

Doesn't God Want Me To Be Happy?

Joe Slater

This question usually refers to superficial happiness such as a child feels when given a new toy. Such earthly pleasure isn't necessarily wrong, but neither should we think it is God's chief goal for us! He certainly approves when we *"eat and drink and enjoy the good of all (our) labor"* (Ecclesiastes 3:13). As Solomon found, though, such enjoyment cannot fill the God-shaped void in the heart of every person.

A man who had been unfaithful to his wife tried to rationalize his sin by asking me, "Doesn't God want me to be happy?" He had confused *"the passing pleasures of sin"* (Hebrews 11:15) for true happiness.

Undoubtedly Jesus could enjoy a good meal and the satisfaction of a job well done. For those perceptive enough to see it, His sense of humor shines through. We should not view Him as perpetually melancholy and forlorn. Yet Isaiah portrays Him as *"a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"* (53:3). What makes us think we, as disciples of Jesus, are entitled to continuous gratification because "God wants us to be happy"?

The imprisoned Paul knew what it was like to have everything he needed and to be in want. *"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content"* (Philippians 4:11-12). Evidently, he didn't believe the modern "prosperity gospel" ("gospel of health and wealth").

Genuine Biblical happiness doesn't depend on your outward circumstances! Being faithful in a covenant relationship with God results in happiness nothing of this world can match! When that's your concept of happiness then yes, God wants you to be happy!

AN UNFAILING FAITH

Jesus told Peter, *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail"* (Luke 22:31-32a). Recall how Satan did, indeed, "sift" Peter to the point that he denied his Lord three times! Satan also went after Job, but the great patriarch stood fast against the devil's assaults.

Satan loves to go after God's faithful servants. This, of course, means that if you are a child of God, Satan desires to have you as well. How unsettling, to think that Satan actually wants to sift us as wheat! In other words, he wants to agitate us. It is an effort on his part to drive us from our steadfastness.

Jesus told Peter He had prayed for him that his faith would not fail. He was informing Peter that though he was a chosen apostle, he was not exempt from Satan's attacks. His main protection would be an unyielding faith; Jesus prayed for him to have it.

But what exactly is Satan's goal when he tries to sift us as wheat? In short, he wants our faith to fail. When we begin to drift away from the church, neglect reading the Bible, or get out of the habit of praying, Satan is winning. When we lower our moral standards to blend with the world, Satan is delighted. These show weakening faith!

From His own bitter experience Peter later warned us to *"be sober"* and *"vigilant"* because *"our adversary, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Peter 5:8).

Centuries before Christ God's faithful prophet spoke of the Lord's impending judgment on the drifting children of Israel. His simple warning: *"Woe to those who are at ease in Zion"* (Amos 6:1).

--Milton Smith (via *Old Paths*) adapted

A TEACHABLE SPIRIT

Peter gives a picture of Christ-like leadership near the close of his first epistle. It is not a leadership of self-promotion as we see from our worldly leaders but one of a servant's leadership.

This seems to be a very different man than the often brash and outspoken man we read about in the Gospels. I often wonder what precipitated this change in Peter. Did Christ's repeated examples and teachings as God incarnate start to break through his human notions of leaders and godliness? Was it some pivotal moments in Peter's life that made him more teachable? Perhaps it was being brought low at his own betrayal of Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75)? Was it recognition of his own hypocrisy after being called out by Paul for his treatment of Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-21)?

As with all of our lives, there were likely pivotal moments in Peter's life where he was more teachable. However, I think the Spirit guided Peter at the end of the passage to show us one essential ingredient for us to be teachable as Peter (1 Peter 5:5, 6):

"Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you." (ESV)

Only when we "clothe ourselves in humility" and approach God with the same humility as Peter are we in a condition where our Lord can teach us and mold us. Perhaps more difficult is the instruction for us to have humility with one another. However, if we are to learn from one another, we need to approach each other with similar humility. In doing so we are each able to bring our differences together making up the complete body our Lord envisioned for His kingdom.

--via Mt. Carmel Church of Christ (Athens, AL)