

“Folks are usually about as happy as they make their minds up to be.”

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Generosity

One way that money **can** bring happiness is to spend it on causes and activities that are meaningful to you. According to Michael Norton, professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, if you spend money on others, you'll be happier, and “the closer you are to the recipient, the happier you'll be.”¹¹ Think about ways you can use your money to improve the lives of people in your church and community.

Of course, generosity doesn't only come in the form of money. How are you spending your time and your talents? Volunteering can boost both your happiness and health levels, according to research. Johnny Barnes knew this. Before he passed away, he had the opportunity to be featured in an award-winning short documentary film about himself. “We human beings gotta learn how to love one another,” he said in the movie. “One of the greatest joys that can come to an individual is when you're doing something and helping others.”¹²

Relationship with Jesus

The song lyric “happiness is to know the Savior” sums up the Christian life! Those who have a relationship with Jesus know that, whatever happens in their lives, they can count on our Lord to be with them through the good and bad days. They can rest in the verse that says, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:23, *NKJV*). The daily peace and contentment from this promise can bring joy to our souls.

The Prophet Jeremiah reminds the believer that the Lord wants us to have joy and happiness. “For I know the plans I

have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,’” (Jer. 29:11, *NIV*). Today, this week, this Thanksgiving, add a little more happiness to your life and to the lives of those around you.



Halpant/Stock/Thinkstock

Resources

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¹⁰*The Week*.

¹¹*The Week*.

¹²Stackelroth.

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HOW TO BE HAPPIER

BY GORDON BOTTING DRPH, CHES, CFC

Johnny Barnes, a Seventh-day Adventist on the island of Bermuda, was known as Mr. Happy Man. For three decades he was famous for his joyful personality and



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Johnny Barnes greets people from a roundabout in the middle of Bermuda in 2015.

the way he brightened the lives of residents and tourists. Monday through Friday, beginning very early in the morning, Johnny would stand at a city roundabout and wave at people, wishing them a good morning and telling them he loved

them. He was so popular that when he didn't appear, people would call the radio station to find out if he was all right. Before his death in 2016 at the age of 93, a statue was erected in his honor!¹

IS MONEY THE KEY TO HAPPINESS?

Everyone wants to be as happy as Johnny! However, not everyone is sure the best way to go about it. Many people think that money is the answer. To some extent this theory is supported by data. During the

STEWARDSHIP is a total lifestyle. It involves our **health**, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality, and finances.

1920s through the 1950s, people reported that they were happier as their household income increased. Yet, more recent studies indicate that money aids happiness only up to a certain amount—and that point seems to be about \$75,000 per year for a person or family, according to studies by Nobel laureate psychologist and economist Daniel Kahneman.²

A Harvard Business School study illustrates that more money doesn't equal more happiness. More than 4,000 millionaires took a survey, which included a question about how much money they would need to achieve a 10 on the scale of happiness. The results were surprising: 25 percent said they would need a 500 percent increase in wealth in order to be perfectly happy, and 27 percent said they needed a 1,000 percent increase! Only 13 percent said they could be perfectly happy with the money they already had.³

Are you surprised that millionaires aren't wildly happy? "Once you get basic human needs met, a lot more money doesn't make a lot more happiness," said Daniel Gilbert, Harvard University psychology professor.⁴

IF NOT MONEY ... WHAT?

Of course, happiness is dependent on many circumstances, and none of us will be perfectly happy this side of heaven. Also, not all of us will make \$75,000 per year! So what are some steps we can take to make ourselves happier, no matter what else is going on in our lives?

Relationships

Being part of a loving family or social network helps boost self-esteem and reduce stress, which will make you happier. Behavioral scientists believe that good quality relationships lead to happiness. A famous study from Harvard—which lasted for 80 years—showed that close relationship with family and friends helped people to be happy throughout their lives.⁵

Surveys of people in nearly 70 countries indicate that happiness decreases as individuals reach middle age, but then it steadily increases as they move through their 50s, 60s, and 70s. Why? Part of it is because

"They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy in this world: someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for!"

TOM BODETT



people redefine happiness as they age, and they focus more on significant relationships and meaningful activities.⁶

Scientists have shown over and over again that social relationships not only make you happier, they also make you healthier and help you live longer. *The University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter* reported on a 2010 analysis of nearly 150 studies which "found that social relationships have as great an impact on mortality as smoking or alcohol consumption and a greater impact than obesity or physical inactivity."⁷

Attitude

Psychologist Rick Hanson describes a practical method for increasing happiness: "notice something positive when you're feeling negative." And when you notice it, focus on it! When you take off your shoes at the end of the day, notice how good your feet feel. When you talk to your child on the phone, notice the sense you have of feeling loved. Thinking positive thoughts and feeling happy emotions will trigger the neurotransmitters dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain. The good news is that these neurotransmitters store these positive experiences in your long-term memory, which will make you feel better about your life.⁸

Laughter

Find ways to make yourself laugh more often. Here's a surprising story: researchers studied the benefits of laughing on a group of people with dust mite allergies. Half the group watched an old Charlie Chaplain comedy video, and the other half watched the Weather Channel. Then they were all exposed to dust mite allergens. The people that watched the funny movie had less of an allergic reaction, but it wasn't the video that helped them—it was the laughter. Laughter increases our immune function. The more you laugh, the more your natural killer cell activity increases and the more your body pumps out antibodies.⁹ Being healthier makes you happier, so laugh! It's more fun than taking vitamins.

Goals

Those who set specific goals and achieve them go a long way toward making themselves happier. Every time you tick off a task, your brain releases dopamine. Don't set a huge goal like "save the environment." Instead, set a small and doable goal like "increase recycling." Making and meeting goals like this is the key to a happier life, according to research.¹⁰

"For every minute you are angry you lose sixty seconds of happiness."

RALPH WALDO EMERSON



..."notice something positive when you're feeling negative."