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Gleanings

Happiness or Joy?



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'Tis the season for frivolity and therefore efficiency in the workplace drops dramatically, other than for those engaged in selling products purchased for the Christmas season. People are consumed with shopping, social gatherings, parties, and family activities. Consequently most people's focus is not on work but on distracting pleasures. Happiness is the goal.

According to one definition, happiness is "a mental or emotional state of well-being characterized by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy" (www.ask.com/wiki/Happiness). Who wouldn't want this? This would be wonderful bliss—no worries, no concerns, and no cares.

Why not make happiness the goal all the time? Why limit happiness to one month of the year?

Certainly, most of us would love to be happy all the time. But this would require circumstances in life that would promote an uninterrupted positive mental and emotional state of well-being. Anything that disrupted this state would interfere with our happiness. For example, most of us get upset when we have problems—particularly difficult ones, such as relational or financial or job or health problems. These issues are realities in our world. How should you respond to these circumstances that disrupt your quest for happiness?

One solution would be to go to Disneyland. After all, Disneyland's enduring purpose is to promote happiness (Collins and Porras, *Built to Last* [New York: HarperBusiness, 1994], 225).

At Disneyland the context is all about you and helping you eliminate all concerns and cares about life so that you can be happy.

The Disney organization goes to great lengths to produce this context. For example, the employees (cast members) are rigorously trained in customer service. Every cast member is trained to take a personal interest in the customers (guests). Cast members are trained to be helpful, sensitive problem-solvers.

To develop a workforce to meet Disney's strict customer service criterion requires a rigorous hiring process. Disney is quick to acknowledge that character trumps capability in their hiring process. They believe that job skills can be acquired through workplace training but character is formed largely through the influence and training of parents. It is therefore Disney's objective to find people with sound character. Then Disney can build on their character and train people in the skills needed to produce the company's value proposition.

In addition, Disney goes to great extremes to set the right context for its guests. The grounds are impeccably clean and orderly. Many, if not most, items are repainted on a schedule not based on need. Seldom will one find a burned-out lightbulb. Even trash receptacles are covered so that guests do not see trash and, as with most things, the receptacles are repainted on a regular schedule.

Every cast member wears a clean, neat, and appropriate uniform. Cast members greet guests personally with a smile; even the security personnel are warm and engaging. There is a message that is both spoken and unspoken: "We are glad you are here and we want you to be happy."

Workers are trained to think of the good of the whole not just their individual responsibilities. There are no silos. I saw one office worker (not a facilities person) straighten up a seating area outside a hotel. This was clearly not her responsibility; she just took the initiative and did what needed to be done.

Services

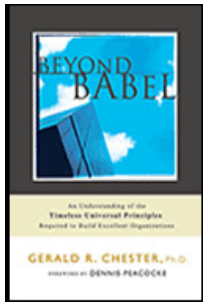
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The service at Disneyland is laudable and exemplary; it is an example of biblical values and principles in action. But Disneyland is a place of unreality. It is a fairy-tale world driven to remove any circumstance that would interfere with the happiness of guests. This begs the question, why do guests need to enter into a state of unreality to be happy?

Remember, happiness is about a mental and emotional state of well-being. What produces this state? Disney believes that the key to happiness is to produce circumstances that require no care or concern on the part of guests. So happiness is about circumstances.

Circumstances have to do with the tangible world and our view of this world largely driven by our sense of prosperity and pleasure. Do I have enough food? Am I well? Can I do what I want to do when I want to do it? Are there any limitations? Do I have enough toys? Do I like my life? Do I have the right relationships?

The fact that people are generally happier during the Christmas season intimates something about the circumstances of life. This is corroborated by the fact that many people visit Disneyland. After all, if you were happy all the time, why would you go to Disneyland?

Biblically, the issue is that happiness is about circumstances. And because of the reality of sin in the universe, sin impairs circumstances so that not everything in life will be pleasant. How then can we live happily in a sinful universe? Are we limited to being happy only at certain times and in certain places?

As long as your definition of happiness is connected to physical circumstances, you will not consistently be happy. Circumstances ebb and flow frequently and unpredictably in life. So when happiness is yoked to circumstances, happiness will be elusive. But there is another way to view happiness.

Consider again the definition of happiness: "Happiness is a mental or emotional state of well-being characterized by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy." Note that happiness can include intense joy, but what is joy?

Happiness tends to be connected to physical circumstances, but joy is not about physical circumstances, it is about spiritual circumstances.

For example, Acts 16:16–40 records the story of Paul and Silas in Philippi. Even though they were Roman citizens with the corresponding rights, they were wrongly accused, illegally arrested, unjustly convicted, and unmercifully punished. They were stripped, beaten, imprisoned, and probably deprived of food and water. Furthermore, they were servants of God. The circumstances they endured seemed so out of order, how could the civil authorities have allowed this? How could God have allowed this?

Most of us would be incensed if our rights had been violated. And we would be angry with God. Why didn't he intervene to protect us? Doesn't God realize that we are here to serve him? We would clearly be very unhappy, but not so for Paul and Silas. They found joy, not because of the circumstances, but because of their relationship with the Lord. Rather than griping and complaining, Paul and Silas sang praises to God. Rather than focusing on their physical circumstances, they focused on their spiritual state. Instead of complaining, they rejoiced. Rather than demanding their rights, they delighted in the faithfulness of God. Their state of mind was not defined by their physical circumstances but by their spiritual circumstances. They were not happy about physical circumstances but they were full of joy because of their spiritual circumstances.

This illustrates how joy is not connected to physical circumstances. Joy is about the spiritual reality of your relationship with Christ. This means that you can experience true joy in the midst of difficult and unjust physical circumstances.

Which do you prefer—happiness based on circumstances or joy based on Christ? If you want happiness based on circumstances, go to Disneyland. But if you want joy, then go to Christ. This means that you accept Christ as your Savior and then learn to live under the Lordship of Christ. If you do this, you can experience joy every day in every physical circumstance of life and you will not need to go to Disneyland.

Merry Christmas!

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