, not the fig-leaf garment, not the nakedness and deformity of sin, but His own robe of righteousness, which is perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah. {COL 311.4}

If the will of God is fulfilled, the husband and wife will respect each other and cultivate love and confidence. Anything that would mar

the peace and unity of the family should be firmly repressed, and kindness and love should be cherished. He who manifests the spirit of tenderness, forbearance, and love will find that the same spirit will be reflected upon him. Where the Spirit of God reigns, there will be no talk of unsuitability in the marriage relation. If Christ indeed is formed within, the hope of glory, there will be union and love in the home. Christ abiding in the heart of the wife will be at agreement with Christ abiding in the heart of the husband. They will be striving together for the mansions Christ has gone to prepare for those who love Him. AH 120

So what is our role in marriage and what is God's? What can we do to find a compatible life partner?

First, experience conversion of heart and unity with God, get oneself right with God and healthy in heart and mind first. Then approach finding a life partner with your Reason/Judgment evaluating the other person's qualifications to be your life partner rather than seeking to get others to like or love you.

WEDNESDAY

Read second paragraph "A crucial aspect..." thoughts?

What are the responsibilities of the various family members? Are parents responsible for the outcome of their children's lives? OR for their conduct in parenting?

What about the Proverb in the middle of the paragraph – if a child goes astray does that mean the parent didn't raise the child correctly? What about Lucifer? Did God fail to parent him correctly?

No, the version is translated incorrectly –

Train up the child according to the tenor of his way, and when he is old he will not depart from it. Darby

Does it make more sense to realize this version?

What about the section on wives submit to your husband's what does this mean?

THURSDAY

First paragraph read – can we experience happiness in a painful and unhappy world? How?

Can a doctor, who has a remedy that genuinely cures, experience happiness in a hospital full of sickness, suffering and disease – how?

Do we have a Remedy to share with a sick and suffering world? What is that Remedy? And how does this help us to remain resilient in the face of personal tragedy, pain and loss?

FRIDAY – second paragraph read and discuss