

FINDING TRUE HAPPINESS

By JOSHUA GOODLING

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I. FINDING TRUE HAPPINESS

Happiness is generally defined as something like; "enjoying life, having peace, and being content."

Most people in the world genuinely desire **true happiness** in their lives, but few seem to find it.

Now, perhaps I should clarify myself here. When I speak of **happiness**, I'm talking about **true happiness**. I'm not talking about the happiness that comes and goes as quickly as it came, or brief moments of happiness. **True happiness** is a happiness that touches the heart, and warms the soul no matter what the circumstances may be. **True happiness** is the happiness that gives peace and joy even in the midst of life's trials. **True happiness** is happiness no matter what life may bring. Anyone can find moments of pleasure and moments of "happiness" in today's world, but there are very few who experience **true happiness**.

Many people today have ideas or goals they are hoping to obtain which they think will bring them happiness. Most people seek happiness in money, fame, fortune, and pleasure. However, while these things may bring moments of elation, they do not bring happiness.

One has to only look at much of Hollywood, the sports world, the music industry, the financial world, and the life of politicians to realize this.

Jay Gould, who lived from 1836-1892, was a wealthy businessman, whom John D. Rockefeller called the most skilled businessman he ever encountered. However, on his deathbed, Jay said; "I suppose that I am the most miserable man in the entire world!" That doesn't sound like happiness to me.

After Alexander the Great had conquered the entire known world, he sat down and wept because there was no more world to conquer. He had accomplished more than most people in the entire history of the known world, yet it didn't bring him happiness.

Many people of fame and wealth turn to the same drugs, alcohol, and other vices that the poor people do when they find out that fame and fortune don't bring happiness. The only **true happiness** is found in Jesus Christ.

Now, before you throw the book down and say; "Just what I need, another person shoving religion down my throat!", please hear me out. Paul said in Philippians 3:1, "*Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord...*" And in Philippians 4:4, he said, "*Rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say rejoice.*" Psalm 144:15 says, "*Happy are the people whose God is the Lord!*"

There are numerous verses in the Bible that describe a Christian as happy. However, there are thousands of Christians who live their entire life in misery and unhappiness. There are many Christians who walk around each day with their chins plowing furrows in the ground. Why? Because too many Christians, like so many people in the world today, are too busy looking for "happiness" in all the **wrong places**.

Why are there so many Christians who live in total misery? Why are there so many Christians whom you even hate to ask how they are doing, because for the next ten or fifteen minutes, they will tell you all the problems with their life, and even the problems they don't have yet, but feel someday soon they will have?

The first answer to that is because there are many people who know all about God and the Bible, yet they have no **personal relationship** with Jesus Christ. It is sad how many people genuinely believe they are "Christians", yet it is obvious that nothing could be further from the truth. Let me take a moment here to define what being a Christian **really** means.

There are many people who know all **about** God from what they've heard at church, things their parents have told them, and programs they've seen on television. However, just knowing **about** God doesn't change lives. In order for someone to **truly** be a Christian, they must have a **personal relationship** with God.

Let me illustrate it this way. I have some letters from President Bush. I even have several Christmas cards from the White House. I've read the President's story, and watched him as he has led our country. So, I know a lot **about** him. However, if I were to call up the White House, and say; "This is Joshua, patch me through to the Oval Office." I wouldn't get to talk to President Bush,

because he doesn't have a clue who I am. I know **about** him, but I don't **personally know** him.

The same is true in regards to a lot of people's "Christianity". They know a great deal **about** God, **about** the Bible, and **about** certain rituals and traditions of their certain denominations, but they have no **personal relationship** with God. There are even pastors, church leaders, and others who claim the name of Jesus Christ, but whose life hasn't been changed.

The Bible even mentions these kinds of people: *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you...'"* (Matthew 7:21-23)

Notice He says; "I never **knew** you", which indicates there was never a **personal** relationship.

So, just because someone "claims" to be a Christian, and even preaches or promotes the Christian faith, that doesn't necessarily mean they **are** a Christian. There are some people who only are in it for the money or the fame, and then there are those who only think of Christianity as a "fire escape" from hell. There are also people who twist the Bible around to form their own version of Christianity. You can tell a **genuine** Christian by the way they live, and I'll get more into that in a moment.

First of all, let me define what a **real** Christian is. Attending church at a certain denomination, being kind to your neighbor, or living a good life doesn't make anyone a Christian. The Bible is very clear when it comes to the Christian faith.

Being a member of or attending a Baptist church, a Catholic church, a Presbyterian church, a Methodist church, (and I could list all of the hundreds of denominations who claim to preach the Christian faith) doesn't make one a Christian. When you die and stand before God, He's not going to ask you what denomination you were a member of.

Let me clarify here that attendance at a local church is good, and should be part of our lives, but my point is that **church attendance** doesn't make you a Christian.

In the same light, being a good person and helping others doesn't make you a Christian. Those are some of the actions that a genuine Christian will participate in, but those acts **themselves** don't make anyone a Christian.

The Bible tells us exactly what makes a person a Christian: *"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* (Romans 10:9-10)

Notice that there are two distinctions here. **1. confession with the mouth** (a head knowledge) and **2. believing in the heart** (a personal relationship).

One way of illustrating this is: Suppose we meet a person and they become an acquaintance of ours. When we see them we recognize them simply because in our head we know who they are. Then we also meet a person that we become friends with, we know them by recognition, but also because they are a friend. So when we see them, there is that visual recognition, but there is also that heart recognition. We have special feelings towards them because we know them personally. The same is true of the Christian. We must know **about** God, but we must also know Him in a **personal way**. Of course, in order to personally know Him, one must realize their own need of knowing Him, and their inability to change their life themselves.

Many people say that they don't need God, but yet they never find true joy in their lives. When a person repents of their sin and selfishness and chooses to begin that new and personal relationship with God, they will experience happiness and their life will be different.

The Bible tells us that anyone who is truly a Christian will have a new life; they will live differently than others. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Now, here is where a lot of people miss the mark. They claim that being a Christian means that they act weird in some way, make fools of themselves, etc. However, when the Bible says that a Christian is to be **different**, it is referring to the way in which a person lives their life, such as being kind to others (even those who are not kind to you), honoring and respecting your parents and

those in authority, seeking to help those in need, not ruining your body by things such as smoking and other things hazardous to one's health. In other words...living a "clean" life.

A true Christian is to follow the commands of the Bible, paying close attention not to twist verses out of context or claim things mean what they really don't. One must interpret scripture in light of all other scripture. And one must learn to live for others.

In the Gospel of John, we find the following story: *"So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."* (John 13:12 – 17)

Back in the time period in which this story took place, people wore open sandals, and the roads were just dirt and dust. So, when people would come into a house, they would remove their sandals, and the servant or lowliest person in the household would wash their feet.

Here Jesus Christ took it upon Himself to do this task. Here was the Son of God washing feet, one of the lowest jobs of the day. He did it to leave us an example of how we are to live our lives as Christians. We are to put others first; we are to be kind and helpful. People should notice something different about us.

There are a lot of people in today's world who wouldn't dare stoop to such a task, but yet they claim to be Christians. They look down their nose at other people, they fly off the handle at the slightest irritation, they scream and holler at their family, and then they claim themselves as Christians. That is **not** a Christian attitude, or even close to how a Christian **should** live.

I should point out here that Christians aren't perfect. Anyone who claims to be perfect is wrong. There will be times in even the best Christian's life where he/she makes wrong choices, and does things they're not supposed to. The true Christian will however shortly realize the error of their ways and make

steps to correct them, and will not blame all of their mistakes and faults on others or their circumstances.

There are some religious groups who try to force their doctrine upon others, and who claim anyone who does not follow their beliefs as their enemy. That is not the proper attitude of a Christian. While I firmly believe in God and know my personal relationship with Jesus Christ has made a difference in my life, I am not foolish enough to think that everyone is going to agree with me. What you choose to believe is your choice to make. However, I will tell you from experience that a **genuine personal** relationship with Christ can bring peace to your life and give you the joy and happiness many are seeking for.

So, now that we've defined what a **true** Christian is, let's get back to the question; Why are there so many Christians who live in total misery?

Why? Because **true happiness** is not found in one's circumstances, but in one's heart. The late Christian newspaper editor, Dr. John Rice once asked a man how he was doing. "I'm okay under the circumstances." was the man's reply. "Well what are you doing **under** there?" asked Dr. Rice in return.

It is not the **circumstances** that matter in our life, but how we live in the midst of those circumstances. As Christians, we should be happy no matter what the circumstances are. David said in Psalm 23, "*Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.*" If in our heart, we have true happiness; our circumstances will not change our happiness.

Only when we totally give our lives in complete surrender to Jesus Christ can we or will we ever experience true happiness. Psalm 128:1, 2 states; "*Blessed is every one who fears the Lord, Who walks in His ways. When you eat the labor of your hands, You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.*"

Let's take time now to look deeply into this wonderful subject of true happiness.....