

The Bible *and* Happiness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 21:36, John 8:32, 1 Cor. 10:13, Phil. 2:3, Col. 3:13, 1 Pet. 3:15, 4:12-14, 1 John 1:4.*

Memory Text: “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (*John 10:10*).

Key Thought: The Bible offers us answers for one of life's most elusive goals: happiness.

Everybody wants to be happy, yet, few know how to achieve it. The world offers all sorts of enticements that promise happiness but always prove in the end to be shallow, fleeting, and empty.

Can we find happiness in this sinful world? We can, but only by going back to the Source of all happiness: God. Pain, suffering, and unhappiness are the result of our separation from God; only to the degree, then, that we return to Him can we find the happiness that we all long for but that the world itself doesn't offer.

This week we'll look at some biblical principles regarding happiness. We'll also focus, at least for a few days, on the family unit itself, for here is where so much of our happiness or unhappiness originates. The Bible offers us wonderful principles that, if applied, can protect our families from so many things that all but guarantee misery and suffering. And regardless of the past, regardless of the mistakes made that have hurt us or that we have made that have hurt others, God, through His Word, offers us promises that can bring healing and happiness. “They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away” (*Isa. 35:10, NIV*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 9.*

Life, Abundantly

“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (*John 10:10*).

Read the above text. What is Jesus saying to us? How do we understand the idea of having life “more abundantly”? What do you think that includes? What does it not include?

At the foundation of all that we believe and hope for as Christians is the promise of eternal life (*1 John 2:25*). Without that, whatever else Jesus does for us, even now, is all in vain (*1 Cor. 15:16-19*).

Yet, the promises that God has given to us in the Bible aren’t all other-worldly; they don’t all pertain to life in a new heaven and a new earth without sin, suffering, and death. The Word of God promises us many things here and now, things that can greatly help us know now what Jesus means when He talked about giving us life “more abundantly.”

Look up John 8:32, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Ephesians 2:8, 1 Peter 3:15, and 1 John 1:4. What promises are found in these texts? What do they offer us in this life, here and now?

God loves us; and because He loves us, He wants us to be happy. He wants what’s best for us. Through His Word, God has revealed Himself to us and has shown us what He is willing to do for us if we will but allow Him to. How often we, ourselves, are the biggest hindrance to our own happiness.

What things of your own doing stand in the way of your “more abundantly” enjoying life offered to us through Jesus? Once you admit what these things are, how can you get rid of them?

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

▶ **Key Text:** *John 10:10*

▶ **Teach the Class to:**

Know: That knowledge of God’s Word brings freedom and everlasting joy.

Feel: The desire to better understand the truth found in the Bible.

Do: Teach others to live according to God’s Word.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

I. Knowing God’s Word (*John 8:32*)

A How can knowledge of the truth bring freedom and power over temptation?

B How can knowledge of the truth bring joy?

II. Rejoicing in the Lord (*1 John 1:4*)

A Have class members share specific promises that have brought them happiness.

B What means has God given us to achieve joy even in a sinful world?

III. Everlasting Joy (*1 Thess. 5:16*)

A How does the world define happiness? Why is such happiness temporary and unstable?


B Our happiness in Christ is based on the hope of heavenly things. What heavenly things bring you joy, and why?

▶ **Summary:** “I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me” (*Ps. 13:6*).

Learning Cycle

▶ **STEP 1—Motivate!**

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners’ experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

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Rejoice Before the Lord

“God created the earth to be the abode of holy, happy beings.”
 —Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 540. That happiness, of course, was disrupted by sin (*Gen. 3:16-18*); and not until sin finally is eradicated will we enjoy the full happiness that only sinless beings in a sinless world can enjoy.

Meanwhile, even in this sinful world, God has provided the means by which we can achieve a certain amount of happiness, contentment, and joy in this life.

What promises did God make to Israel, provided, of course, they were obedient? *Lev. 23:40; Deut. 12:7, 12, 18; 16:11.*

Study after study shows that in regard to the kinds of factors that give an indication of “happiness,” those who have faith in God come out better than those who live with no faith. After all, as Christians, think about what the Word has revealed to us: that we have a loving, caring God who loved us so much that He came down to earth, took on human flesh (*Rom. 8:3*), and in that flesh died for our sin (*Rom. 5:8*), and that because of His death we have the promise of eternal life in a world made new (*Rev. 21:1*). We have the hope that this life isn’t all that there is. Meanwhile, we have from Him many precious promises about Him being with us (*Matt. 28:20*), guiding us (*John 16:13*), helping us (*Heb. 4:16*), never leaving or forsaking us (*Heb. 13:5*), and so forth. No wonder we should be happier than those who know nothing about these promises.

Look up Exodus 20:1-17; Proverbs 3:5; Luke 21:36; Philippians 2:3; Colossians 3:13; 1 Peter 4:1, 2; and 2 John 1:5, and note the principles found in them. How would each one, in its own way, add to our happiness here if we were to obey what they say? Ask yourself, too: “How well am I seeking to follow the principles found in these texts?”

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Motivate your class members to focus on today’s lesson as essential for their everyday living. Begin from what is known and move toward what is to be learned. Be careful not to get sidetracked by the enthusiasm or indifference of some members.

To be happy is everyone’s desire. Rich or poor, employed or unemployed, man, woman, or child, literate or illiterate—we all seek happiness. In fact, if someone were to say that he or she does not want to be happy but is content to be sad, miserable, or depressed, we would think of such a person as not being normal. Wanting to be happy, therefore, is a normal part of human life.

But there is a problem. How can one be happy? What contributes to life’s happiness? Can one be happy by what one can attain—education, a good job, a beautiful house, wealth, a loving family? Encourage your class members to discuss this question.

► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, **What do I need to know from God’s Word?**

The Bible has much to say about happiness. The Bible is God’s Word on how humans can live happily on earth and on how they can receive the happiness of life eternal. As you explore biblical principles of happiness, encourage class members to participate by reading the texts, asking questions, or making helpful comments.

Bible Commentary

I. Happiness and God as Our Creator

We are not our own, but God’s. We belong to God by creation (*Gen. 1:26, 27*) and by redemption (*1 Cor. 6:19, 20*). A sense of God’s ownership of us is perhaps the first step we need to take to be stripped of any self-delusion that we can find our own happiness. The Bible begins with God’s creating the world and ends with His restoring it. In between

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The Family Foundation: Part 1

The Bible says the world was created by the word of God and that He created humankind in His own image (*Gen. 1:26, 27*). He designed man and woman, He blessed the first marriage, and He made marriage the foundation of the family. And, as we all know so well, a strong, stable family is a crucial component in creating happy lives. As the psalmist says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain” (*Ps. 127:1, NIV*). In the family we can experience love and happiness. It is for this reason that the Word clearly says, “ ‘Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate’ ” (*Matt. 19:6, NIV*). The Lord desires His children to understand that if they marry, they have made a covenant to be faithful to each other for as long as they live. The Word also explains how this marriage relationship can be strengthened: marry only another believer (*2 Cor. 6:14-16*), be completely loyal to each other (*Heb. 13:4*), and express love and appreciation for each other (*Song of Sol. 7:1-9*). The family that abides by the Word of God will experience the joy of His presence as they follow His commandments.

What principles for a strong family can be found in the following texts?

Rom. 12:1

Rom. 14:7

1 Cor. 3:16, 17

1 Cor. 6:19, 20

How can you apply the principles stated in the above texts and strengthen your own family relationships? Meanwhile, what can you do to help heal the wounds from past family relationships that have gone sour?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

is the story of life, its struggles, its temptations, and its possibility of victory when it falls in line with God's expectations. Casting ourselves upon God as the One who saves us through Jesus opens the possibility of happiness.

Consider Matthew 11:28: How does the biblical use of “eternal life” and “rest” have a bearing on human happiness?

Right relationships. The biblical concept of happiness demands that through Christ we be in right relationship with God (*Rom. 5:1, 2*) and with each other (*Eph. 2:14-16*). Hence the psalmist's joyful declaration, “What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record” (*Ps. 32:1, 2, TLB*).

Consider Philippians 1:18-21: What is the basis of Paul's joy and happiness even in adverse circumstances?


Neighbors. The command to love our neighbor is closely knit with the command to love our God (*Matt. 22:37-39*). Loving God and humans are two sides of the same redemptive coin that ensures our joy in Christ. Take away one, and we destroy our basis of Christian happiness.

II. Happiness and Love

“The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all created beings depended upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—homage that springs from an intelligent appreciation of His character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 493.

Love begins with God and embraces our fellow humans. The Sermon on the Mount (*Matt. 5-7*), the parable of the good Samaritan (*Luke 10:25-37*), and the description of the final judgment (*Matt. 25:31-46*) show that Christian existence and happiness are inseparably tied to our unconditional love for God and our fellow humans.

Consider Luke 10:25-28: Why did Jesus say that loving God and

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The Family Foundation: Part 2

The family is the foundation of everything human; destroy or even weaken that foundation, and so much else crumbles with it. How crucial, as Christians, that we do everything we can to protect the sanctity of our homes (and “home” includes everything from living by ourselves to being part of a large family).

Go back over the Ten Commandments. How many of those commandments are directly related to family concerns, and how are they related? Why would families be stronger and more secure if all these commands were followed?

A crucial aspect of family life deals with responsibility. The Bible says that each person—husband, wife, or child—must bear responsibility for the choices they make (*2 Cor. 5:10*). If each individual knows and accepts his or her responsibility as spelled out by the Word, the family ties will be greatly strengthened. The Word gives guidelines about the responsibility of each individual. The Word says that Abraham commanded “his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord” (*Gen. 18:19, NIV*). To parents, the Word says, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (*Prov. 22:6, NIV*). The Word also admonishes parents to avoid treating their children in a way that will cause them to become discouraged (*Col. 3:21*). To the children, the Word says, “ ‘Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you’ ” (*Exod. 20:12, NIV*), and “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (*Eph. 6:1, NIV*). To the husbands, the Word says, “love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (*Eph. 5:25, NIV*), and to the wives, “Submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body” (*vss. 22, 23, NIV*).

What are your own responsibilities in regard to your family? How well are you meeting those responsibilities? Are you doing anything that can damage the happiness and sanctity of your family? Which areas in your family relationships need improvement?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

our fellow humans is at the core of “eternal life” and leads to a life of happiness? How does God show His love toward us? How does He expect us to show our love toward Him?

Consider 1 John 5:16-19: Can we love God and at the same time not love our fellow humans? Failure to love exposes a lack of confidence in ourselves, as well as reveals a life of fear and falsehood.

Family. By two pre-Fall institutions, God revealed two principles that contribute to human happiness. The Sabbath shows the need for rest and worship (*Gen. 2:1-3*). Marriage and family (*Gen. 2:18-25*) foster happiness between individuals based on mutual love, respect, stewardship, and dignity. Home is not a human institution where anything is permissible. It is a divine altar before which the entire family bows in worship to the Creator and in affirmation of love and service for each other. That altar is the sacred refuge where every family member can find true happiness.

Consider Ephesians 5:22-6:4: You may have this passage read by various class members. As they read, note the great principles that mark a happy Christian home.

► **STEP 3—Practice!**


Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question, **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

Thought Questions:

Job lived a righteous life (*Job 1:1*). He loved God and his family (*Job 1:8*) and had a confident hope in Christ’s second coming (*Job 19:25-27*). Yet his life was filled with sorrow. How do you explain why good people suffer and bad people prosper? Is it a matter of definition or a testing of one’s resolution?

Application Question:

Joy. When we are of service to others and to God, we experience Christian happiness. Read John 5:11-13 and note how Jesus links God, others, and us

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“Not As the World Giveth”

As we’ve said all week, God loves us and wants us to be happy. At the same time, we must remember that we are in a world of sin, of death, of suffering, a world in the midst of a war between good and evil. And as in all wars, there are casualties. In fact, we all have suffered in this war, one way or another. Thus, despite the many promises that we have in the Bible, promises that offer us much comfort and hope, we all are destined to suffer in this life.

Think about the lives of Abraham, David, Jesus, and Paul. Would you characterize them as “happy”? Defend your answer.

One of the crucial things to consider is how we understand happiness. Jesus Himself gives a key when He said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (*John 14:27*). In other words, we have to realize that worldly ideas of peace or even happiness aren’t the same as biblical ideas. Worldly happiness can be based on fleeting and temporal things, things that in their time and place can be good. But sooner or later all these things vanish, and to build our hope and happiness on them is to build on sand. For the Christian, happiness has to be based on something deeper than the fleeting and uncertain joys of this life. That we can enjoy these things, and derive some pleasure and happiness from them, is important; but we must keep our hope based “where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (*Matt. 6:20*).

Read Luke 10:20, John 14:27, Philippians 3:7-11, 4:6-13, and 1 Peter 4:12-14. What principles are found in these texts that can help us better understand what it means to be “happy” in this life, even amid inevitable suffering and sorrow? Also, as you read them, ask yourself, “How well am I applying these principles to my own life?”

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

in that order and how He defines Christian joy within that context. Under what circumstances might we miss out on this great principle?

Witnessing

Earlier, it was stated that true happiness is inseparably tied to our unconditional love for God and our fellow humans. Discuss how such love for others is expressed through acts of service (*Matt 25:31-40*) and how these acts of service are effective witnessing tools.

► STEP 4—Apply!

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question: **With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?**

How can your class members apply the principles of this lesson to their daily living?

- 1 A short temper is part of your daily struggle. Because of it, you get angry every now and then, and the end result is you are unhappy. What biblical promise can you claim to overcome your anger?
- 2 You are unhappy because you cannot meet the economic needs of your family. What promises does the Bible have for you? “Let not your heart be troubled” said Jesus in His antidote to despair and grief (*John 14:1-3*). Jot down the comforting points Jesus conveys and imagine friends and situations in which these principles will bring the needed help.
- 3 What lessons can we learn from the following children’s chorus:

“Happiness is to know the Savior,
Living a life within His favor
Having a change in my behavior
Happiness is the Lord.”

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Factors That Make for Success or Failure,” pp. 77–96; “From the Marriage Altar,” pp. 97–128, in *The Adventist Home*.

“This feeling of guiltiness must be laid at the foot of the cross of Calvary. The sense of sinfulness has poisoned the springs of life and true happiness. Now Jesus says, ‘Lay it all on Me; I will take your sin, I will give you peace. Destroy no longer your self-respect, for I have bought you with the price of My own blood. You are Mine, your weakened will I will strengthen; your remorse for sin, I will remove.’ Then turn your grateful heart, trembling with uncertainty, and lay hold upon the hope set before you. God accepts your broken contrite heart. He offers you free pardon. He offers to adopt you into His family with His grace to help your weakness, and the dear Jesus will lead you on step by step, if you will only put your hand in His and let Him guide you.”—Ellen G. White, *This Day With God*, p. 63.

“The children of God may rejoice in all things and at all times. When troubles and difficulties come, believing in the wise providences of God, you may rejoice. You need not wait for a happy flight of feeling, but by faith you may lay hold of the promises, and lift up a hymn of thanksgiving to God. When Satan tempts you, breathe not a word of doubt or darkness.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Feb. 11, 1890.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, talk about this whole idea of happiness. What are your definitions of happiness? Should we expect to be happy all the time? Is there something wrong with our walk with the Lord if we don’t feel happy? How can happiness be used as a ploy by Satan to deceive us? At the same time, how can God use unhappiness as a means of reaching people?
- 2 What do you say to a Christian who admits that he or she is not happy? What counsel would you give that person?
- 3 As a class, discuss this thought: Can a person in the Lord be happy even while suffering for Christ’s sake?