

The Humble Seeker of Happiness: Finding Joy

Presenter: Yevon Romney, April 30, 2010, BYU Women's Conference

(Alma 27:18) Now was not this exceeding joy? Behold, this is joy which none receiveth save it be the truly penitent and humble seeker of happiness

Life is not a two-hour movie where life is bliss and challenges are quickly resolved.

What can we do to find joy in the journey of life?

The opposite of happiness is unhappiness, not depression. Depression, a grave condition that deserves urgent attention, occupies its own category apart from happiness and unhappiness. 5

Everyone has struggles and challenges. We all have times of happiness and times of unhappiness and we experience different levels of each emotion.

I learned that I was the only one who could make me happy. I couldn't depend on an outside force, another person or some wonderful circumstance to change my life. I had to change my life and I had to have a plan and get going on that plan.

Positive Psychology as an explicit perspective has existed only since 1998, but enough relevant theory and research now exists concerning what makes life most worth living to fill a book suitable for a semester-long college course. 1

Although there are numerous theories about happiness and countless definitions of it, researchers have worked to answer the question: Can I learn to be happier?

- Realize that enduring happiness doesn't come from success - Wealth is like health, its utter absence breeds misery, but having it doesn't guarantee happiness.
- Take control of your life – Happy people feel in control of their lives, set goals, use time wisely
- Act happy – We can sometimes act ourselves into a frame of mind, going through the motions can trigger the emotions.
- Seek work and leisure that engages your skills – Happy people are often in a zone that challenges them without overwhelming them like gardening, socializing or craft work.
- Create something - develop a hobby, skill or talent and make something that didn't exist before

- Join the “movement” movement – An avalanche of research shows that aerobic exercise not only promotes health and energy, it is also an antidote for mild depression and anxiety.
 - Give your body the sleep it needs – Happy people live active vigorous lives yet reserve time for renewing sleep and solitude.
 - Give priority to close relationships – Intimate friendships with those who care deeply about you can help you weather difficult times.
 - Focus beyond the self – Reach out to those in need. Happiness increases helpfulness (those who feel good do good.)
 - Keep a gratitude journal – People who pause each day to reflect on some positive aspect of their lives experience heightened well-being.
 - Nurture your spiritual self – Faith provides a support community, a reason to focus beyond self and a sense of purpose and hope.
- From Positive Psychology, C. R. Snyder & Shane J. Lopez, Sage Publications, 2007, page 145.

The Happiness Project by Gretchen Rubin, Harper Collins Publisher, 2009.

A “happiness project” is an approach to changing your life. First is the preparation state, when you identify what brings you joy, satisfaction and engagement, and also what brings you guilt, anger, boredom and remorse. Second is the making of resolutions, when you identify the concrete actions that will boost your happiness. Then comes the interesting part: Keeping those resolutions.

- January – Boost Energy – Vitality
- February – Remember Love – Marriage
- March – Aim Higher – Work
- April – Lighten Up – Parenthood
- May – Be Serious about Play – Leisure
- June – Make Time for Friends – Friendship
- July – Buy Some Happiness – Money
- August – Contemplate the Heavens – Eternity
- September – Pursue a Passion – Books
- October – Pay Attention – Mindfulness
- November – Keep a Contented Heart – Attitude
- December – Boot Camp Perfect! – Happiness!!!

How does finding balance and maintaining perspective contribute to joy?

Life is like a seesaw or a teeter totter as we use to call them. Teeter totters were a favorite piece of playground equipment until the safety monitors came along and outlawed them. Seesaws also work as a simple example of a mechanical system with two equilibrium positions. One side is stable, while the other is unstable.

Sometimes we're up and sometimes we're down. But what I realized is that it's what is at the center that makes all the difference. It's the pivot point at the center of the teeter totter that determines if balance will be achieved at the ends of the board.

What is your anchor or your fulcrum point as your teeter totter goes up and goes down? I can build my center of balance between happy and unhappy events that occur by grounding myself in these ways:

*Attending the temple

*Core beliefs – true conversion

*Believing Christ

*Trust in Heavenly Father and His plan of happiness

*Faith in His Plan for me *Providing service and thinking of others

Alma 7:11:13

11 And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

12 And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

My 86 year old father-in-law Vern said that it was during the times of trial and unhappiness that he learned the most. He wouldn't want to repeat those trials, but he wouldn't want to lose the insight and growth, indeed the comfort and peace that he felt during the hard times to know that a higher power was aware of his struggles and aware of him in all ways possible.

A balanced life usually means finding balance in all the aspects of our lives. Examine the balance in your own life. How are you coming? Are you lop-sided and almost tipping over in some areas? Do you neglect some areas and excel in others? Are you taking care of yourself so that you can be happy? Stresses and being unbalanced in many of these areas can diminish the quality and quantity of your happiness. Are you balanced in these areas:

Spiritual – Emotional - Intellectual – Economic – Physical – Social

We are happier when we can take care of ourselves. We need to take care of ourselves first so what we have the energy and ability to take care of others. Don't ever feel guilty if you are doing something to better balance your life and build your strength in the areas listed above.

We can learn a lot from other cultures. Some seem to have this concept of balance figured out. In the book Happiness around the world: The paradox of Happy Peasants and Miserable Millionaires author Carol Graham mentions that the "The grumbling rich man may well be less happy than the contented peasant, but he does have a higher standard of living."

Beyond the necessities of enough food, shelter, heat and clothing, we all rely on relationships and meaningful work to determine our levels of happiness. We can be happy on very little money.

The Art of Happiness by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, M.D., Riverhead Books, 10th Anniversary Edition, 2008. The books teaches the following:

- We endeavored to bring our discussion to the basic human level, the level where distinctions between people – gender, race, religions, culture and language – break down. At this fundamental level, we are all the same; each one of us aspires to happiness and each one of us does not wish to suffer.
- If you want others to be happy practice compassion; and if you want yourself to be happy practice compassion.
- These spiritual traditions teach us to feel connected with our fellow beings and with the world we live in. They celebrate service to others as one of the highest virtues.
- Researchers on human happiness identify compassionate service to others as one of the key characteristics shared by many of the world's happiest people.
- When we help others, the focus of our mind assumes a broader horizon within which we are able to see our petty problems in a more realistic proportion.

How does seeking the Lord's way bring happiness?

As a member of the church of Jesus Christ, I believe and trust that The Lord's way is the only way that will bring lasting, true happiness to our lives. We've been given insight and understanding about who we are and whose we are. We know why we are here, what we are to do and what happens next. We have answers to many of the pressing questions that people through the ages have had in regards to what truly brings

happiness. Lasting happiness comes through following the example of Jesus Christ. True, sustainable happiness comes in conducting our lives according to our knowledge of right and wrong. True happiness is a product of knowing that even through our trials, our disappointments, our shortcomings and our unhappy times, that there is something larger and something bigger and better ahead if we just stay the course.

From – The Joy of the Journey, Ardeth Greene Kapp, Deseret Book Company, 1992.

- The joy of the journey comes not only in the anticipation of our ultimate destination, but also when our eyes are opened and we learn to experience the wonders of life and goodness of life even while we are faced with the challenges.
- We may feel the need to schedule, program, and calendar good times when what we really need is to be awakened to the unprogrammed, unexpected and beautiful things that take place every day.
- Unless we learn to take control of the present, we will always live in anticipation of better days in the future. And when those days arrive, we shall still be looking ahead, making it difficult to enjoy the here and now.
- We live in a time when happiness is too often determined by the things we accumulate, collect, measure, and even compare in relation to what others gather, accumulate, collect, measure and compare. This pattern of living never brings happiness.
- As we seek to do the will of our Father in heaven and strive to walk in His steps each day, we will come to understand the purpose of life and experience the joy of the journey.

My situation and discovery came much in the same way as another young woman named Melody McGrath as shared in the New Era:

“Could one actually seek happiness? And seek it contritely and humbly? For some reason I had always thought that happiness was some sort of innate gift—you either had it or you didn’t. I had never really considered that in order to be happy, I might have to really put forth an effort. Suddenly I realized that, like any other principle of the gospel, including faith, hope, charity, and mercy, happiness is something that requires work and a measure of self-discipline, as well as divine help, to achieve and maintain. Of course, misery often seemed like the easier option: it would take much less effort to sit in my room, listen to sad songs, and think about the ways my life is less than perfect. But I realized that, not only was my unhappiness damaging to me and to those who love

me, but it was also a rejection of God's gifts, a rejection of the great plan of happiness. Now when I pray I ask for the Lord's help in achieving an inner happiness that exists regardless of the trials. I actually tried to be cheerful, to appreciate the many wonderful things about my life and the world in which we live. *New Era*, June 1996, page 8.

1. *A Primer in Positive Psychology*, Christopher Peterson, Oxford University Press, 2006.
2. *The Handbook of Positive Psychology*, Edited by C.R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, Oxford University Press, 2005
3. *Positive Psychology*, C.R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, Sage Publications, 2007.
4. *Authentic Happiness*, Martin E. P. Seligman, Ph.D., Free Press, 2002.
5. *The Happiness Project*, Gretchen Rubin, Harper Collins, 2009.
6. *The Art of Happiness, a Handbook for Living*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, M.D., Riverhead Books, 1998.
7. *The Joy of the Journey*, Ardeth Green Kapp, Deseret Book Company, 1992.
8. Scripture Lifeline: *The High Way to Happiness*, Melody McGrath, *New Era*, June 1996, 8.
9. *Find Joy in Life*, Elder Richard G. Scott, *Ensign*, May 1996, 24.
10. *Finding Joy in the Journey*, Thomas S. Monson, *Ensign*, November 2998, 84-87.