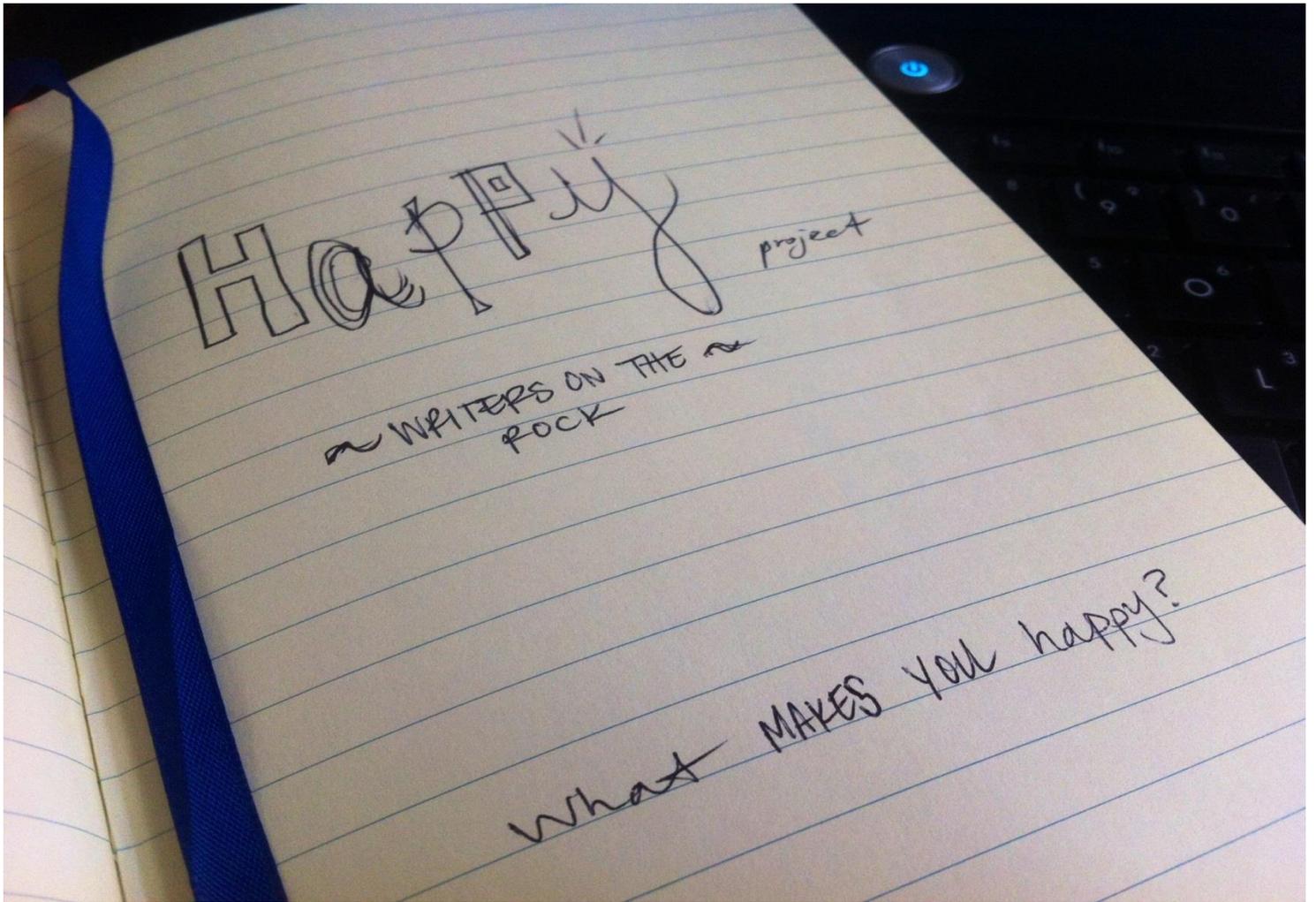


A journey to (true) happiness

Writers on the Rock





“... the best feeling in the world is realizing that you’re perfectly happy without the thing you thought you needed.”

Writers on the Rock is a Golden, Colorado-based group that believes we can make a difference for the Kingdom of God with words. If you want to join us on this journey, send an email to david@davidrupert.net

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hApP~ i ~NeSs

by Jacklyn Hall

As more of my pain shows, my Happiness also grows...

I grew up knowing and aspiring to challenge the proof of the saying, “no pain, No Gain.”

Is it true that the more pain we go through, the more gain of contentment and happiness we receive too?

If Grace is the center of our Faith/Joy, how do we retain it without holding onto the Pain?

Not only have I recorded my life’s memories in 14 journals over the last decade, but within those memories are moments of hurt & sadness that left scars, which I believe (some) are still healing...

...At what point do we reach complete Gain without any hint left of our Pain?

Can’t we live in that eternal victory NOW?

As a writer, I look to what other writers have contributed towards expressing exoneration from pain; rather, I reflect upon how resolution (*happiness*) is found to have come from such dark sources and the various ways it is portrayed.

Flannery O'Connor is one such writer who wrote what she perceived as reality. Others disagreed with her, saying her writing style was grotesque and sarcastic. Regardless of others' opinions of her apparent harshness,

She claimed to reveal through her characters what it would look like to be touched by **divine grace**. Flannery says:

"Grace changes us and change is *painful*."

... Even if it's grotesque, isn't Pain well worth the GAIN?

... Can HAPPINESS be full-grown without having experienced growing pains?

... How do we completely turn away from the pain, in order for ALL Joy to remain?

Part of my life-story testifies to this idea of pain producing gain. So, I believe it's true to say:

With greater pain, (it is possible for) more superior and complete GAIN.

Do you agree that this is true? To be deeply Happy, we must have traversed through some destructive hurt, utter darkness, tugging on our souls, even if it's just a minimal amount of experiencing sin, in order to have looked for the **glimmer of light at the end of the (dark) tunnel...**



We've all encountered our own “versions” of PAIN, haven't we?

At a very dark season of my life, I couldn't even see a *speck* of that light anywhere in front of me. I was living in darkness and couldn't even see that it had whelmed me to

my last “life-line” of only trusting in God, when I couldn’t sense His presence at all. Yet He’s been leading me out of it by revealing that miniscule light to me despite my jaded eyes, so I could finally “see” it in the seemingly far-off distance. In the depths of despair, or even a slightly negative mood, we can always lift our eyes to Him who illuminates our lives with His brilliant hope.

We are never alone in our darkness.

“The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will **rejoice over you with gladness**; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

(Zephaniah 3:17 ESV)

*His Happiness & delight in us spills over into us,
So we can rest in His happiness at all times.*

Let us always remember, in our weakest moments of despair, what John 1:5 tells us...

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (ESV)

Doesn’t it make you so HAPPY to delight in seeing restoration from Darkness and into Light?!

Let our Souls Rejoice in that ultimate transformation!



When we sense (without doubt) that we’re in *living in His light*, let us Remain in, bask in, and relish the Light. Each time I look to the sky & see literal light, I always recall this quote from CS Lewis:

“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because *by it* I see everything else.”

-Live in the LIGHT=Happy-

The earthly glimpses I encounter of Heaven register with my soul, & cause my spirit to rejoice in living eternally within His presence! I’m constantly learning His presence, within us here & now...

In Philippians 3, Paul pens about forgetting what is in the past and focusing on what is ahead. To share with Christ’s power means to also desire *sharing in his sufferings*; don’t we know deep down that this is the key to our happiness?

To simply Believe our “trials of various kinds” are the source of PURE JOY? (James 1:2 ESV)

What makes you Happy?

Here’s some of the things that make ME happy...

Entering fully into His Rest makes me happy.

Seeing a runner stop mid-step to help an incline biker become unstuck and back on track, makes me happy.

Delighting in others’ growth, change, and reflecting the character of Christ, along with my own tears turning into joy, makes me happy.

The simple truths of love and peace bring me happiness.

To “dwell in possibility” makes me happy.

Actively loving, serving, giving to others and any form of helping, makes me happy.

Seeing HEALING take place makes me happy.

Choosing integrity and selflessness makes me happy. (Proverbs 16:9)

Soaking in moments of communion with fellow believers in Faith, makes me happy.

The testing of my faith so I “may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:4 NIV), makes me happy.

WORSHIP through singing makes me happy.

Laughing and Smiling makes me happy.

Seeing others Laugh and Smile makes me happy.

Watching the light of the Sun return after seeing the rain stop... makes me happy.

Finally, seeing my pain removed & my Gain of God’s Love taking its place, fills me with happiness.

We KNOW there is a time and season for everything; time both for mourning and for rejoicing. We also KNOW that in the END, all mourning shall cease & we’ll be HaPpY forever and Ever.

Now, thinking about THAT makes me Happy! 😊

Blessed

By Jean Woomer

Am

Blessed by the

Holy Spirit

When I have Him lead

My

Way

This is where I find

Happiness

For He has all to say

EXTRAORDINARY LOVE

By John Meyer

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. -- John 15:11-12

There's a new song by U2 that has made me think a lot about the way Christians are supposed to love. It's called "Ordinary Love," but it's really a call to extraordinary love. I believe it shows us the way to joy, too.

The simple two-line chorus has a world of meaning:

We can't fall any further if we can't feel ordinary love
And we cannot reach any higher if we can't deal with ordinary love.

The inability to love is tragic, Bono is telling us, but ordinary love isn't enough. Jesus told us that and modeled what extraordinary love looks like. The Holy Spirit tells us to love that way that daily, if only we will listen.

Extraordinary love means loving passionately and selflessly with a heart full of grace and kindness and sensitivity and empathy and insight. It means loving with no exceptions -- not just those who are easy to love, but those who make it really hard.



Photo by David Rupert

It means living out of our hearts. It means "burning brightly," as Jon Foreman puts it.

Recently a dear friend recommended that I read a wonderful book about Francis of Assisi, who showed us what extraordinary love looks like. "Chasing Francis: A Pilgrim's Tale" by Ian Morgan Cron describes "the simple elegance of Francis's strategy of ministry -- simply read the Gospel texts and live the life you find on its pages."

In the Old Testament we are called to obey the Lord's "commandments" and "statutes" and "commands" and "laws." Psalm 119 says that over and over again for 176 verses.

But as we all know, Jesus pared it down to two commands. Love God with all your heart and soul and

strength, then love your neighbor as yourself.

That's what Francis did. His love for Jesus found expression in the way he loved and served others. I've been a big fan of Francis all of my life, and I recite his famous prayer every day. It is a prayer that tells us how to offer extraordinary love.

*Where there is hatred, let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light
Where there is sadness, joy*

"...if we give extraordinary love, we will have extraordinary joy."

I am generally a happy person, grateful for abundant blessings and driven by a desire for an intimate relationship with Jesus. But like all of us I have my unhappy moments, and when I do I feel convicted. I feel like I'm being ungrateful, sinful. How dare I be unhappy when I have so many blessings? How could I be unhappy if Jesus is my Lord and savior? Didn't Jesus tell us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God." When I get in one of those places I always say a little prayer that's part of a Switchfoot song:

Let me know that you hear me. Let me know your touch

Let me know that you love me. And let that be enough

The last time I was in that place, because of some people who let me down, I prayed for peace. I asked God what to do next. The answer I got was a renewed call to be humble and selfless, to be forgiving to those who hurt me, to serve them and others with Francis as my model. I remembered that whenever I do that, I find joy. I felt peace enter my heart and I felt loved. Jesus "let know me know" he loves me, and that was enough.

I believe that is the way to be happy in a broken world where we are restless for all things to be made new. I believe if we give extraordinary love, we will have extraordinary joy. All we have to do is follow the second half of Francis' prayer:

Grant that I may not seek to be consoled as to console

To be understood as to understand

To be loved as to love

For it is in giving that we receive

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Look at those last three lines. Talk about reason to be happy.

Is Happiness Really a Right?

By David Rupert

There are no more disconcerting words than these: "You have a right to happiness."

I don't have anything against happiness. In fact, I spend a great deal of time and money chasing the feeling. But sometimes, happiness is a term to justify selfishness.

Happiness, although thrown into the Bill of Rights by [Thomas Jefferson](#), is not really a Christian imperative. It's not a right and I'm not even sure the pursuit of happiness is. But we often act like it is – using it as an excuse to

"When I've chased money, or pleasure, or power, I've never really been happy in the end. Miserable is a better term. My toys are broken. The pleasure is short-lived. The power is fleeting."

leave a spouse, to buy unnecessary possessions, to gorge ourselves at the buffet line of life.

This supposed right we have has justified divorce, infidelity, relationship abandonment, job dismissal and all sorts of rash decisions made before a situation could be resolved.

Read Malcolm Muggeridge's thoughts on this:

"Slipped into the [American Declaration of Independence](#) along with "life and liberty" as an unalienable right, almost accidentally, at the last moment. Happiness is like a young deer, fleet and beautiful. Hunt him, and he becomes a poor frantic quarry; after the kill, a piece of stinking flesh."

Those harsh words speak honest truth.

This is why we see people chasing ambition, doing selfish things just to get ahead. That's why the meanest and ugliest rats sometimes win the race. That's why we have corruption and greed in business.

And when I've chased money, or pleasure, or power, I've never really been happy in the end. Miserable is a better term. My toys are broken. The pleasure is short-live. The power is fleeting.

Is there something more?

Jesus calls us to a different kind of pursuit — joy.

Joy is found not in pampering our soul, but pleasing our Creator. God isn't impressed with our money, with our titles, with our fame. He looks at our heart, at our character, at our souls. The pursuit of happiness is trumped by the quest for joy.

Happiness

Bernie Pfeifferberger

In the song "Oh, Happiness" by the David Crowder Band they sing:

"Oh, Happiness, there is grace, enough for us and the whole human race."

In reality, that should make all of us happy!

Happiness is the profound Truth throughout scripture and written on our hearts –

God loves me

God loves me

God loves me.

He loves me when I awake and praise His name.

He loves me in the late hours of the evening when I'm too exhausted to call His name.

He loves me through each new life He brings into my family.

He loves me and wipes away the tears of sorrow when He takes one home.

He loves me through my obedience to follow through with what He asks me to do.

He loves me when I fail Him and cry for forgiveness.

I can rejoice in a happiness that sees beyond circumstances and deeper than happy as stated in Psalm 16:11 –

"You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." (NIV)

Happy

Dave DeRose

I had a job interview today. In my car praying beforehand, I prayed, "God, I want to thank you for this opportunity. I don't know your will and whether or not this is what you want for me. Please know I will serve you, faithfully, wherever you want me."

I definitely think praying is a skill and I have been practicing it since I committed my life to Christ in last November. I certainly have a long way to go, but something happened today that has never happened before. I felt God touch my heart. It is a hard feeling to describe, but it was in the right spot, right inside my heart. It felt like if you put joy into energy, and placed it inside your heart, it radiates from within. It almost brought me to tears. Now, I am smart enough to know this doesn't mean that I am going to get the job. For me, what it means is that God is and will be with me.

I know what you're thinking. What does this have to do with "happy" Dave? I would explain, I am setting the scene for my epiphany. You know when your flesh desires something so intensely that it is almost painful? Things such as; promotion, increase, or improved relationships? I was living in this manner for a long time. I let my ambitions, ego, and countless other personal behaviors get in the way of my happiness. I have only come to live by Christ recently and have learned a considerably large amount about myself in a brief period of time. I have faced many uncomfortable self-realizations. Let's just say God has been very candid with me lately. One thing has remained constant throughout this process, my happy level through each personal hurdle has increased immeasurably. I am seeing life through new eyes. I think I can now explain what this thing called "happy" is in an entirely new way.

After the interview, I spent some time debriefing with my parents (they are such a blessing I can't even begin to tell you). I took a moment to look and my baby nephew and soak in his cuteness as he slept gently in his crib. Then I headed home, took my dog on



a walk, and reflected on my earlier experience in my car. It was during this walk that it hit me.

Happiness is not an accomplishment thing, a physical thing, or can be given by other people. Happiness is taking a moment to invite God into your heart, feeling His presence, and enjoying the present for all of its glory. I watched my dog grinning as we walked through my neighborhood.

Feeling incredibly peaceful, I realized how blessed and lucky I am. There are things I don't have that I wish to, someday. Knowing and understanding God is with me through life, even when life gets hectic, people are rude, or I fail, He allows me enjoy life. I don't need what He doesn't want for me.

Take time to pray, let God touch your heart, look at all the beauty in your life that is only possible through and thanks to Him, and know He is with you as you walk through all seasons of life; this is what happiness is made of. We can't focus and let our emotions be effected by the things we cannot control. When we submit to the present moment, that we have thanks to God, our level of "happy" will increase. Happiness is a God thing, it can't come from anywhere else. Recognize this and watch your life transform.

Inside Out Happy

by Kaitlin Schuessler

You've seen the movie, Happy Feet, with the penguin foot dance that exudes light, carefree, upbeat - happy. You've heard the Happy and You Know it Song, where you move it and shake it and turn it all around.

Happy reacts. It moves, it creates noise, it plays and laughs. And it's shared.

When was the last time you experienced happiness? Did you hide it inside, and keep it a secret? Or did you call up your closest friends and family, hardly waiting to share the happy news, the happy times? People have different cause to feel happy. But the response to happy is uniquely the same: an external sharing of sorts. After all, what good is happy if it's not spread? A happy that moves outside in doesn't fill the world, it fills the individual. But a happy that moves inside out is an outreach.

How do you share your happy?

.

"When we anchor our hearts in Him...we will always be strong enough to handle whatever comes our way"

Kisses and Candy

by Melissa Payne

"Sawyer, what makes you happy?" I asked my six-year-old son one day after church.

"Oh, that's an easy question! My mommy's kisses...and candy! So, can we have candy now?"

I have to admit, when I think of happiness, like Sawyer, I often think of things that are easy, sweet and fun. A sunny day. The perfect song. Bedtime goodnights that end in sleepy smiles. Coffee. Little kid giggles.

But recently I discovered a drastically different kind of happiness. One that felt deeper, more serious, but that touched my heart and my soul more profoundly than any sunny day ever will.

It was a Thursday. And my mom had just been admitted to the ICU. Earlier, when the paramedics had rushed her into the ER, the doctor looked at me and said, "Your mom is a very sick lady. We don't know what's wrong yet. But if she doesn't start to breathe more on her own we may have to intubate her."

The ICU doctor was not much more encouraging. "Your mom is critically ill," the doctor told me. We did not know much, but what we did know was that my mom needed to turn a

corner and do it soon. I felt numb. Was I going to lose her? Today, tonight? My mom who has been my rock my whole life. My mom whose own deep faith is what originally anchored our family in God's love.

I needed to pray. At first I was at a loss. I felt small. So small. I wanted to beg for God to save her,

to heal her. Because she's mine, my mom whose voice I seek almost daily. Whose advice is always strong and clear. My friend. Yet at the same time, I knew that whatever was going to happen was part of God's plan – even if that plan included something I could not fathom.

And then I remembered. Something my mom had taught me and her mom had taught her. That when we anchor our hearts in Him...we will always be strong enough to handle whatever comes our way.

So I prayed. I prayed for strength. For strength to face whatever was going to happen that night. I prayed for God's presence with me, my mom, my dad and my siblings. I prayed for courage. And while I prayed, I felt an amazing sense of peace and a

calmness wash over me. Because I knew. I just knew from the inside out that God was with me. He was with all of us. And while I still did not know the outcome, the one thing I did know, the one thing I was absolutely

sure of was that I was strong enough. That with God beside me, I would get through this night and any nights to come. And that everything would be okay.

And it was. My mom got better. We all took sighs of relief, we laughed together

as we agreed that He must still need her here – she has a purpose to fulfill.

Afterwards, I felt full. My mom got better because she was supposed to. But God gave me something more. He gave me a peek at what I can be. What I am when I completely rely on Him. The happiness I still feel today comes from knowing that even if that Thursday night had had a different ending, God would have given me the strength, courage and endurance to face it.

So, while I agree with Sawyer that candy is pretty great, I am content to be full of a happiness that is more than kisses and candy.



A Clockwork Mind

By N. Alan Miller

Ever since the first computers, there have been ghosts in the machine. Random segments of code that have grouped together to form unexpected protocols. Unanticipated, these free radicals engender questions of free will, creativity, and even the nature of what we might call the soul. Why is it that when some robots are left in darkness, they will seek out the light? Why is it that when robots are stored in an empty space, they will group together, rather than stand alone? How do we explain this behavior? Random segments of code? Or is it something more? When does a perceptual schematic become consciousness? When does a difference engine become the search for truth? When does a personality simulation become the bitter mote...of a soul?

-Dr. Alfred Lanning, "I, Robot"

Bear with me on this journey into the unique aspects of human emotion.

A common theme of speculative fiction, particularly science fiction, is the ethics of mankind's power to become gods over our own creation. Specifically, sentient robotic creations with some form of artificial intelligence. It is an interesting and often eerie topic. The ironic twist on this theme is the potential of man to create a runaway intelligence; a

robotic difference engine capable of improving itself in the form of self-replicating generations of smarter and smarter robots that eventually lead to an ultimate artificial mind of omnipotent knowledge...a singularity. A God that has apparently eaten every apple from the Tree of Good and Evil and will rule over its own creator.



As creepy as it sounds, this hypothetical raises an interesting question: Would an omnipotent mind, originated from man, have emotion? Unlikely, as the quest for perfection is walked on a road paved purely of narcissism. A mind of this sort would view fear, compassion, and sacrifice as a hindrance, and would thus eliminate any such behaviors from its decision making protocols. What about happiness, and other positive emotions? Again, unlikely, as the experience or "feeling", is unnecessary to achieve the goal. Emotion is not the goal, and thus is not pursued or

exhibited. An omnipotent mind with no emotion...indeed a scary notion.

What if humanity created a mind designed not to be smart, but to *feel* emotions? Is it possible? Is there a specific sequence of conditional statements and mathematical equations that lead to consciousness? Can emotions be quantified? As Dr. Lanning so eloquently stated, there have always been ghosts in the machine. Combine computer science with quantum mechanics and you enter a realm of frightening uncertainty; a deep dark ocean of unknown currents in which we are swimming with an anchor tied to our feet.

A microcosm of this idea is wonderfully exemplified in a short film simply titled *Kara*, produced by a video game developer called *Quantic Dream*. I strongly urge any readers to view this little known 3D animated film (PG-13) on YouTube as it will probably elicit more emotional response in the five minutes of runtime than the majority of full-length feature Hollywood films. The film essentially indicates that an android developed on an assembly line becomes sentient, and views its own creation as being *born*, and manifests genuine emotional response from confusion to fear and ultimately happiness.

Or is it? Is the emotion genuine, with some random segments of code grouping together to truly replicate emotion? Or is it merely emulation,

with the machine mimicking responses it has interpreted from a combination of its own programming and limited external stimuli. As fantastic as the situation may be, in reality the answer is likely the later, as the coding of the machine is the DNA, and we as human beings can only quantify into code what is, in fact, quantifiable. This means we can quantify the stimuli and the responses, but only on a primal level universal to all beings. In other words, we can only quantify what is rational, and the vast majority of

emotion is irrational.

“Combine computer science with quantum mechanics and you enter a realm of frightening uncertainty; a deep dark ocean of unknown currents in which we are swimming with an anchor tied to our feet.”

Do you own anything that is of sentimental value that, when you view it, makes you happy? Or sad? Or angry? I can look at a picture of

my grandmother who died last year and I will feel both happy *and* sad, but if I show that same photograph to a 10 year old in India, he won't have any emotional response. It's just a picture of an old woman to him. This is irrational emotion, and it dominates the majority of our emotional range, especially happiness.

I can program a robot to be happy when it sees that picture, but it is only happy because I told it to be happy. There is no intrinsic genuine happiness coming from the machine, as the machine is merely trained, or programmed, to behave a specific way when encountering specific stimuli.

What about other forms of life? Do dogs and cats and lions and dolphins experience emotions like happiness or sadness or fear the way we do? When your dog sits at the door, tongue hanging out and tail wagging as you enter the house after a hard work day, then greets you with a series of leaps and barks and licks, is he in fact happy? When a guard dog attacks an enemy, potentially putting its own life in jeopardy, to protect his owner, is he exhibiting sacrifice? Yes, but the dog isn't aware of it.

The difference between people and animals isn't a question of rationality, but rather self-awareness. People have a level of self-consciousness that



doesn't exist in the rest of the animal kingdom. Would a stray dog come to the defense of a complete stranger as

he is being beat up in an alley? Probably not. But people will. Why do we as human beings go out of our way to help complete strangers?

We tend to anthropomorphize animals

"I can program a robot to be happy when it sees that picture, but it is only happy because I told it to be happy."

by projecting human emotions onto animals because they are exhibiting similar behaviors. When a dog opens its mouth and lets his tongue hang out, his mouth takes the shape of a smile, so we then say that because the dog is *smiling*, which it is not, it must therefore be happy, because we smile when we are happy.

Dogs and other animals exhibit emotions only on either instinctual or trained responses. Fight or flight is a natural response to fear present in all animals, including humans. But happiness? Happiness in animals is limited to learned behaviors that benefit the animal in question. Like robots, it is fueled by narcissism. Even if the return is something very simple, such as companionship or safety, it is still a return that the animal expects.

People behave this way as well, because we, like all other animals, have instinctual, biological emotional ranges. But we do things to be happy

that no other creature on Earth will do. We sacrifice. We give. We go out of our way to help complete strangers with the knowledge that we won't benefit on a material level. We even have to fight our instinctual tendencies to commit these acts of selflessness. We behave extremely irrationally. All for happiness. Why?

The simple fact is that when it comes to happiness, we are alone. Because we possess something that nothing else on Earth, by God's creation or our own, possesses. The Holy Spirit. We are called to commit these acts of sacrifice so that we may receive blessings, and to obtain a level of happiness no creature or machine could ever fathom.

So be happy. Make the choice, because you're the only one capable of making it. Because it is a gift that nothing else in the Universe has been bestowed. You've won the lottery. You're in the one-percent of the one-percent of the one-percent. You found the golden ticket. And remember that it is *always* a choice, no matter the situation. Because true happiness comes from God, not the world around you. You are not just biology, and are infinitely more than a clockwork mind.

“Daddy, Tell Me Heaven Does Exist”

A work of fiction, by Douglas N. Beck

Sally loves her daddy despite all his problems. She often asks herself, “If heaven does exist will my daddy get to go there?” Every day after school she anxiously awaits her dad's arrival from another day at work. She hopes his day went well because on his bad days he comes home and takes out his frustrations on Sally, or worse, her mother. They love him so much but fear the rage that dwells within him.

Sally admires her daddy and loves his smile although she does not see it very often. When he is with his friends he laughs and smiles incessantly and she loves that about him. Gazing at him from afar, watching a happy man, how could she love him any



less?

Tom is a handsome man aside from the pock marks left behind from his youth. Women want to be with him and his friends, all men, wished they possessed half his wit and charm. Tom was the life of the party and lit a room up like a morning sun. But few knew of the demons within him.

Tom tried to conceal his rage but it was always just below the surface. Somehow he managed to keep it hidden when he was out in public, especially when he was with his friends. That served to make the rage only stronger when he closed the door of his house each evening. Carol tried to leave Tom on more than one occasion but feared what would happen if he found her and Sally missing. Besides, Tom had a good side. He took care of his family financially and always made sure they were happy, or so he thought.

Sally had other friends who were living the same hell. They talked about it often but made sure no one else was nearby to overhear them. They feared what others would think. They did not want to be seen as bad little girls or girls that deserved what they got. Bullies in the school avoided

them; their intimidation tactics never work on Sally and her few friends. What they experienced at home made them strong and the bullies sensed that. The bullies went as far as to avoid these meek little women in the hallways of their massive school.

Sally wanted to believe in heaven, in fact deep down she was a believer.



Photo by [Clarita](#) via MorgueFile.

She wanted to go to heaven someday but only if her mom and dad would be there with her. She knew that her dad needed heaven more than anyone and asked God to help her dad get there someday. She asked god to leave her daddy's rage on earth so he could be happy, so they all could be happy together. God never answered her but she knew he heard her prayers.

Sally did not talk about God or heaven when she was with her friends; in fact she never discussed it with anyone. Her daddy would not let her go to church or even participate in "youth groups" in school. There was no room in her daddy's life for competition and that was how he viewed God. Sally wanted so much to ask her dad if he believed in God but she feared his rage once again. Certainly a man who banishes God from his house must assuredly believe in him. After all, Sally reasoned, you cannot banish something you do not believe in.

Sally came home with her usual hopefulness on a cold fall day. What happened to Sally that afternoon changed everything. When she got home she found her father in their living room all alone, crying. She had never seen her daddy cry before and it scared her. She found her mommy in the kitchen nearby in tears as well. Neither of her parents spoke a word to each other or Sally. Sally felt alone and scared in a house filled with tears. She asked her mommy to explain but the words failed her. Sally ran to her daddy, still crying, and gave him a big hug but he refused to hug her back. Sally was now terrified, what could have happened to bring so much sadness to their home. Sure, their house had been filled with pain for years but sadness had never shown itself. Sally did not know what to do... she began to cry, not knowing why.

At bedtime her daddy came in to her room, his crying had stopped but his

eyes betrayed him when he told her he was okay. He sat on the edge of her bed and caressed her cheek. This scared Sally as he had never done this before. He tried to speak but his words could not be heard, like a windless whisper, he spoke but no sounds came out. Sally asked her daddy the one question she had always feared to ask, "Daddy, tell me heaven does exist. Tell me you believe in God" With a deep breath her dad said the one thing Sally feared the most but needed to know. "Honey, I certainly hope so as I need it now more than ever."

Sally's daddy passed away in his sleep that night. When Sally was awoken by her mother early that morning and told her the news. She could not help but smile just a little bit. Sally was sad, very sad but more than that she was happy. To her mother's amazement Sally told her about the conversation she had with her daddy the night before. Sally was happy because her daddy got to go to heaven. She knew God left his rage here on earth, her Daddy was finally happy inside and out.

Happiness finds its way into the strangest of places and oddest of times and Sally, her Mommy, and her dad had found happiness through death. Sally was happy for her friends and told them so; "Tell me heaven does exist" and they all knew the answer.

“Happy to Serve”

By Jon Dudycha

Serve. It is a word that may be foreign to most of us. A word that may not even be in our own personal vocabulary. For one individual however this is not the case. Scott Russomanno is the head of the sports ministry department at Red Rocks Church. He uses his passion for sports as a platform to serve as many as possible and is a principal illustration of sharing God’s love through serving others.

His thirst for athletics started at a very young age. Scott participated in a number of activities while growing up including; basketball, tennis, golf and baseball to name a few. He admitted to me that being involved in all of these sports helped him along his journey of starting this ministry. Scott first conceived the idea early in 2006 while he was working alongside the Red Rocks pastoral staff. He would get together with some individuals and hand out McDonalds sandwiches to the homeless; they called it “Sunday McMornings.” He was lit on fire by the Lord after acknowledging the power that serving had on people. His desire was fueled and the sports ministry was born.



Scott went on to work for Red Rocks as a volunteer until he came onto staff in 2009, which is when they started incorporating outreaches for the sports they put on. Throughout the early stages of the ministry a group called the McDonnell Family Foundation was instrumental in raising support for Scott and his new found desire. The outreach arm of the sports ministry department is called *Activ8*. There are currently 14 different organizations that partner directly with Scott and Red Rocks Church. These include *Mount St. Vincent's*, a group that works collectively with orphans; *Joshua Station*, a group that transitions homeless into housing; *Christ Body Ministry*, who performs meals for the homeless; and *Adoption Exchange*; who provides resources for foster children and families in the adoption network. The partnerships that Scott

has made over the years allow Red Rocks Sports to invite each member that participates in the sports to be involved in an outreach opportunity. Scott recognizes the great need in the Denver area and asks all of the willing athletes to participate.

Another unique aspect of the sports ministry is to incorporate a safe environment for current athletes participating in the sports ministry to bring their unchurched friends. This is an excellent way of using sports as a platform to reach non-believers, which could turn into long-lasting friendships as well as brothers or sisters in Christ.

At the end of each summer Scott puts on a golf tournament at the scenic Red Rocks Country Club. The tournament is called the "Papa Russi Memorial" and all proceeds are donated to the church's ministry partners who serve widows and orphans. It is a beautiful event and well worth for the golf enthusiast and or the kind hearted.

Red Rocks Sports currently has 16 leagues, 3 tournaments and over 20 outreach events with over 1,900 athletes participating. Red Rocks Sports has also garnered over \$30,000 of fundraising into the Activ8 outreach program and there has been over 28,000 volunteer hours served in 2013 alone.

Scott Russomanno is a man that not only talks about what serving means, he lives it, day in and day out. We are all called to serve.

So, What's Different?

by Cari Zorno

"Mom, South Africa was so amazing," Were Chris' first words as he walked in the door dropping his duffel bag on the floor, "I don't know where to start," He said as he flopped down in the overstuffed chair. At the age of 15 he had just returned from a month long mission trip.

"What impressed you most?" I prodded; I knew from experience that prodding and probing were necessary if I was to hear the stories.

"They are so poor mom," his face was drawn in pain, the impact of their poverty apparent as he spoke, "but, they were so happy! Soooo happy mom." A smile briefly crossed his face then in exasperation he added, "why can't Americans with all we have be so happy?" he asked, "The kids would play with a stick and rock for hours knocking it back and forth. They were barefoot mom but it didn't stop them from laughing." Chris slumped back into the chair in contemplation.

"They have so little and don't expect any more. They enjoy what they have." He paused, "We have so much and waste our time on what we wish we had." With that statement he grabbed his duffel and headed to his room to unpack.

Chris had seen first-hand what Paul wrote to the Philippians "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." James wrote, "Consider it all joy...when you encounter various trials, because you know that the testing of you faith develops



perseverance."

God wants us to be happy and he wants us to laugh. He created the giraffe, hippo and the bombardier beetle that can shoot fire out of his behind. Our God has a sense of humor. He named Abraham's son "Isaac" which means laughter. Abraham became a dad at 100 years old, he needed to be able to laugh.

Happiness is a matter of perspective. The South African people had their needs met and they were thankful. A byproduct of being thankful is happiness. Those who have only known little but have experienced

God's provision and His faithfulness can experience great happiness.

When we are thankful for what God has provided we can experience happiness. Being unsatisfied, always wanting more than we have robs us of happiness. God's will is for us to be thankful, "give thanks in all

circumstances; for this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:17-19

What is the first thing we, as parents, teach our children but please and thank you? We as God's children need to do the same. God knows what is best for us, learning gratitude is the beginning. "I urge, then, first of all, that *petitions...and thanksgiving* be made for all people." 1 Timothy 2:1-3. "Do not be

anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, (please and thank you) present your requests to God." Phil. 4:6

To experience all God has for us we need to, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name." Psalm 100:3-5. I believe thanksgiving is the beginning of true happiness.

"For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" 1 Timothy 4:3-5

The Gift of Happiness

By Johnny Domenico

It can be as simple as a smile from a stranger. Sometimes that's all it takes to turn around somebody's day.

We spend our entire lives searching for meaning in relationships and careers, but often it's the simple, brief, every-day interactions that give us a glimpse of true meaning.

Being on the receiving end of that smile from a stranger can be a day-changer, but being the smiling

stranger can be a life-changer.

On one side, you've been the recipient of a small gift from God, something to be cherished. On the other, you become the vessel through which God has given a gift, which is a true blessing.

The happiness you feel is different too. When you go through a day waiting for somebody to smile at you, there's a chance you'll go to sleep disappointed. When you go through a day seeking out strangers to smile at, you'll find no shortage of people who can experience the love of God through you.

Every gift we've been given in our lives comes from God, but also comes through people who allow Him to work through them, whether they know it or not.

What gifts do you have to give? Who are the people you will see today who can use your help? How can you brighten somebody's day today? Answer these questions and you might just find the



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greatest gift of all: a truly blessed life.

Psalms 23:1 – “The lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.”

Jeremiah 17:7-8 – “Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

Galatians 5:22-23 – The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law

I Cling to Happy

by Kaitlin Schuessler

In a time of utter discouragement and frank *unhappiness*, my encouragement comes from those tiny little happy moments that still rise up, albeit for brief periods of time, even split seconds. For example when I wake up and I *can* think positive thoughts and feel a sense of comfort, I cling with all of my soul to this. It might be incredibly brief, but that doesn't make it unreal.

And I stack this happy moment onto another, in order to chain them together to make them longer and



Photo by Amada Deerligh, by permission.

more enduring. A double rainbow after a fresh, crisp rain and the sun peeking through the clouds. I savor this beauty and keep it as long as I possibly can. I can't help but hope for these happy moments to continue to occur, with more frequency, and with more duration. You promise Your presence, Lord. And if You are Good, and You are Love, then happiness is impending. “For troubles without number surround me.. and my heart fails within me..but may all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You”.

In past periods of angst and hurt, I would cling to these happy moments with a fear - a fear that they wouldn't remain, or that they were just an illusion, a flippant and erroneous sense of false happiness. And so I'd attempt to keep it in, not let my happiness show, because then others might see and falsely believe that I might actually be happy. And then I'd no longer have the covering of unhappiness and they might embrace

happy me and there'd be no room for self-pity.

But just as the Psalmist in utter turmoil, when his life was at stake, claimed he still would "not conceal Your love and Your truth" (Ps. 41:10),

I'm going to pronounce and hold firm to any happiness that comes my way, and welcome it with freedom, not fear, with a loose invitation, not a firm, fearful grip. Because it might slip away, yes. But it will come again. In a different package maybe, if I'm aware and ready for it. And I will continue to welcome these brief but real glimpses of happy, however small, until they seep into my soul and find a home there. Layer upon layer of happy, I invite you in.

Whispers of My Savior

Sherryn Hensley

Blades of grass tickle my toes, I feel the sun descend like a warm mantle on my shoulders, touching my face, flickering through my hair and the warmth creeps through my body. I look up toward the warmth emanating orb into the clear blue sky and watch the clouds float by, morphed by air currents high above. The same air fills my lungs and I feel my heart beat, and I am happy.

The diagnosis doesn't disappear. The daily stresses of life don't go away.

Nothing about my circumstances changes. However, in this moment I can't help but relish, (no, delight!) in the daily gifts of my Creator, and in that moment I am fully and truly happy.

It's not always sunshine and solitude. Sometimes it's a warm hug from a friend, a kind word from a stranger, or a small unexpected act of generosity that will humble and warm my heart. I feel a thrill through my body as thunder bellows and lightning crashes, as God's mighty hand touches the earth. I feel giddy when I feel the wind against my face as I stand on a mountain peak. The same wind, the very breath of God, formed and

"The diagnosis doesn't disappear. The daily stresses of life don't go away. Nothing about my circumstances changes. However, in this moment I can't help but relish, (no, delight!) in the daily gifts of my Creator, and in that moment I am fully and truly happy."

shaped that mountain peak. Sun, water, wind, and humanity reach out to touch me, and I delight in them: The gifts of my Creator, the whispers of my Savior.

Things that make me happy

By Amy Young

1. A hot cup of black tea with milk in the early morning
2. Seeing a friend's name in caller I.D.
3. Talking about books
4. Greek pizza
5. Listening to rain
6. Playing "Ticket to ride" with my nieces
7. Traveling to new places
8. Getting an email saying the library book I've wanted is in
9. The smell of Christmas trees
10. Cheering a Broncos touchdown with 70,000 other fans
11. An unexpected kind word
12. The memory of a girl blowing dandelions in the backyard, wishing for a kitten
13. Arriving home after a trip
14. The sound of a diet coke can opening
15. Inspirational movies
16. The flicker of a candle
17. The adrenaline rush at the end of a workout
18. Looking back at pictures I've taken
19. Tea parties
20. The crunch of fall leaves

A Gift from God

By Christie Sounart

Rain was not going to ruin my day.

The musty smell of wet dirt permeated my senses as I sunk my toes into the sand. The chilly air felt cold on my skin bare legs and arms. But my thoughts were focused on the game as I looked up and eyed my opponents through the holes of the worn volleyball net. The ball felt familiar as I spun it in my hands. I threw it high in the air, rain droplets hitting my face, and heard the sound of hard contact as I sent it sailing over the net.

I felt alive for the first time in weeks. Happy, in fact.

Oh the feeling of intense happiness. My heart beating rapidly, my breathing fast, excitement overwhelming my thoughts and speech. I feel invincible, like anything is possible. Sometimes my face hurts from smiling.

It is such a great feeling to be happy, yet the emotion is fleeting. Happiness will fade with time, to be replaced with such feelings as sadness, anxiety or anger. But it will return. It will come back, bringing with it rays of hope and laughter.

But does God want us to be happy?

The answer, I think, is yes. But not in the way we want to be happy --

constantly seeking out the temporary feeling of elation, knowing it can disappear at any minute.

God has more permanent plans for us, which is why He grants us joy.

Joy is so much more than an emotion. It can ingrain itself deeply within us, sprout and take over us completely. Other feelings may cloud its presence, but it does not disappear. Joy will surface with acts of love, gentleness, kindness and generosity.

Joy is the smile through the hurt, the sunlight in the storm. It is the lone flower in a sea of ash. The glimmer of hope in the pain.

I've seen joy and I've felt it. It can only be from God because it appears in times where happiness seems impossible or when the burden of life feels hopeless.

I want to radiate joy.

So I will enjoy the small moments of happiness like my Saturday afternoon volleyball match. But I will look forward to the challenge of showing joy through the challenges and hardships. It is God's gift to me.

"Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content."

Listen To This Music

By HM Maltrud

Some of the happiest times in my life, I have been wearing black. I am happy wearing black not because I am hostage to a big city fashion trend nor am I attending a rock concert in the obligatory band tee-shirt. I am happy to be wearing black because it is required for the occasion.

I am a flutist and have been for most of my life. The flute is not my vocation but is a passion I have had since I was given a chance to play in the sixth grade band. Throughout my life, God has graciously allowed me to have opportunities to play in numerous settings, sacred and secular. For that, I am ever grateful.



Photo by HM Maltrud

Over the years, I have collected a small wardrobe of dressy black clothing. Concert black. Classical musicians often wear black at

performances for uniformity but more importantly, so the distraction of the musician can recede and the music come forward. The audience is more likely to pay attention to the music if they are not distracted by the musicians themselves. My years in music ministry served to teach me that leading worship from the platform may not require concert black, it does require preparation beforehand. It is essential to practice the music, of course, but it is even more essential to prepare the heart.

In Christian life, the familiar allegory is to imagine ourselves to be instruments of God. We are acting on His behalf. We are bearers of His love, His mercy, His message and His hope. We are witnesses to His power and His miracles. There is nothing inherently wrong with this image. We can become so identified with being God's instrument, however, that we can awaken our ego. It can be very easy to fall into the trap of praising the instrument over the music.

*I am a hole in a flute
that the Christ's breath moves
through*

Listen to this music

*I am the concert from the mouth of
every creature
singing with the
myriad chorus*

*I am a hole in a flute that the Christ's
breath moves through*

Listen to this music **Hafiz**

The flute is arguably the oldest musical instrument known to man, second only to the voice. The oldest example found to date is made of a vulture's hollow wing bone and has five holes and a v-shaped opening to blow into. Without getting into the physics, the overall concept of a flute still remains the same: a hollow tube with an opening for receiving air, a

design mechanism for splitting the air stream and a series of holes, spaced so that varying tones are made depending on which holes are covered or open. For each flute from early to modern, the number of holes may vary but each is designed and placed purposefully for the notes that hole will contribute as the flute plays.

The poem by Hafiz, a beloved Persian poet, talks of being a hole in a flute. It is a subtle but important shift in thinking. To be a hole is to be an empty space. To be an empty space is to be filled; it is nature's way.... by God's design. Emptying ourselves prayerfully of all our worldly worries, for a time, allows us to be truly open to the movement of the Holy Spirit through us. Being a hole on flute through which Christ's breath flows instead of the flute itself is a distinction which takes us out of the spotlight and off of the stage. It is like wearing concert black and getting out of the way so that Christ can breathe His music of salvation to all who have ears to hear. The more we can mindfully be a hole in a flute, the more we can be amazed by the music of the Holy Spirit and the grace, power and hope it will sing into the lives of those who hear it.

I am a hole in a flute

*that the Christ's breath moves
through*

Listen to this music.

Where does true happiness come from?

Not in unbelief — [Voltaire](#) was an infidel of the most pronounced type. He wrote: "I wish I had never been born."

Not in pleasure — [Lord Byron](#) lived a life of pleasure, if anyone did. He wrote: "The worm, the canker, and the grief are mine alone."

Not in money — [Jay Gould](#), the American millionaire, had plenty of that. When dying he said: "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth."

Not in position and fame — Lord [Beaconsfield](#) enjoyed more than his share of both. He wrote: "Youth is a mistake; manhood, a struggle; old age, a regret."

Not in military glory — [Alexander the Great](#) conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept, because, he said, "There are no more worlds to conquer."

Happiness

By Hinde Newton



Happiness is a thousand dragonflies,

dancing in the sky.

It is experiencing the moment

with the wonder of a child.

It is the rituals and habits

that fill us with spirit and peace.

It is the light,

the surprising joy of a glimpsed rainbow.

It's when we stop to take in the beauty

that is all around us.

When we allow ourselves to feel

the hand of God

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