

Finding Happiness

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The key to happiness is not in getting what we want but rather in accepting what we get. St. Paul wrote, *"I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is like to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether in plenty or in want"* (Philippians 4:12).

Most of us find it easy to believe that we would somehow be happier if life dealt us a better hand. Sadly, some people go through life searching for better things instead of enjoying what God has already given to us.

St. Paul said that he had learned how to be happy with what he had. One way to appreciate what we have is to have it taken away from us. The person dying of thirst in the desert suddenly develops a deep appreciation for every drop of water. Someone diagnosed with a terminal disease learns quickly to appreciate every moment of every day.

To most people, the grass looks greener on the other side of the fence until they get over the fence. Then they begin to yearn for the "good old days".

A second way to learn contentment is to look around and see that life isn't as bad as we might think it is. Someone once gave me a copy of the following. I don't know who the author is, but he must have discovered that happiness depends on our attitude, not on our circumstances.

"The young man was at the end of his rope. Seeing no way out, he dropped to his knees in prayer. 'Lord, I can't go on,' he said. 'I have too heavy a cross to bear.'

"The Lord replied, 'My son, if you can't bear its weight, just place your cross inside this room. Then open the other door and pick out any cross you wish.'

"The man was filled with relief. 'Thank you, Lord,' he sighed, and he did as he was told. Upon entering the other door he saw many crosses, some so high the tops were not visible. Then he spotted a tiny cross leaning against a far wall. 'I'd like that one, Lord,' he whispered.

"And the Lord replied, 'My son, that is the cross you just brought in.'"

The Bible says, *"Keep yourself free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'"* (Hebrews 13:5).

If we believe that happiness is the absence of problems, we will always be searching for our personal utopia. The problem is that such a place does not exist. Those who can only be happy when things go their way will never be happy for long.

If we seek happiness through material things we find that there is always something else to obtain.

If we seek happiness through relationships, we discover that even those who love us most are imperfect and may hurt us and let us down.

I once heard a well-known speaker say that at one of his seminars his wife was asked to speak. She surprised the crowd by saying, "My husband does not make me happy." After her husband recovered from the shock she added, "He cannot make me happy. I have to decide if I will be happy or not. It's my choice regardless of what he does."