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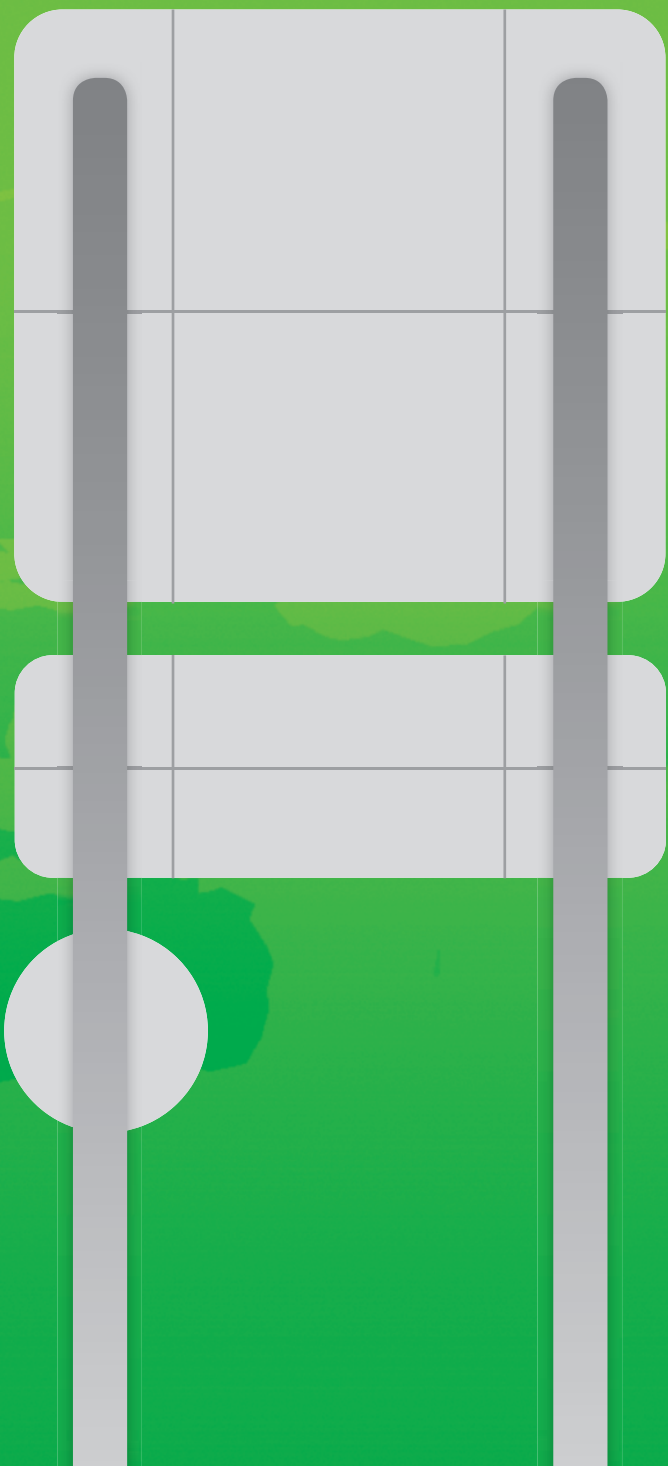
It doesn't just happen

Searching for happiness



**unmet longing; life needs
meaning; where are we going?**







Searching for happiness

HAPPINESS IS WITHIN. Some people have everything, yet are miserable, others have little or nothing, but are content and full of vitality. What makes the difference? The latter have found that what *happens* in their world, however hard, need not ultimately control how they feel, and they have discovered that what happens *in* them is more important than what happens *to* them. *What we are* affects *what we feel*, so happiness (or unhappiness) is, at least in part, our choice.

Unmet longing

WHO IN THE WORLD DOES NOT WANT TO BE HAPPY? The desire is so deep that as the body needs breath, so the heart craves happiness. Why then is this universal longing so often unmet?

Why? The answer lies in the very nature of happiness. A child who tries to catch his own shadow will always be empty-handed. As he runs, the shadow runs from him. But let him turn and face the sun and run towards it, and he finds his shadow follows him. Seek happiness for *itself*, and it escapes us. But if we aim for other, better, higher things, we are more likely to find it. We can discover happiness when we are not looking for it!

MEMO

We can discover happiness when we are not looking for it!





The longing for happiness is natural, but if we make it the main purpose of our lives, if we pursue it doggedly with no thought of others, of right and wrong or of consequences, we will be sorely disappointed. By all means let us prize happiness, but never as a first prize. C.S. Lewis was right when he said, 'You can't get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first.' It is the same principle as that given by Jesus in another context, '... seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'¹

If we make happiness our main goal in life, then everything – work, family, even God – will merely be a means of making us happy. We won't find a great purpose by pursuing happiness; we are much more likely to find happiness by pursuing a great purpose, even in the face of tragedy.

IN THE FACE OF TRAGEDY. A seventeen-year-old girl took, she says, 'a reckless dive into what I thought was deep water. But my head hit the bottom and it snapped my neck.' In hospital she thought, 'Oh God, my life's over. I want to die.'

Later she said, 'I'm paralysed in all four limbs. My hands don't work ... I haven't walked a step in years.' It takes two hours each morning for someone to get her up, to go through the toilet routines, get her dressed, exercised and strapped into her wheelchair. For her to blow her nose someone has to press her abdomen as she only has fifty per cent lung capacity. But when a teenage girl asked, 'But now you're happy?', she answered, 'I really am. I wouldn't change my life for anything.' Can anyone with problems like that really be happy? As we shall see in this book, they can.

WHAT IS HAPPINESS? Definition is difficult, for happiness is subjective, and like love, is better 'felt than told'. But it is not the same as –



- **Pleasure.** Words like enjoyment, bliss, ecstasy and pleasure describe emotions which fade, often quickly, and may be experienced in a very unhappy life. Drugs give pleasure *now* – and misery later. A ‘happy hour’ is what it says – a happy hour. Happiness is deeper than pleasure.
- **Relief.** A person will be ‘happy’ to get relief from toothache, to have passed an exam or to escape from a difficult situation. But relief from pain is usually temporary and no guarantee of a fulfilling life. Happiness is more than relief.
- **Blessing.** The word ‘blessed’, as in the teaching of Jesus, ‘Blessed are the merciful ...’,² describes *how God sees people* not *how people feel*. If people are happy it is not so much because they are merciful but because they are blessed by God (that is they have His gracious favour). Happiness is a result of blessedness.

What, then, is happiness? Dictionaries stumble and miss the mark, for happiness is something *experienced* rather than *explained*. Pleasure (or displeasure) is what we *feel* at any given moment, while happiness is satisfaction as we *think* about our life. Some people compare it unfavourably to joy and dismiss happiness as superficial. But the words are largely interchangeable. The student is ‘happy’ or ‘overjoyed’ at the result of his exam, and the parent ‘happy’ or ‘full of joy’ over the birth of the baby. It is only in the chapter ‘Growing in spirit’ (see page 75) that we find there is a joy which can be described as happiness with a deeper dimension.

FACTS ABOUT HAPPINESS

- **Parents.** Biological parents pass on certain traits to their children. If we have inherited a happy disposition we have had a good start. But if we



haven't, that does *not* mean we cannot be happy. We can't change the shape of our nose (except by surgery) but we *can* change our outlook on life. That's a choice.

- **Early years.** The formative years are enormously important, and the child who is loved and encouraged is fortunate. But even when there has been abuse and rejection, where there is strong resolve, especially with outside help, it is possible to find happiness.
- **Circumstances.** The word 'happy' is derived from the Old Norse *happ* meaning luck or good fortune, but whereas circumstances, good or bad, influence the way we feel, they do not control it. If we look at adverse circumstances as a challenge rather than a misfortune, we will go about changing them if we can or handling them if we can't. The apostle Paul, beaten, stoned, imprisoned and shipwrecked; cold, hungry and naked; lived in danger both from man and nature. But he was able to say, '... I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.'³

Some of the happiest people live *permanently* in the toughest situations. Helen Keller, blind and deaf from when she was a baby, became a widely travelled and world-famous speaker and author. She wrote, 'A happy life consists not in the absence, but in the mastery of hardships.'

'A happy life consists not in the absence, but in the mastery of hardships'

MEMO

- **Money.** Once the basic necessities of life are met – food, clothing and shelter – there is little to choose between income groups as to their experience of happiness. Why? Because many find the more they have the more they want. Wealth is comparative:



even the rich don't always feel rich, if richer 'Joneses' have what they don't. Lottery winners, once the excitement of winning has worn off, are often as happy or unhappy as they were before their win. No wonder Jesus said, 'Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot.'⁴ Having a lot to live on is nothing compared to having a lot to live for.

- **Sex.** No one would deny the contribution to happiness that sex makes when expressed in the security of commitment and loyalty. But sex for the sake of sex is highly unsatisfactory. It leaves behind a trail of misery; sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, abortions; the loss of self-respect and dignity; blame, guilt and emotional turmoil; broken hearts and broken homes. Sex may excite, but in itself does not bring happiness.
- **Work.** Although pay is important, it is not as big an influence on job satisfaction as relationships at work, and the nature of the work itself. Noel Coward famously quipped that interesting work is 'more fun than fun'. A person's feelings are affected by how much they have control over what they do, and if they lose their job the loss of self-respect may impact them as much as loss of income.
- **Religion.** Surveys consistently show that people for whom God is important report being significantly happier than those for whom he is not. Why? They are more likely to have a sense of purpose in life, a buffer against its storms and concerns beyond their own interests.
- **Attitude.** Attitude is a major factor in happiness. Those with a positive attitude choose to look up not down, forwards not backwards. They look for the best in others, and resolve to be the best themselves. Their effort matters to them even if the results are not what they hoped for. They



choose cheerfulness, not whingeing; gratitude, not complaining. When they fail, they start again. They have a positive 'happitude' to life. Abraham Lincoln summed it up when he remarked, 'Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.'

A SERIOUS BUSINESS. What makes for happiness is examined in these pages. The authors hold a Christian world-view, but invite those who may not share it to join them in exploring the values which make for wholeness. Here is no empty promise of some magic 'ten easy steps to happiness'. There are no quick fixes or short cuts. Rather, we will find that dreams need discipline, contentment comes through character and it is meaning that makes life worthwhile. Happiness is a serious business!

Happiness is a serious business!

MEMO

Life needs meaning

The average person today is no happier than people fifty years ago. Everything is more, bigger and better, and life itself is longer, yet the enjoyment of life is no greater. Why? Because without meaning there is no lasting happiness. Some find meaning in –

- **Achievement (doing)** – the satisfaction that comes from reaching a goal
- **Ambition (being)** – the importance of achieving position or standing
- **Acquisition (having)** – the possession of money or material things
- **Acceptance (belonging)** – the respect or love which is longed for