

Bible and Life

Happiness

Everyone strives for happiness. Yet, so often it is hard to find. This can be because many people are not quite certain what will make them happy. For some it is having enough food to eat. For others it is having a good job, while many people would be very happy just to have a job! For others still it is getting more money, more possessions and more prestige. And for some, happiness is having a good family that is well-adjusted. For many less fortunate people, happiness is just being well.

However, have you noticed that not everyone who gets their wishes stays happy? Often, happiness is only temporary. It doesn't seem long before people begin to lose their happiness and start searching for it again. For a lot of people, searching for happiness is a life-long but sometimes elusive pursuit.

What does the Bible say about happiness? Solomon, probably the wisest person who has lived on this earth (apart from Jesus) said, "Blessed (happy) is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding". Prov 3:13. It's very hard to dispute this isn't it? When we realise that we have made good decisions based on wisdom and understanding we certainly become happy.

Two other verses provide further perspective for us. Paul said "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances". Philippians 4:11. So often unhappiness is brought about because we are never satisfied. Paul was undoubtedly happy because he accepted his problems as being part of his life. And the other verse was written by James. "As you know, we consider blessed (happy) those who have persevered. ... The Lord is full of compassion and mercy". James 5:11. In other words, happiness can come because we show the commitment to see a task through to its completion. Serving God continually is one such task that will result in long-term happiness.

World Turmoil

Where and when will it all end? Thinking people are very concerned about the future of the world. (Many other people try not to think about the future at all and spend a lot of the time in pursuits that take their minds away from the cold, hard realities of the world.) Jesus, when asked by his disciples about turmoil in the world, said "Nation will rise against nation, and

kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven." Luke 21:10-11.

Yes, Jesus was initially talking about the events just after his **first time** on earth. But he was also talking about the days just before **his return** to the earth. There is no doubt about the fact that we live in the time when nations are battling each other, and when there are famines, pestilences and fearful events on the earth.

But, Jesus was not a negative person. Far from it. He continued, "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Luke 21:28. There is reason for great hope because other parts of the Bible tell us that these events will herald Jesus' return and usher in God's Kingdom of peace and righteousness. God, through the prophet Isaiah says, eventually "My people will live in peaceful dwelling-places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest." Isaiah 32:18. Wonderful promise isn't it? No more world turmoil!

Suffering

It is often said by people who want to deny the existence of God that a loving God would not allow suffering. Unfortunately, this view shows a lack of understanding of the Bible teaching on love and suffering. Let's go back to the beginning. God created a world that was "very good" Gen 1:31. He gave the first man, Adam, a free reign on what he could do **except** that he was told not to eat of the fruit of a specific tree. A reasonable direction? Regrettably, Adam (and his wife, Eve) were disobedient. God punished them. Part of their punishment was suffering and death. Read all of Genesis 3 for the details.

The love of God is shown in that He was (and is) prepared to forgive error. This is why He provided His Son Jesus as a sacrifice so that people might overcome suffering and death. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16. In the meantime, people - those who follow God's directions as well as those who don't - suffer and die. The difference is that those who are committed to serving God know that suffering in the present life will be put aside in God's kingdom. The prophet Isaiah said of righteous people that in the kingdom "Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away." Isa 35:10.

It's a wonderful prospect isn't it? Everyone suffers at some time in their lives. The suffering may take many forms including illness, bereavement, family difficulties and persecution. Those who

accept the principles of God have the hope that they will be helped through those very difficult circumstances. We can take to ourselves the Apostle Paul's conviction in coping with suffering - "I can do everything through him who gives me strength". Philippians 4:13.

What is Love?

The word 'love' is very prominent in everyday life. It can be heard mostly in popular songs and sprinkled liberally in most movies and television serials, especially the 'soapies'. Regrettably, much of the reference to love is very superficial, associated only with emotions and, too frequently, really only associated with sex.

The Bible concept of love is much different. There are two words in the New Testament that are translated as 'love' in English. One of them covers the ideas of affection and emotion, and the other suggests something more substantial, having morality and principle. The noted Bible analyst, James Strong suggests that the first mostly relates to the heart and the second relates to the head.

Which do you think is the word used in John 3:16? "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Yes, it is the latter. God's love was of incredible depth and substance, so much so that he gave his only Son so that others might be saved from eternal death.

There is another interesting use of the two words in the New Testament. You might recall this passage. "When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.'" (John 21:15) The words used for 'love' in this verse are different in the original Greek text. Jesus asked Peter if he had a substantial, principled love for him, and Peter answered that he had great affection for Jesus. Peter had not, at that stage, reached maturity in his love for Jesus.

What about our love? Is our love for our families and for Jesus substantial, as was God's love for us in providing his Son? Or is it only the superficial, affectionate variety so evident in current society? Affection is important, but the Bible has suggested that it must go hand in hand with love of a much deeper nature.

How Important is Doctrine?

'Doctrine' literally means a 'tenet', a 'belief' or 'teaching'. It might be religious, political or philosophical. While some people have a doctrine about some aspect of their life, many others

avoid using the term because they see it in a context of a fixed belief and prefer to be more flexible.

Probably the word is used mostly in connection with religion and the Bible. You might be interested to know that the word 'doctrine' occurs 51 times in the Bible. Most of the occurrences are in the New Testament. The first usage was in reference to Jesus. "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." (Matt 7:28-29.) (The word 'teaching' here is translated as 'doctrine' in the King James Version.) It was evident that Jesus' doctrine was more authoritative than the doctrine of the church teachers.

Jesus alludes to the importance of doctrine in John 7:16-17. "Jesus answered, 'My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.' " It is obvious that the Christian should follow Jesus' doctrine as it came from his Father.

The Apostle Paul refers many times to the need for adhering to sound doctrine or teaching.

In his letter to Timothy (1 Tim 4:6), for example, he writes "If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed."

The Apostle John was also adamant that the doctrine or teaching of Jesus was the only doctrine that the Christian can accept. "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son." (2 John 1:9)

It is important, then, for us to make certain that we know what the real doctrine or teaching of Jesus is. And, as for avoiding doctrine and being flexible, Paul had this to say: if we are mature "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming." (Ephesians 4:14)

Strong words!

Marriage

Census reports in the Western World have indicated that over the last 20 or 30 years there has been a decline in the number of people getting married. More and more couples are simply

agreeing to live with each other without a formal commitment. As a consequence, many governments have found it necessary to make provision for 'partners' in family, welfare and taxation benefits.

What is the Bible view of marriage? Firstly, the Bible makes it clear that God is the author or instigator of marriage. In Genesis it is recorded that after Eve was created from Adam "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." Gen 2:24. Paul quotes this verse in Ephesians when he reinforces the concept of formal marriage when talking about the relationship between man and woman, husband and wife. "However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." Ephesians 5:33. There is no concept of partners here, Paul is talking of a formal relationship between wife and husband.

The long-term nature of the relationship is regarded as non-negotiable by Jesus. After quoting from Genesis himself, Matthew records Jesus as continuing "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." Matt 19:6.

What, then, is the reason for the such a formal relationship? Paul explains it carefully earlier in that chapter from Ephesians. "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Ephesians 5:25. In other words, marriage, the formal relationship between a husband and wife, is a magnificent example of the relationship between Christ and his Church where Christ is the husband and his Church the wife. Jesus committed himself to loving his 'wife' to the extent of death. There is no greater commitment is there? This undoubtedly provides good reason for the formal commitment of marriage to be more highly regarded in Western society.

The Kingdom of God

What exactly is the Kingdom of God? It may be a surprise to some people to find that a Kingdom was established by God in Old Testament times. This was the Kingdom of Israel because God set it up for His people. God said to David "And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people shall not oppress them any more, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you." 2 Samuel 7:10-11. The sequence was: God established a home for His people and He appointed David is king over the people to provide some security for His people.

God also told David, "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever." 2 Samuel 7:12-13. The fascinating aspect of these verses is that they were quoted by the angels at the birth of Jesus. After soothing an obviously anxious Mary, the angels said of the child that would be born to her "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end." Luke 1:32-33.

There is no doubt that there will be a Kingdom with Jesus as King. Where and when will this take place? There are many passages in the Bible that make it clear that the Kingdom will be on earth. Let's just look at one such passage. The context for these verses is that four 'living creatures' and twenty four elders 'sang a new song' to the Lamb (Jesus): "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Revelation 5:9-10. The key feature of these verses is that that the whole of Revelation refers to events that would take place after the vision was given to John late in the first century. As the Kingdom has obviously not been established on earth yet, it must be at some time in the future.

Yes, the Kingdom of God on earth with Jesus as King!

Growing Up

It is often said that our world is very much geared towards young people. It is true that in many parts of the world young people 'mature' very rapidly. In those countries where there is immense social and political upheaval, tragically, young people become heavily involved in armed conflict at an age where, in other countries, they are in high school and trying to improve their grades, play sport, or have a good time.

In some western countries, it seems that young people, particularly adolescents, are being exploited commercially through emphasis on activities that prey on their volatile and impressionable natures at that age. They often lack direction and purpose, and have great difficulty seeing value in life. Consequently, many become very anti-social and cause considerable concern either through violence and vandalism, or through abuse of drugs and alcohol.

Regrettably, the problem lies with the older people who should be providing guidance. Too often, young people are left to their own devices. Solomon gave his typical wise words: "Train a

child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." Prov 22:6. He placed the responsibility for the development of the young squarely on the adults.

Jesus stressed the importance of children. The disciples had a quarrel about which of them was going to be greatest in God's Kingdom. "Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and made him stand beside him. Then he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all-- he is the greatest.' " Luke 9:47-48. In other words, to serve Jesus means recognising the value of children first.

But young people themselves do have a responsibility to God. It was again Solomon who said "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come ... " Eccl 12:1. This suggests very strongly that a God-centred upbringing will provide a very sound foundation for later life.

Growing Old

For many people, growing old can bring increasing insecurity. Illness, limited finance or financial support, living in homes for the aged - many things affect the way old people feel about their future. For example, there is the family. Many older people feel the great excitement of having their grandchildren and, often, great-grandchildren close to them. They often face the dilemma of wanting to be part of their family but not wanting to be a burden on anyone. Unfortunately, there are people who do not have a family, or their family lives at a distance from them so that family interaction is minimal. For these, life can be very lonely.

For most, increasing age brings increasing illness and suffering. The support of family can be very comforting in these circumstances but more often, an individual person needs the comfort of inner peace to be able to cope.

In both of these circumstances, and in many others relating to growing old, a strong personal faith becomes vital. Ultimately, recognition of the power of God to **always** help individuals can help overcome the insecurities and the loneliness. Paul gave some excellent advice about feelings of personal security. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Phil 4:6-7. While Paul wrote these words before he himself had grown particularly old, he, more than most people, was very well aware of the need to seek the guidance of God to help him through most difficult times, including periods of loneliness. In the same letter to Philippians he also

said, " ... I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ... I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Phil 4:11,13.

It is also important for those not so old to try to understand their feelings and provide support for them in very practical ways.

Racial Harmony

Luke 10:30-37

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Where are we going?

Have you ever been in the situation where you have been talking about life after death with someone and they have said, "Well, we are all going to the same place anyway"? In one sense this is very true. The Bible says that when we die we all go to the grave. Solomon said "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." Ecclesiastes 9:10.

This is probably not what the person you were talking to had in mind. They were probably suggesting that all good people go to heaven when they die. As the above verse suggests, however, this is not the case. This, and many other verses, positively state that when a person dies they go to the grave. If you look at Hebrews 11 you will find that there is a whole chapter indicating that many of the great people of the Old Testament who were approved by their faith "did not receive what was promised" (v. 39). And what were they promised? A place in God's Kingdom. Where did they all go? To the grave.

However, the Bible doesn't leave the matter there. Hebrews also continues that they didn't receive the promises "because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect." (v.40) In other words, God's idea was that the great people of old **and ourselves** will receive the promises together - at the same time. When will this be? When God's Kingdom is set up on earth and after the great people who are in the grave are raised from the dead.
