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What Kind of People are Really Happy?



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WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE ARE REALLY HAPPY?

Scripture: Matthew, chapter 5; Philipians 4:7

What kind of people are happy people? In reply to this question some would say that the incidence of unhappiness today is very high. A distinguished writer has made the statement in a periodical that unhappiness is the commonest thing there is. And T. S. Eliot, the famous British poet and literary critic who recently passed away, asked plaintively, "Where is the Life we have lost in living?"

A great many writers, perhaps because they themselves have lost the secret of happiness, dwell on the prevalence of unhappiness. But I believe there are untold numbers of people who have discovered a precious secret, the secret of how to have happiness in depth, that is happiness deep within the mind and the consciousness. And, as a matter of fact, unless there is depth in happiness it isn't genuine, but is spurious and of little value. Apparently many people are discovering this and are finding out how to live in this confused and bewildering world and at the same time have peace within their hearts and a deep happiness within their natures.

I had a curious experience not long ago which was at the time most revealing. Mrs. Peale and I were spending several days at one of the world's greatest spas, Baden Baden, in the Rhine Valley at the edge of the romantic and lovely Black Forest. Here people come from many

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countries to find renewal and health by drinking and bathing in the life-giving mineral waters.

Now the city fathers at Baden-Baden, doubtless knowing that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," have made town a gem of loveliness. There are great trees lining the avenues and in the background are the surrounding mountains and the ancient, storied castle on the hill. Three times a day, morning, afternoon and evening, there is a concert by a splendid symphony orchestra. Some of these concerts are held in what is known as the Trinkhalle (English, the Drink Hall), where people go to drink the curative water.

One morning Mrs. Peale and I were sitting there, and I was reading as I listened to the music, when she said to me, "Norman, if you'd look around you'd learn something. Look at these faces - the people at this table." There may have been a dozen other people sitting at the big table where we were sitting; all German. "Look at that young woman, for example, just to your right," she murmured. "What a serene face she has! And that veteran over there with no arm in his left sleeve. He looks so thoroughly at peace with life. Notice the others, too. It seems we're in the midst of some very happy people."

And it was a fact. The group at our table included one woman in deep mourning, dressed in black as is still the custom in some parts of Europe. She obviously had lost someone close to her and she looked lonely. But there was written upon her face the "peace of God, which passeth all understanding."

There was also a man so and feeble that he had come with a nurse holding his arm, steadying him as he walked - a man you might have characterized as tottering on the edge of the grave. But he sat beating time

the music, humming the lovely melody, with the most beautiful smile imaginable. "That man," I thought to myself, "is not tottering into any grave. He is marching into immortality."

I had no conversation with any of these people. I read their faces only. But there was stamped on their countenances that victory in life which is happiness in depth. Now where do you find this happiness in depth? You do not find it in any superficial manner. There is a lot of synthetic, superficial happiness you hear much about today. But I am talking about happiness which has substance and which lasts. Real happiness in depth isn't given lightly. You have to earn it. And you must earn it through peril, toil and pain. It comes often bathed in tears and wrapped in adversity. But when you have it, it is lovely and precious and beautiful.

The other day I was reading the fifth chapter of Matthew. I've read that chapter hundreds of times. But this time I had a new revelation about it. It is a blueprint for happiness. It says "Blessed are the pure in heart." The pure in heart find happiness. "Blessed are they that mourn." They, too, find happiness. "Blessed are the meek." Not the smart-alecks or the wise guys, but the humble - find happiness. "Blessed are the peacemakers" those who do not foment strife, but bring peace among men. They find happiness. The word *blessed* may be interchanged with the word *happy*. The passage goes on to say that if you live as Jesus teaches some people will "persecute you;" they'll make it hard for you. But rejoice, and be exceedingly glad," it says, "for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

The pointers on what you have to do to be happy go through the whole chapter: If anybody makes you go

a mile, go two miles with him. If anybody takes your coat, give him your cloak also. Not only should you not commit adultery, you should also keep your thoughts pure and under control. And it says not only to love your friends, but also love your enemies and "pray for them which despitefully use you." Then the great sermon rises to a climax where it says, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

"Oh," you say, "that is unattainable. That is too hard." That is why Jesus is Jesus. That is why He is the Lord. He put it high, because He believed that there was something great in human beings. He didn't teach something soft; He taught something terribly tremendous. He tried to get us to see that if you have what it takes to rise to this high challenge you will get happiness like you can not get it any other way. Christianity is a man-sized religion. There is nothing soft or innocuous about it. But if you are man enough to take it, then your life will be great.

Of course, one of the things it takes is to be a good person. That sounds like some old Sunday-School statement, doesn't it? Be a good boy; be a good girl. I'm glad for my part, that I was brought up in a simpler time than this, because in those days we were told what good was and what bad was. In those days they knew that black was black and white was white. Nowadays, it's all mixed up into a kind of gray and we've actually come to a point where it is considered poor form by some religious leaders to tell people what is good and what is bad. The pedagogy of our time in religious education seems to have progressed to an elevated place where the main thing to do is reason and quibble. How any so-called religious education leaders can do this is beyond me when all they

need to do to find out what is good and what is bad is to read this fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Maybe they feel that this is outmoded and that they are going to give us something better. Now isn't that great! Personally, I'll stick with Matthew. Recently one of the great publishing houses suggested I write a book on the decline of morality in this country. I didn't feel equal to that. So I got associates and I are doing it together. Before undertaking this project I didn't really know what the moral condition of the country was. I am like most people: I didn't want to know. I wanted to think everything was sweetness and light. So I had been putting my head in the ground like an ostrich and imagining that everything was lovely. But you searchers have confronted me with unmistakable evidence of startling and very dangerous trends. The old moral prohibitions have now been put by. We have advanced ourselves to an intellectual position where we consider we are beyond these things. The idea constantly stressed is that every person is a free individual. There is to be no authority whatsoever. The home, the mother, the father, the church - are to supply suggestions, but not have authority. The attitude is, "I'm free - I can do anything I want. It is nobody's business but my own." We do not bother to ask ourselves how a free man must conduct himself in order to remain free. Yet the fact remains that if you do wrong you enslave yourself. As Dickens said, "I wear the chain I forged in life." Now you would think, wouldn't you, that in such circumstances the church, which has always been the repository of morality, would hold the standard high and say to people, "We believe that Jesus Christ is right when He says that this is right and this is wrong!" I

know of a boy who went to a summer conference held under the auspices of his church -- a Protestant church (I will not name the denomination). And at the conference they sat around the fire in the evening talking about sex. And among those present was this boy who had a girl by the name of Dorothy. He loved this Dorothy. And he was a red-blooded fellow, and he was attracted to her physically as well as spiritually. But he had some ideas, this boy did. And after listening to a lot of confusing talk about sex he stood up in the meeting and addressed himself to the erudite leader and said, "What I'd like to know is: is it wrong or is it right to have sex relations before marriage?"

The professor-minister replied, "Well now, let us evaluate your question and discuss and consider its ramifications. Under certain circumstances "

In short, the boy got a weasel answer. He figured that he might as well follow his inclination. He did. He and the girl fell into bed. The next morning he had a sense of guilt. He went to the leader and told him what he had done and said, "I'm in hell. I love Dorothy too much to have done this. Why did I do it? Why didn't you tell me it was wrong?"

In telling me later what had happened he exclaimed, "What's with these guys? I knew it was wrong. But I needed somebody to tell me it was wrong. The theory was in profound unhappiness because of spiritual leaders who aren't competent to lead.

I will be written off by some of these self-styled leaders as old fashioned. Well, it won't be the first time I've been written off. And I have as my authority the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew - in which I have more confidence than in bright young men who

either don't know what they do think or are rationalizing something deep within their nature, thereby contributing (in my humble judgment) unwittingly to the undermining of the morality of this nation.

One of the greatest happiness-producing factors in all the world is self-control, self-mastery, the ability to take hold of yourself and say, "No!" to that which is wrong. This makes muscles. This makes strong men. This makes happy men. What are we going to do? Degeneration of pygmies? Moral pygmies? Soft, emasculated people? Ultimately such a nation will go down.

I was reading recently about a summer conference of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. At this conference they had twenty-three hundred athletes and coaches from all over the United States. And they were there testifying to their faith in Christ. Talk about men! One of the men there was Paul Anderson, Olympic weightlifting champion, said to be the strongest man in the world. He gave a sermon there one night. He also entertained his audience with certain feats of strength. He drove a twenty-penny nail through a one-inch board with his fist. That's quite something. Then he got eight men to come out of the audience and sit on a table. These eight men together weighed seventeen hundred pounds. He got under the table and lifted the table and all on his back: enormous feat of strength! Every inch of this man is muscle. He is one of the strongest men in the world.

After he got through with these demonstrations he preached a forceful sermon on the theme that anyone who has filled himself with the love of Jesus Christ can overcome any temptation life may bring him. He said that Christ-like love is the greatest power man can tap. "And," he told the assembled athletes, "go use it."

The final point is this: of all the people I have known the happiest are those who have had lots of trouble, sickness, pain, difficulty, but overcame all these because they had a resource. And the resource they had is acquaintance with God. They knew that no matter how dark the shadows God and Jesus Christ were always there. If you know that then, no matter how much trouble and difficulty you have, you are happy in your heart, because you know that the source of victory is yours.

Last summer I was again at Berne, Switzerland, where I have been many times. And there I walked to a ten-day peak of the central Oberland the giants of the Alps. There they were, on the horizon. The sight reminded me of a book by Sir Arnold Lunn, a Britisher now seventy-five years of age, who has spent sixty-five summers among these mountains and is perhaps the greatest authority on this region living today. When he was ten he was taken to Grindelwald, Switzerland, by his father, a pioneer of modern skiing. He himself is a champion skier. He has been over practically every valley, every slope of these mountains. He loves them. And he can write about them with the fervor of a poet.

Lunn tells how in the summer of 1940, when the Wehrmacht was marching into France and stark tragedy cast its shadow over the world, the French embassy at Berne was burning papers and he himself was summoned home to England for military service. There at Berne he looked once more at the mountains. In previous years at the end of summer he had thought, "I'll be back and see you again next year." And he would go away with the memory of them written on his mind. But that year he wondered whether he ever would be back. The whole

world was crashing. Would England be a fief of Hitler? Would Switzerland itself be merely a department of the Third Reich? Would he himself live? Maybe he'd be killed in the fighting. Yes, the whole world was crashing around him.

Five years went by. The war was ended. Lunn arrived at Berne in the late afternoon. The sky was overcast, the mountains invisible. He walked to the terrace. Suddenly, as if by magic, the clouds parted and there they were in the diaphanous mists of early evening: the Wetterhorn, the Monch, the Eiger, the mighty Jungfrau. Through the war and the floundering of civilization they had stood, impervious, and now the light of the dying sun

seemed to say that there are certain things in life which no cloud, no war, no hate, no force can destroy.

This was for Arnold Lunn a spiritual experience, reassuring him that no matter how you suffer God is still there in the shadows, keeping watch over His own. When you know that, and are sure of it, you can face anything, for you have this deep, abiding happiness in your heart.

So I would say that there are two great pillars upon which happiness rests. One is moral decency, self-control, manly mastery over yourself. The other is the knowledge of the love of God and of His presence at all times, come what may. This is what makes happy people happy.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we give Thee thanks for the fact that Thou hast made us men with freedom of choice. We are free either to destroy ourselves or to create ourselves. We can be weak or we can be strong. We can be defeated or we can be victorious. And we know that happiness does not lie along the path of weakness, but along the path of strength. Help us to know

always that we do not have to depend upon our own meager strength, but that Thou, eternal and everlasting God, and Thy Son Jesus Christ art ever-present to support and to sustain. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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