

## ON HAPPINESS

**Psalm 107: 1-9**  
**John 15:8 -11**

**Faith Community**  
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### Introduction

A writer in San Francisco recently did an informal survey. For eleven months he observed how many people had smiles on their faces while shopping in the “upscale organic market” where he shops. In that time he saw thousands of faces, “nearly all of them healthy, beautiful, and very expensively groomed.” In eleven months he counted seven smiles, although three of those he considered insincere. Instead of smiles he saw mostly looks of “troubled self-absorption.”

Like San Francisco, our nation has so much – we are the wealthiest nation in the world – so why aren’t we happier?

### I

It might be that we don’t fully understand happiness. We think of happiness as feeling good, having a good time. Sometimes it seems like we think of happiness as spending every day at Disney World – that is, being constantly entertained.

Happiness seems to be an emotional state, and therefore, by definition, passing and temporary. So we have to keep searching for the next event, program, show that will lift our spirits.

Maybe as adults we think of happiness as having things: a yacht, an enormous house, endless vacations, sexual adventure, expensive sports cars, and good wine. (Have you noticed the number of TV shows that have people walking around with a glass of wine in their hands?) Sometimes it seems like happiness is having all the right toys.

Many men think of happiness living a life like Hugh Hefner’s. He has mansions, a jet, women everywhere, and a cellar full of wine. It looks like one adventure after another. Not many people seem to know about his quotation several years ago, when he said he would rather fall in love than make another million dollars. Even the comparison – falling in love versus one million dollars – shows that there is something wrong.

When I was in high school, there was a playboy who lived up the street from us. He was wealthy and divorced, and he always seemed to have a different woman over. One night I was doing my homework at my desk that looked out over the church parking lot. Suddenly, an expensive car pulled into the lot and there was a lot of screaming. Then the playboy got out of the car, with no shoes on, and slammed the door. The car roared off. He began to walk back up the road to his house. I saw a good excuse for a break from homework. I saw my friend out in his yard so I went out to see if he knew more about what had just happened. We went up to our friend’s house, right next door to this bare foot man’s house.

The three of us were standing in our friend’s yard talking when we heard a car come roaring down our street. The same expensive car pulled into the man’s driveway. An angry woman was

inside. Suddenly she backed her car clear out into the street and then floored it and blasted into the man's garage door. She backed up again into the street and smashed through his garage door. She repeated it all a third time and then roared off down the street. At first we were shocked and then we burst into laughter.

I'm thinking that wasn't such a happy day for our playboy neighbor: memorable but not so happy.

When we think of happiness as experiential, it makes marketing happiness a lot easier. Buy this product; travel here; get this vehicle and you'll be happier. The message is, "You can purchase happiness. You can go after it and get it."

Even the Declaration of Independence talks about "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." With all due respect to Thomas Jefferson, I think he got that part wrong. You can't pursue happiness with any likelihood of finding it. Happiness comes from how you live; it's a result, a byproduct of living well. If we spend our lives searching after happiness, we won't find it. If we live our lives well, it's a likely result.

## II

In the Old Testament the word "shalom" is translated peace. But the word is rich and means more than just absence of conflict. It means happiness, well-being, contentment, and fulfillment. Shalom is the word used for a person living in obedience to God. When we know God and follow the standards God gave us, we are likely to find shalom – happiness. It is a gift from God that comes by living faithfully. The apostle Paul talks about "joy and peace" which is satisfaction, the well-being that come from living our faith.

Shalom is relational. It concerns our relationship with God and our relationship with other people. As Christians we realize that Christ's death and resurrection accomplished well-being between God and people, and it influences the relationship of people with each other. Shalom is about peace, but also satisfaction and contentment. It even involves healthful sleep. Psalm 4 talks about those who "sleep in peace."

## III

We know real happiness when we know the standard on which our life is based and we live faithfully toward that standard. Happiness is the result of committing ourselves to something that is beyond us, something that is greater than we are. Happiness is living true to our beliefs. From that kind of living comes contentment and fulfillment.

Christians understand that God set that standard for us in Jesus Christ and living true to him is our path to true happiness.

Living in Christ is living well, healthily, and with meaning. Living by Christ's standard draws us away from illusions and fantasies, and focuses us on what's real. You can't have enough affairs to make you as happy as you will be living with the same spouse who knows you through and through and loves you for who you are. That's reality.

Last past weekend we talked with two families whose kids are having a difficult time adjusting to university life. Both said everybody just wants to drink, party, and use drugs, and that's not what their kids want. Their sons and daughters are saying, "I'm having trouble finding friends who are interested in the same things I am." One of them found a home and help in a church near campus. These are kids who grew up knowing what counts and holding solid values.

The irony of happiness is that sometimes it causes us to sacrifice for what we believe in. Because we are happy and know what we believe in, we can make sacrifices to help other people.

It occurred to me that when Jesus said to that rich, young man, "Go and give all that you have to the poor, and come follow me," he wasn't talking about sacrificing, as much as he was helping the man find happiness.

### **Conclusion**

Happiness is basing our lives on a solid foundation and living true to what we believe. It is committing ourselves to Christ and living in the way he showed and told us. The result of living in this way is lasting happiness and fulfillment, because we are living true to something that is greater than we are. We are living faithful to our Creator.

When I think of lasting happiness, I think of the man who I talked to at his bedside just days before he died. He was solidly grounded in faith and values. He had suffered a disease that had eaten away at him. He was now dying at too young an age.

As I sat beside this man he said, "I have lived a good life. I couldn't have asked for anything better: a wonderful wife, great children, the joy of grandchildren, good work to do." He said, "You know, my death will be more difficult for my family than it will be for me. I'm ready - and I'm not afraid."

Is there a better sense of fulfillment than that?

Amen.