

# Five Rules for Happiness

Recently my daughter sent me an email with "Five Rules for Happiness" as the subject. The concise little rules that followed captured my attention. I jotted them down on a slip of paper and posted them near my computer. I have glanced up at them repeatedly over the last few weeks to remind myself of the simple yet elusive solution to the stresses and strains of life that seek to steal our happiness. Even though I don't know their origin, you will see that they each bear the validation of the scriptures in their wisdom.

The Scriptures for this devotional come from Eugene H. Peterson's [The Message](#).

## 1. Free Your Heart from Hatred

We don't *really* hate anyone do we? Well, let's substitute the word "aversion" for hate; do we have a strong aversion to someone deriving from fear, anger, or a sense of injury? If so, then we really *do* hate! Jesus forbids His disciples to hate because hatred means bondage to the sin nature, which we crucified with Him. There is a place for the hatred of evil that is directed against the wrong, not the person.

Jesus said, "You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-centered selves" (Matthew 5:43-45).

Booker T. Washington said, "I will allow no man to belittle my soul by making me hate him."

There is no place in the life of a Christian for personal hatred. If we feel it welling up in our heart today, let us agree to "respond with the energies of prayer," and allow Jesus to help us free our heart from hatred and find true happiness in His love for all.

## 2. Free Your Mind from Worries

Again, we protest; we don't worry.. not really.. or do we? Is there a care or concern that repeatedly distracts us during the day? Ah, if so, we *do* worry! And we all know Jesus told us not to!

Jesus said, "Give your attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes" (Matthew 6:33-34).

Corrie Ten Boom said, "Any concern too small for a prayer is too small to be made into a burden."

There is no place in the Christian life for the burden of worry. When we feel some care or concern over which we have no control creeping into our minds today, let us turn it over to the God who "daily bears our burden" and allow Him to help us free our mind from worries.

## 3. Live Simply

I recently read that the top two occupations entering debt counseling are firemen and teachers. While we have learned many things, as a group we have apparently not learned to live simply.

Jesus said, "If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to Him than birds. . All this time and money wasted on fashion - do you think that it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers - most of which are never even seen - don't you think He'll attend to you, take pride in you, do His best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's *giving*. People who don't know God and the way He works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how He works. Steep your life in God-reality; God-initiative; God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met" (Matthew 6:25-32).

"To find the universal elements enough; to find the air and the water exhilarating; to be refreshed by a morning walk or an evening saunter ... to be thrilled by the stars at night; to be elated over a bird's nest or a wildflower in spring--- these are some of the rewards of the simple life" (John Burroughs).

Let's agree to focus more on what we can do without, than on what we think we "need" and live simply and happily.

#### **4. Give More**

Once I heard a pastor's wife say that she would not buy anything that she would be unwilling to give away to someone who needed it. She seemed to live what Andre Gide summarized in saying, "Complete possession is proved only by giving. All you are unable to give possesses you."

Jesus told His disciples, "You have been treated generously, so live generously" (Matthew 10:8).

Our giving doesn't need to be limited to material possessions. If we see someone who is discouraged, can we not give a word of encouragement? If we see someone who is sad, can we not share a funny story - laughter *is* good medicine. If we see someone who is stressed, can we not offer to do something to help?

The more we give, the happier we will be.

#### **5. Expect Less**

I'm certain that we need to clarify this suggestion. As teachers, we've heard repeatedly that we get what we expect from our students; that our expectations should be high so that they can rise to them. But as human beings, we've learned from experience that *unrealistic* expectations - of anyone or anything - can lead to bitter disappointment, which

will obliterate happiness. For example, if we look to our spouse, our job, or our children to make us happy, then we need to expect less from them and look to Jesus Christ. If we expect appreciation from our co-workers, our students, the parents of our students, then we need to expect less from them and look to Jesus Christ. It's not that all expectations are bad; rather, it's the unrealistic or misplaced expectations that need to be evaluated and reduced, or our lives will be characterized by discontentment rather than happiness.

The Apostle Paul had learned the proper balance for expectations. He expected the best in the way of spiritual growth from the people he taught, but he expected nothing for himself. He wrote to the Philippians, "Actually, I don't have a sense of needing anything personally. I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am" (4:11-13).

"Too many people miss the silver lining because they're expecting gold" (Maurice Setter).

If you want to live a happy Christian life, expect less from others and seek your fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who will not disappoint!

Free your heart from hatred, free your mind from worries, live simply, give more, expect less - five little rules for happiness. So easy to say - so difficult to achieve!

The number one comment I heard after giving this devotional the first time went something like, "That's good advice, but it's just impossible to do!" In this way I agree: it is impossible for us to achieve in our own human effort. Yet, I disagree because I believe that Jesus in us *can* achieve it.

I am reminded of a very disagreeable little boy named Eustace in C. S. Lewis' Narnia book, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader. It seems that Eustace had turned into a dragon while he was asleep on a dragon's hoard! "Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself" (75). One night, as he was lying awake wondering what on earth would become of him, he saw Aslan - the huge lion that represents Jesus Christ in the Narnia books. Aslan took Eustace to the top of a mountain where there was a garden and a very large well in the middle of the garden. Eustace seemed to understand that if he could get into the well it would ease his pain, but the lion told him he had to undress first. Eustace later recounted:

I was just going to say that I couldn't undress because I hadn't any clothes on when I suddenly thought that dragons are snaky sort of things and snakes can cast their skins. Oh, of course, thought I, that's what the lion means. So I started scratching myself and my scales began coming off all over the place. And then I scratched a little deeper and, instead of just scales coming off here and there, my whole skin started peeling off beautifully, like it does after an illness, or as if I was a banana. In a minute or two I just stepped out of it. I could see it lying there beside me, looking rather nasty. It was a most lovely feeling. So I started to go down into the well for my bathe.

But just as I was going to put my foot into the water I looked down into the well and saw that it was all hard and rough and wrinkled and scaly just as it had been before. Oh, that's all right, said I, it only means I had another smaller suit on underneath the first one, and I'll have to get out of it too. So I scratched and tore again and this under skin peeled off beautifully and out I stepped and left it lying beside the other one and went down to the well for my bathe.

Well, exactly the same thing happened again. And I thought to myself, oh dear, how ever many skins have I got to take off? For I was longing to bathe my leg. So I scratched away for the third time and got off a third skin, just like the two others, and stepped out of it. But as soon as I looked at myself in the water I knew it had been no good.

Then the lion said - but I don't know if it spoke - You will have to let me undress you. I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it (89-90).

Aslan does successfully remove the skin from Eustace and Eustace becomes a boy again. And from that time forth Eustace began to be a different boy. The point is that Jesus Christ is the only means of shedding our sin nature and its habits and becoming the kind of people that Jesus would have us to be. What is impossible for us is possible through Jesus Christ. When we sense that our hearts are filling up with hatred, our minds are being consumed with worries, we are living elaborately, being possessed by our possessions or forming unrealistic and misplaced expectations, let us just lay down flat on our backs and ask Jesus to remove the ugliness from us.

Ben Franklin observed, "The constitution only gives people the right to pursue happiness. You have to catch it yourself." It is the desire and will of Jesus Christ that each of us catch the kind of happiness that the world cannot take away. He prayed to the Father, "I pray these things while I am still in the world so that these followers can have all of my joy in them" (John 17:13 NCV).

I pray that we will all catch the happiness of Jesus Christ today by freeing our hearts from hatred, freeing our minds from worries, living simply, giving more and expecting less.

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Lewis, C. S. The Voyage of the Dawn Treader. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company. 1970.