

# **Fighting Discontentment: How to Be Happy in an Unhappy World**

**by D. Matthew Brown**

In some country in Central America, an American industrial company opened a factory. This company had moved its manufacturing facilities from the United States to this poor, third-world country, seeking to produce the same product that they had produced in the States at a much cheaper cost. Though the company paid the Central American workers far less than they paid their former American workers, the company did pay the Central American workers much more money than they had ever made at any previous local job that they had held. After the first two weeks of operation had passed, the company gave to their new workers their first pay check on that Friday. The following Monday, none of the workers that had worked the two previous weeks returned to work. The factory was empty. The American supervisors of the factory were dumbfounded, "Why had no workers returned to make more money?" They pondered their dilemma and soon realized that the money that they had paid the workers on the previous Friday was more than enough for the workers to support themselves and their family for several months, living in the conditions that they had lived in before the company had arrived. The American supervisors came up with an ingenious plan: they would distribute a copy of the latest Sears catalog to everyone in the surrounding area. The following day after they had distributed the Sears catalogs, workers from the surrounding villages came to the factory in droves. The workers were now discontent.

The United States is an unhappy country. Our capitalistic economy thrives on the unhappiness of its citizens. Advertisements abound on television, billboards, in newspapers, and everywhere else trying to make its beholder discontent with what he currently owns. If a person owns a 2005 Honda Accord, television ads are quick to point out to him the great new features of the 2006 Honda Accord and why he would be much happier owning the latest model. Even if the owner of the 2005 Accord does not decide to upgrade to the newest model, chances are he was pushed by advertisements to be unhappy with the car that he currently owns: It's dull, it's out of date, it's not as stylish as the new Accord, it's tail lights are not as curved as the newer model's, and on and on. Discontentment abounds in all aspects of our American lives, whether it be our salary, the home we live in, the spouse we're married to, the dog we own—it doesn't matter, we are taught from the time that we are in diapers to be unhappy with what we have. Some call it "not settling"; I call it selfish brattiness.

### *Happiness Defined*

Thus far I freely interchanged the words *contentment* and *happiness*, and their negative counterparts, *discontentment* and *unhappiness*. For some reason, some persons like to distinguish words that fall into the "happy" category, like *blessed*, *joyful*, *happy*, and *content*. I do not do so myself because honestly, how can one be joyful and not be happy? Or how can one be blessed and not be happy? And how can one be content and not be happy? It is impossible! I don't know how many times I have heard Christians say that they were miserable, but they had the joy of the Lord. Bull! If they really had the joy of the Lord they would be happy! The same follows for contentment, for contentment means simply to be happy in the state that you are in.

### *There is but One Mean to Happiness*

The key to happiness in this life and in the life to come is such a Sunday school answer that everyone knows it, but no one believes it: God! Jesus! The Bible! Yes, yes, and yes. If everyone knows the answer to happiness, why are there so few happy Christians? Because many know the answer to happiness with their minds, but their minds have yet to tell their hearts. Did you know that like 98% of the people in this country believe in their minds that there is a God? Just imagine how this country would change if that 98% also believed in their hearts that there is God! The same is true with happiness. If Christians really believed that God was the key to their happiness, don't you think that they would constantly seek God through prayer? If Christians really believed that Jesus was the key to happiness, don't you think that they would look continually to the Cross with thanksgiving and gratitude? If Christians really believed that the Bible was the key to happiness, don't you think that they would read it and meditate on it every chance that they had? What you believe is shown by your actions.

### *Imperfect People Can Never be Perfectly Happy*

I second John Piper when he denounces the hymn that says, "Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before." Every day with Jesus is not sweeter than the day before. Of course Jesus Christ is God and the spring of life and happiness to those who believe in him, but trials and tribulations come our way that suppress the joy that we are supposed to have in Christ. Is it sin not to rejoice and not to be happy in the Lord at all times? Yes, for Paul makes that clear in his command in Philippians 4 to rejoice in the Lord. The problem is that we are sinful people until the day that we are saved from this present age, and we will continue to allow outside circumstances and fleshly desires to rob us of our happiness in God. What we must do in times when our happiness in the Lord is taken from us is, first, repent from our unhappiness. If unhappiness is sin just like lying and stealing are sins, confession and repentance are absolutely necessary. Second is to cultivate practical habits that prevent us from giving provision to our flesh and that allow us to be happy in the Lord and in the state that we are in.

## *Practical Habits for Happiness*

- 1. Turn off the television.* Television is a wellspring of unhappiness. Computer advertisements will make you unhappy with the computer that you have, scantily clad, skinny women will make you unhappy with the wife of your youth, fictitious television dramas will make you unhappy with your "boring" life, etc. While there may be some decent stuff on television, the majority of it is designed to rob you of your happiness.
- 2. Keep your eyes straight ahead.* This is a literal suggestion for many guys and figurative for others. I know how it is to be a guy whose eyes were once constantly surveying the landscape for the next "hot" girl that would walk by. Not only is doing such a thing totally sinful and dishonoring to God, it is robbing you of your happiness! If you have a wife, what does it say to your wife about your view of her and your own heart that you cannot keep your eyes off other women? Stop it! God made her for you, and you are to be happy with her and her alone. For those who do not have problems with roaming eyes, tame your imaginations! If you are a woman and God has given to you a husband, do not wonder how life might be with some other man. Keep your eyes straight ahead on Christ and learn how to be thankful and rejoice in your husband's good attributes and do not resent him for what he lacks. God made him the way he is for a reason; to despise him is to despise the God who made him.
- 3. Walk with God.* Walking with God is not something that you do one Sunday afternoon in the park, but it is a life style. Do not devote a portion of your day to praying to God and forget him the rest of your day. Become a person who prays continually to God throughout the day, thanking him for the blessings that come your way and begging him for strength when you encounter various trials and temptations. Yes, people may look at you funny if you verbalize some of your prayers, but chances are that you'll be happier than them.
- 4. Become a Person of Love.* Unhappiness is rooted in selfishness, for it tells you what you do not have and what you deserve to have. Deny your self and love other people instead, doing so will take away your need to love yourself and your desire to please yourself. I am convinced that the happiest people are the ones who care the least for themselves and that the most miserable people are the ones who care the most for themselves.
- 5. Develop an Attitude of Gratitude.* Grateful people are happy people. Just look around you; I know that's all I have to do. At times when I'm unhappy with the state I'm in, all I need to do is think about the wonderful bride that God has given to me that loves me and is committed to me even when I'm unlovable, the wonderful family that I have married into, the great parents and family that the Lord has already given to me, the beautiful, free piano that he gave me last Saturday (answered prayer, praise God!), the great home that he has given to me, and on, and on, and on. Add to those worldly blessings the salvation that God has given to me through the blood of Christ, it's easy to see why it is a sin to be unhappy!

### *Happiness is a Choice*

Regardless of what this world tells you, your happiness is not dependent on external factors. Your happiness is your choice. You can choose to seek God and trust his word, you can choose to thank him for the countless blessings he has given to you and is going to give to you, and you can choose to love people more than you love yourself. Happiness is not easy to come by, but you will never come by it if you choose the path of this world. Who will you believe, this sinful world that encourages you to take and take, or the One who said, "Give and it will be given to you"? The choice is yours.

### *Philippians 4:4-13*

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me--practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

*I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*