

God Wants You to be Happy

By RJ Regan

- *Is happiness the same as rejoicing?*
- *What does happiness look like?*
- *Does God want us to be happy?*

I was speaking to someone over breakfast, and he shared with me that he was divorcing his wife. “It just isn’t working out,” he said, “and after all, God wants me to be happy. I could be a much better Christian if I were married to someone else.” After I expressed my disappointment and disapproval of his decision, I pondered what he said. Does God want me to be happy?

Rejoicing vs. Happiness

According to Webster’s Dictionary, there is no meaningful difference between happiness, rejoicing, and exultation. Essentially, they are the same. “Happy” is an adjective, whereas “rejoice” is a verb.

According to Webster’s

Rejoice (verb) is “to feel very happy or show great happiness about something or to fill someone with happiness.” **Happy** (adjective) is “feeling or showing pleasure, contentment or joy.” Happiness is defined with joy and joy with happiness. So you can see that happy and rejoice have the same meaning.

What Does Happiness Look Like?

Just because a person has a smile on his face doesn’t mean he is happy, and just because a person looks somber doesn’t mean he is not happy. Everybody is different. As Peter said, *and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy **inexpressible** and full of glory* (1 Peter 1:8, emphasis mine).

So, ultimately, how we express happiness is between us and God. But it comes from a view that a good God is in complete control. To the degree we know that, we can be happy.

Connections to Happiness

The Gratitude Connection

It is impossible to be happy if we are not thankful. Ingratitude for situations, people, and things destroys our ability for happiness. Ingratitude is the start of an insidious spiritual decline. As Paul said, *For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks* (Romans 1:21), and *Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything gives thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

The Contentment Connection

Contentment is necessary for thanksgiving. A discontented person cannot be thankful in their areas of discontent. Contentment must be learned, not passively waited for. Contentment is a result of control. But it makes a BIG difference WHO is in control.

For the believer, complete control is found in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because He is in control, we can learn contentment. As Paul said, *I have learned to be content in whatever circumstance I am. I know how to get along with*

humble means and I know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11-13).

The Sovereignty Connection

In Scripture, we are commanded to be happy, but what does that look like in our day-to-day living? Does that mean when we cut our finger or see somebody hurt themselves we should be happy about that? No, we shouldn't. We should be empathetic for the person who is suffering.

But we can be happy in knowing that all things are under God's control. *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).* Not everything is good, but everything works together for good.

The Circumstance Connection

Both good and bad circumstances are used by God to test us. They are never a reason to disobey the commands of God, to try and create our own happiness. But if the Bible does not forbid it, then feel free to try to improve your circumstance.

For example, if I am having a hard time with my business or a rough time in my marriage, that does not mean I can be unethical in business or divorce my wife to try and be happy and rejoice. No. God has put those circumstances in our lives as tests, to get us to grow up and be mature men and women of Christ. We must work through the struggle and pain, knowing that God is in control, and see the test for what it is, a temporary situation used by God for our sanctification, in which we should have great joy. *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18). Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow (James 1:17).*

Remember, suffering is the vehicle God used to teach even Jesus obedience. *Although He was a son he learned obedience from the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5:8-10).*

Your commitment to God is revealed by how you respond to frustrated expectations and circumstances.

The Eternal Focus Connection

The pragmatist (or humanist) may say, "All that doesn't kill me makes me stronger." So in that sense, all trials and struggles are a benefit to him, and he can view circumstances in his life as a benefit and experience joy and happiness in them. This view of life may be helpful, except for one important thing. At some point, one of the circumstances will kill him. It is at this point the futility of this world-view breaks down.

Our doctrine and our view of end times (eschatology) appreciably affects our view of circumstances and how happy we will be in them. If this life is all there is, then life is, in fact, a sick joke. But if there is a future eternal hope as promised in the Bible, then our life on earth is just a temporary place before entering eternity with God. It is in this future eternal hope where we get the godly perspective and endurance that helps us through life. (See Hebrews 10:35-36 and Ephesians 6:10-12.)

All that happens to us, all that we have, and all that we do, is a test, a trust, and a temporary assignment. It is all to help us prepare for an eternity with our Father in heaven. God has allowed all of these things in our lives for our benefit so at the day of reckoning we can stand before Him as tested and faithful servants. So He will say, *"Well-done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master"* (Matthew 25:21).

God Is In Control

Pilate had Jesus under his complete control and had the power and means to destroy Him. Or so Pilate thought. *So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin"* (John 19:10-11).

True joy comes from obedience to God, trusting in His sovereignty, and participating in His work. It is only through obedience that we can have any hope of knowing whether or not a suffering circumstance is for our discipline and correction or if it is a test and trial for our edification.

Regardless, we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). We may not be able to perceive the good at the time, and it may not even be revealed to us until we enter eternity with God, but we can have assurance that all circumstances are good for the believer and follower of Christ because He is in complete control of all. Therefore, joy can be found in that. (See also Genesis 1:1; Proverbs 16:4; 21:31; John 1:1-3; and Colossians 1:16.)

God Commands You to be Happy ... and Sad

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 says there is a time for everything. There is a time for happiness and sorrow, life and death, to plant and uproot. Paul said, *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep* (Romans 12:15). As we mature by being conformed to the image of Christ and away from conforming to the world, we should begin to have our thoughts and actions align more with Christ. We should rejoice in what makes God rejoice and weep in what makes God weep.

Conclusion

Rejoicing in the midst of suffering is a supernatural gift of God (Philippians 4:6-7). But it is also a choice that believers are commanded to make: *Consider it joy ...* (James 1:2). It is only through a decision to depend on God, knowing that He is in control, where we can experience true happiness and joy. Dependence on God is expressed through obedience to God's commands, a broken and contrite heart, and participating with Him in His work (Isaiah 66:2). Without a mature relationship with God, as found in His Son Jesus Christ, you can never be truly happy. All sin and disobedience destroys real joy and happiness because it destroys our relationship with God. Rejoicing is a command from God, as is weeping.

However, circumstances are never a reason for violating the commands of God. In all situations and circumstances, He expects obedience, and our sense of happiness and joy should never be tied so close to circumstances that we feel justified in violating His commands.

Questions and Answers

Q: *Is happiness the same as rejoicing?*

A: According to the dictionary, there is no meaningful difference between happiness and rejoicing. "Happy" is an adjective, whereas "rejoice" is a verb.

Q: *What does happiness look like?*

A: Being happy can be expressed any number of ways. Outward appearance is not necessarily a good test of happiness but rather an internal understanding that God is good and that He is in complete control.

Q: *Does God want us to be happy?*

A: The follower of Christ is to rejoice and be thankful in all things. It may be something we feel, but regardless of our feelings, it is something we are commanded to **do**. Therefore, happiness is a choice—kind of like love.