

# Ancient Perspectives on Happiness

*After examining several pagan view of happiness from the ancient world, Dr. Michael Gleghorn argues for the view of Christian philosopher Augustine.*

The Declaration of Independence says that all men “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights,” including “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”[\[1\]](#) Although we could say a lot about this statement, I want to focus on that very last phrase: the pursuit of happiness. What exactly is happiness? And how should we pursue it in order to have the best chance of attaining it? These questions not only interest us, they also interested some of the greatest thinkers from the far-flung past.

So what *is* happiness? An online dictionary says that happiness “results from the possession . . . of what one considers good.”[\[2\]](#) A good start, but it raises another question, namely, what should we consider *good*? Many things can be described as *good*: a cat, a job, a lover, and a book may all qualify. And each of these things might even make us *happy* . . . at least, for a while. But is there a *good* that offers us genuine and lasting happiness? If so, what is it? Now we’re getting closer to what the ancients were interested in knowing about happiness.



Of course, as you can probably guess, many different answers were proposed. A few thought that happiness could be found in the pleasures of the flesh. But most believed you needed something a bit more . . . *lofty*, shall we say, in order to experience *real* happiness, things like friendship, peace of mind, virtue, and even God. One thing they virtually all agreed on was that a truly good and happy life ought to be

lived with a sense of mission or purpose. Hence, the ancients did not think about happiness primarily in terms of just “having a good time.” Instead, they thought there was an important *moral* component to happiness. As Christian theologian Ellen Charry notes, for the ancients, happiness “comes from using oneself consistently, intentionally, and effectively, and hence it is a moral undertaking.”[\[3\]](#)

The link between morality and happiness has, I fear, become rather under-appreciated in our own day. But important as it is, many (including myself) don’t believe that this can be the *final* word on happiness. So in an effort to find out what is, we’ll spend the rest of this article looking first at some of the most important pagan perspectives on happiness from the ancient world before concluding with a Christian proposal by possibly the greatest theologian in the early church, a man named Augustine.[\[4\]](#)

## **Epicureanism**

Let’s begin with Epicureanism. Epicurus lived from 341–270 B.C. and is often viewed as the poster boy for a hedonistic lifestyle. A popular gourmet cooking site, [epicurious.com](http://epicurious.com), creatively plays off this reputation to celebrate the pleasures of a great meal.[\[5\]](#) But as we’ll see, Epicurus was not the total “party animal” that people often think.[\[6\]](#)

Although he rightly regarded physical pleasure as a good thing, and believed that it was natural for us to want it, he personally thought that friendship and mental tranquility were even better. It was these latter sources of happiness, and not merely the pleasures of the flesh, which Epicurus thought of as the greatest goods. In order to attain them, he even commended a life of virtue. After all, it’s the virtuous person, living at peace with his neighbors, who generally has far less cause for fear and worry than someone who’s been up to no good. Such a person is thus more likely to experience the true joys of friendship and mental tranquility than his

non-virtuous counterpart.{7}

As you can probably see, there are aspects of Epicureanism that even a Christian can appreciate. But there are problems with this view as well. For example, while Epicurus did not deny either God or the gods, he did teach that they were rather unconcerned about human affairs, and he denied that there would be a final judgment. For him, death was simply the end of existence and you didn't need to worry that God would judge you for your deeds in an afterlife. But these ideas made many people uncomfortable.

For instance, the Roman philosopher Cicero (106-43 B.C.) reacted strongly against Epicureanism in his book *The Nature of the Gods*. And Lactantius, an early Christian writer (A.D. 250-325), believed that only the fear of God “guards the mutual society of men.”{8} In his view, if people think they aren't accountable to God, society will likely be in trouble. Hence, many thinkers worried that Epicureanism might lead to an amoral—or even *immoral*—pursuit of pleasure as the highest good of life. And unfortunately, this “can just as easily lead to debauchery and . . . selfishness as it can to the simple, honest life style of Epicurus.”{9}

So while the Epicurean view of happiness has some things in its favor, there are several reasons for rejecting it.

## **Stoicism**

Stoicism was another important school of thought that addressed the issue of human happiness. In the ancient world, it “was the single most successful and longest-lasting movement in Greco-Roman philosophy.”{10} The Stoics' manly, morally tough philosophy of life had broad appeal in the ancient world. It attracted slaves like Epictetus (ca. A.D. 55-ca. 135) as well as the Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 121-180). Even many of the early church fathers admired the Stoic emphasis on moral virtue and integrity.{11}

So what did the Stoics think about human happiness? According to Ellen Charry, the Stoics viewed “the goal of life” as human flourishing. This was understood, however, not in terms of having a long life or being financially successful. Rather, it was viewed “as maintaining one’s dignity and grace whatever may happen.”[\[12\]](#) The Stoics understood that things don’t always work out as we want. Life throws us many curve balls and, if we’re not prepared, we’re bound to be disappointed.

Their solution? In a statement reminiscent of the Buddha’s teaching, the Stoic Epictetus declared, “Demand not that events happen as you wish, but wish them to happen as they do happen, and you will get on well.”[\[13\]](#) We often don’t have any control over what goes on around us. But we can control how we react to it. By knowing the good and morally virtuous thing to do, and by consistently choosing to do this, one attains the highest happiness of which human beings are capable; namely, “the enjoyment of self that comes from the conviction that one is living a principled life of the highest integrity.”[\[14\]](#) This, in a nutshell, is the Stoic conception of human happiness.

But there are some problems with this view. Although Christians will readily cheer the Stoic commitment to a life of moral virtue, they’ll nonetheless deny that such a life is ever really possible apart from the grace of God. As the Christian theologian Augustine observed, Stoicism fails to adequately address the problem of human sinfulness. Moreover, he thought, it holds out the false hope that one can achieve happiness through self-effort. But as Augustine wisely saw, only God can make us truly happy. Hence, while there’s much to admire about Stoicism, as a philosophy of human happiness it must ultimately disappoint.[\[15\]](#)

## Neo-Platonism

Having now surveyed Epicureanism and Stoicism, and found each of them wanting, we must next turn to Neo-Platonism to see if

it fares any better.

Probably the most important Neo-Platonist philosopher was a man named Plotinus, who lived in the third century A.D. Plotinus believed that in the beginning was the One, “the supreme transcendent principle” and the “ground of all being.”[\[16\]](#) Everything which now exists ultimately originated from the One through a series of emanations. Since everything proceeds from the One *not* by a process of creation, but rather by a process of emanation, “Creator and creation . . . are not sharply distinguished in Plotinus’s account.”[\[17\]](#)

Although this is certainly different from the biblical view, in which there *is* a clear distinction between Creator and creation, it would probably not be fair to simply call Plotinus a pantheist—that is, someone who believes that “all” of reality is “Divine.” According to one scholar, Plotinus tried “to steer a middle course” between pure pantheism (on the one hand) and creation by God (on the other).[\[18\]](#) But since everything that exists emanates or proceeds from the One, Plotinus’s view is certainly *close* to pantheism. And it is thus quite different from the biblical doctrine of creation.

But how is this relevant to Plotinus’s perspective on the nature of human happiness? According to Plotinus, since everything (including mankind) emanates out of the One, human beings can only truly find happiness by realizing their “oneness” with the One. In Plotinus’s view, “Happiness resides in a person’s realization that she is one with divinity.”[\[19\]](#) According to Plotinus, then, realizing one’s “oneness” with the One is the key to human happiness.

Are there any problems with this view? Although there’s much to admire about Neo-Platonism, and while it was quite influential in the early church, it was never entirely accepted, and that for several reasons. From a Christian perspective, Neo-Platonism ultimately has a defective view of

God, creation, human nature, the meaning of salvation, and what happens to a person after death. In other words, while the system is very religious, it's *not* Christianity. And thus, while we can agree with Plotinus that happiness can only be found in God, we must nonetheless reject his system on the grounds that he's not pointing us to the one *true* God.

## Augustinianism

Having previously surveyed some of the most important perspectives on happiness from the ancient world, we'll now bring our discussion to a close by briefly considering the thought of Augustine, one of the greatest theologians of the early church. Augustine lived from A.D. 354 to 430 and was familiar with the various perspectives on happiness which we've already examined.

Like the Epicureans, he believed that our happiness is at least tangentially related to our physical well-being. Like the Stoics, he believed that a life of integrity and moral virtue was important for human happiness. And like the Neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus, Augustine thought that true human happiness could only be found in God.

Nevertheless, Augustine views each of these perspectives as ultimately inadequate for all who long to experience *lasting* human happiness (and Augustine thinks that's pretty much all of us). After all, neither physical well-being nor a virtuous life can grant us lasting happiness if our existence ends at death. And while he agrees with Plotinus that happiness can only be found in God, Augustine (like all Christians) is convinced that Plotinus ultimately has a defective view of God.[{20}](#)

So where is true and lasting happiness to be found? Ellen Charry sums up Augustine's view quite nicely when she writes, "Happiness is knowing, loving, and enjoying God securely."[{21}](#) In Augustine's view, happiness is a condition in which one's

desires are realized. Happy is he who has what" he wants," he writes in his little book on happiness.<sup>{22}</sup> But he also believed that what we all really want is the *everlasting* possession of the *greatest* good that can be had. That is, we want the best that there is—and we want it forever!

But since the greatest good can only be God, the source and foundation of every other good there is (or ever will be), it seems that what we ultimately want, whether we realize it or not, is God! And if we not only want the best that there is, but want it forever, it seems that we must ultimately want the very thing God freely offers us in Christ, namely, everlasting life in the presence of God. The psalmist urges us to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). And those who do are promised joy in His presence and "eternal pleasures" at His right hand (Psalm 16:11).

This, then, is Augustine's view on human happiness. In my opinion, it's far and away the best perspective that we've examined in this article, and I hope you'll think so, too.

## Notes

1. Cited from the text of the Declaration of Independence at [www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html) (accessed August 26, 2011).
2. Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, inc., s.v. "happiness," [dictionary.reference.com/browse/happiness](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/happiness) (accessed August 26, 2011).
3. Ellen T. Charry, *God and the Art of Happiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 3-4.
4. Ellen Charry surveys the views of each of these persons and perspectives in the first two chapters of her book *God and the Art of Happiness*, 3-62.
5. For more, check out [www.epicurious.com](http://www.epicurious.com)

6. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *A Short History of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 70.
7. This paragraph is indebted to the discussion of Epicurus in Solomon and Higgins, *A Short History of Philosophy*, 70-71.
8. Lactantius, "A Treatise on the Anger of God," in *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 269; cited in Charry, *God and the Art of Happiness*, 8.
9. Stanley R. Obitts, "Epicureanism," in Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 358.
10. Solomon and Higgins, *A Short History of Philosophy*, 71.
11. Gary T. Burke, "Stoics, Stoicism," in Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1056.
12. Charry, *God and the Art of Happiness*, 9.
13. The Enchiridion, VIII; cited in Solomon and Higgins, *A Short History of Philosophy*, 71.
14. Charry, *God and the Art of Happiness*, 10.
15. This paragraph is indebted to Ellen Charry's discussion of Augustine's critique of Stoicism in *God and the Art of Happiness*, 14-15.
16. Everett Ferguson, "Neoplatonism," in Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 756.
17. Solomon and Higgins, *A Short History of Philosophy*, 122.
18. Frederick Copleston, Greece and Rome, vol. 1 of *A History of Philosophy* (Garden City: Image Books, 1985), 467.
19. Charry, *God and the Art of Happiness*, 19.



20. This paragraph and the one that precedes it are generally indebted to Charry's discussion in *God and the Art of Happiness*, 3-62.

21. Charry, *God and the Art of Happiness*, 29.

22. De beata vita 10; cited in John Bussanich, "Happiness, Eudaimonism," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 413.

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## Giving Can Improve Your Health; Science Says So

Want happiness and fulfillment in life? Then practice giving, advises an influential medical professor.

It really is good to be good, claims Stephen Post, Ph.D., professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Science says it is so.

Post and coauthor Jill Neimark present evidence in their recent book, *Why Good Things Happen to Good People*.<sup>[1](#)</sup> As head of an institute supported by philanthropist Sir John Templeton<sup>[2](#)</sup>, Post has funded over fifty studies [related to giving] at forty-four major universities. He's convinced that giving is essential for optimum physical and mental health in a fragmented society.

Post says research has produced remarkable findings: Giving protects overall health twice as much as aspirin protects against heart disease. If pharmaceutical companies could charge for giving, we might see ads for Give Back instead of

Prozac, he speculates. One program, Rx: Volunteer, has some California HMO physicians giving volunteerism prescriptions to their Medicare patients.

## **All You Need is Love?**

Post and Neimark say around 500 scientific studies demonstrate that unselfish love can enhance health. For instance, Paul Wink, a Wellesley College psychologist, studied University of California Berkeley data that followed about two hundred people every decade since the 1920s. Giving during high school correlated with good mental and physical health across life spans. Givers experienced these benefits regardless of the warmth of their families, he found.

Other research says that giving correlates with lower teen depression and suicide risk and with lower depression among the elderly. Studies at Stanford and elsewhere found links between frequent volunteering and delaying death. Post says giving even trumps receiving when it comes to reducing mortality.

Give more; enjoy life and live longer? Maybe, as Jesus famously said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."[{3}](#)

Illustrations abound of givings personal benefits. Millard Fuller, a millionaire, gave away much of his wealth at age thirty. He and his wife, Linda, sold their business and affiliated with Koinonia Farm, a Georgia Christian community. They built houses in Zaire and then founded Habitat for Humanity in 1976 to help needy people build affordable homes. Fuller's goal was to eliminate poverty housing from the face of the earth. Get rid of shacks!

Today Habitat volunteers have constructed over 225,000 houses, helping over a million people in over 3,000 communities worldwide. Countless volunteers attest to the personal

satisfaction their involvement brings.

## From Playmate to Orphan Care

Post and Neimark relate an intriguing tale of a former *Playboy* model who has devoted her life to helping poor kids in Haiti. Susan Scott Krabacher's childhood helped her connect with the hurting children she now serves. Sexual abuse, her mother's psychiatric breakdown, multiple foster homes, and her brother's suicide took their emotional toll. In her late teens, she became a *Playboy* centerfold and moved into the Playboy mansion.

Ten years of playing mixed with depression. Eventually she reconnected with the faith of her youth. Observing Haiti's poverty prompted her to learn more of the biblical take on life. The foundation she and her husband started runs three orphanages for 2,300 children. "I work long hours," Krabacher notes, "put up with unbelievable sacrifice, bury too many children, and get no compensation but love, which is the greatest freedom you can know and the most important thing in the world."

Post would agree. Do you desire happiness, love, safety, security, loyal friends, true connection, or a benevolent and hopeful world? He has one answer: Give. You'll be happier, healthier, and live longer. Love cures, wrote the esteemed psychiatrist Karl Menninger. It cures both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it.

### Notes

1. Stephen Post, Ph.D., and Jill Neimark, *Why Good Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), [www.whygoodthingshappen.com](http://www.whygoodthingshappen.com).
2. Institute for Research on Unlimited Love: [www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org](http://www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org).
3. [Acts 20:35](#) NASB.

# Giving Can Be Good for You: Science Says So

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Other research says that giving correlates with lower teen depression and suicide risk and with lower depression among the elderly. Studies at Stanford and elsewhere found links between frequent volunteering and delaying death. Post says giving even trumps receiving when it comes to reducing mortality.[\[5\]](#)

Give more; enjoy life and live longer? Maybe, as Jesus famously said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35 NASB). Both Jewish and Christian biblical texts admonish us to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; Mt. 22:39 NIV). I don’t know about you, but I find it fascinating to explore these ways that contemporary science and social science often highlight the value of ancient biblical principles.

Post presents research to support the value of ten ways of expressing giving love. Here we will examine four of them: compassion, humor, loyalty, and listening.

“Love cures,” wrote the esteemed psychiatrist Karl Menninger. It cures “both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it.”[\[6\]](#)

## **Compassion’s Benefits**

Illustrations abound of giving’s personal benefits.

Millard Fuller, a millionaire, gave away much of his wealth at age thirty. He and his wife, Linda, sold their business and affiliated with Koinonia Farm, a Georgia Christian community. They built houses in Zaire and then founded [Habitat for Humanity](#) in 1976 to help needy people build affordable homes.

Fuller's goal was "to eliminate poverty housing from the face of the earth. Get rid of shacks!"[\[7\]](#)

Today, Habitat volunteers have constructed over two hundred twenty-five thousand houses, helping over a million people in over three thousand communities worldwide.[\[8\]](#) Countless volunteers attest to the personal satisfaction their involvement brings. And they're in over ninety countries. In Amman, Jordan, for example, I had lunch with the Habitat director there who involves compassionate volunteers in the Middle East.

As I reflect on his work, I'm reminded of another Middle Eastern leader who showed great compassion. One of His followers wrote, "When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36 NIV).

Stephen Post says "we're hardwired to open our hearts and to care—and in fact, compassion is important for the survival of the species."[\[9\]](#) He cites preliminary psychological research in which "compassion significantly reduced depression and stress."[\[10\]](#)

In that light, consider the intriguing tale of a former *Playboy* model who has devoted her life to helping poor kids in Haiti. Susan Scott Krabacher's childhood helped her connect with the hurting children she now serves. Sexual abuse, her mother's psychiatric breakdown, multiple foster homes, and her brother's suicide took their emotional toll. In her late teens, she became a *Playboy* centerfold and moved into the Playboy mansion.

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long hours,” Krabacher notes, “put up with unbelievable sacrifice, bury too many children, and get no compensation but love, which is the greatest freedom you can know and the most important thing in the world.”[\[11\]](#)

## Humor – Good Medicine

There are intriguing parallels between some modern social scientific findings and time-tested biblical life-lessons. One of these involves humor. An ancient proverb says, “A joyful heart is good medicine” (Prov. 17:22 NASB).

Humor heals. Think about how you felt the last time you roared with laughter. Maybe a funny movie, a family situation, or an uproarious joke session had you even crying and gasping for air. Your abdominal muscles and heartbeat went wild. One Stanford psychiatrist “found that a hundred laughs is the aerobic equivalent of ten minutes of rowing.”[\[12\]](#)

Stephen Post sees humor as a way to help others, “a very effective way of connecting, of lightening another’s life as well as our own.” Interviews with Holocaust survivors conducted by a Tel Aviv University researcher found that many cited humor “as a way of surviving trauma.” Post notes that Ronald Reagan was a master of using humor to put other people [and perhaps himself] at ease. When President Reagan was shot and at risk of dying, he quipped to the emergency room doctors, “I hope you’re all Republicans.”[\[13\]](#)

Of course, bitter humor can hurt rather than heal. But positive humor can help people relate and communicate openness. Post cites psychologist Robert Provine who monitored and analyzed over twelve hundred “bouts” of laughter in public places. Provine says shared, contagious laughter can be “an important signal you send to someone that says, ‘This is play. I’m not going to attack or hurt you.’”[\[14\]](#)

Humor is also important for a successful marriage, according

to University of Washington psychologist John Gottman. He found that coping with issues “through dialogue, laughter, and affection” was a good predictor of whether marriages would last.{15}

On a Detroit TV talk show, the host and I were discussing my book, *Secrets of Successful Humor*. He asked about humor and marriage. I told him, “The secret of our marriage is that we take time two evenings each week to go out to a lovely restaurant. A nice dinner, some candlelight, soft music, a slow walk home. She goes Tuesdays; I go Fridays.”

It hit a nerve. The host roared, long and loud. Contagious laughter spread throughout the studio audience. We all enjoyed some communal fun that helped open us up to each other.

## Loyalty Bonds

A famous biblical proverb notes, “A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need” (Prov. 17:17 NLT). Post believes that “Loyalty is love that lasts. . . . The commitment inherent in loyalty defuses our deepest existential anxiety.” He continues: “Broken covenants are hard to restore and never quite attain their state of original trust. It’s not easy to find loyalty in our society.”{16}

Marriage and friendship, of course, can be significant expressions of loyalty. University of Chicago demographer Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher co-authored the book *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially*. Analyzing data from over six thousand families, Waite discovered strong correlations between marriage and longevity. Gallagher says their research demonstrated that, compared to similar singles, married folks “are physically healthier, live longer . . . experience less anxiety, depression, hostility, and loneliness, and are more likely to tell you that they’re happy with life in general.



They have more sex than single people of the same age.” Of course there’s a caveat, Post notes. High-conflict marriages bring stress and can lower immune function.{17}

Friendships count, too. University of North Carolina sociologist Rebecca Adams’ frequent childhood moves had her attending thirteen schools by the time she entered college. She feels she learned how to *make* new friends but wasn’t as good at *maintaining* them. These experiences helped motivate her to study friendship. She’s discovered strong links between quality of relationships and mental well-being. Adams notes, “It’s been shown over and over again that friendship is more important to psychological well-being than family relations are. . . . Friendships are voluntary. So we’ll choose friendships that support our psychological well-being.”{18}

Men can learn a lot from women about friendship. Male and female friendship styles often differ, Adams says: “Men define their friendships in terms of shared activities, and women define them in terms of conversation. For men, a friend is their fishing, golfing, or bowling buddy. For women, a friend is someone they can confide in.” Of course there are exceptions, but Post notes that emotional intimacy is what nourishes friendships most.{19}

Giving love through compassion, humor, and loyalty all contribute to our well-being. But, is anybody listening?

## **“I’m Listening”**

The television comedy *Frasier* was one of the most popular TV series in U.S. history. It’s been called “a thinking person’s comedy.” Reruns are ubiquitous, about six episodes daily in our area. Frasier Crane, the protagonist, is a caring, sensitive, cultured—but insecure and sometimes pompous—Seattle radio psychiatrist who always greets his callers with, “I’m listening.” Yet sometimes he becomes so wrapped up in himself

that he tunes others out. He's not alone. In one amusing scene, Frasier's ex wife, Lilith (also a psychiatrist), tries to converse with Frasier's brother, Niles (yet another psychiatrist), about an especially weighty matter. Niles, focused on a video game, doesn't pay her sufficient attention, prompting Lilith to exclaim, "Is there a *chair* here I could talk to?"

I confess that in our home, my wife Meg sometimes has to use Lilith's line to get my attention. (Mind you, I don't confess that it's as often as *she* might *claim*!) But listening is a powerful form of affirmation and an important tool in understanding and communication. Solomon, a wise Jewish king, wrote, "What a shame, what folly, to give advice before listening to the facts!" (Proverbs 18:13 NLT)

Stephen Post writes, "When we truly absorb another's story, we are saying, 'You count. Your life and feelings and thoughts matter to me. And I want to know who you really are.'" He claims that listening can help both the listener and the one listened to. New studies indicate: "Listening activates the part of our brains hardwired for empathy. . . . When we listen to others in pain, their stress response quiets down and their body has a better chance to heal."[\[20\]](#)

Post says that without a good listener, we can feel terribly alone, "like the psalmist in the Bible who cries out, 'No man cared for my soul.'" He continues, "This has led some scholars to call the God of the Psalms a God of listening. Our need for a listener is an inherent aspect of all prayer."[\[21\]](#)

So, giving love is good for you. Science says so. Compassion, humor, loyalty, and listening are important ways you can express giving love. Is it as intriguing to you as it is to me that contemporary science and social science are often in harmony with age-old biblical counsel? Makes me think I should read the Bible more often.

## Notes

1. Stephen Post, PhD, and Jill Neimark, *Why Good Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), 15.
2. Ibid., 1.
3. Ibid., 7.
4. Ibid., 7-8, 48-51.
5. Ibid., 8-10, 68-69.
6. Ibid., 2.
7. Ibid., 25, 275.
8. [www.habitat.org](http://www.habitat.org)
9. Post and Neimark, *Why Good Things Happen*, 179-180.
10. Ibid., 184.
11. Ibid., 177-8; see also Susan Krabacher (as told to Kristi Watts), "Diary of a Playboy Centerfold," *The 700 Club*, [www.cbn.com/700club/features/amazing/Susan\\_Krabacher061506.aspx](http://www.cbn.com/700club/features/amazing/Susan_Krabacher061506.aspx); accessed January 24, 2008.
12. Post and Neimark, *Why Good Things Happen*, 132.
13. Ibid., 133-135.
14. Ibid., 139-140.
15. Ibid., 141-142.
16. Ibid., 199-200.
17. Ibid., 203-205.
18. Ibid., 216-217.
19. Ibid., 221.
20. Ibid., 231-232.
21. Ibid., 234.

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# **"I'm Depressed; What Causes**

# Happiness?"

I am depressed right now and so is my friend. What causes happiness? I don't want the chemical description, but what stuff, like situations and actions, causes happiness? I know that the Bible says that just because we are Christians, doesn't mean we won't suffer. But how would I get out of depression? I don't want an answer like read your Bible and pray, because I do that every night, and here I am still depressed. There's no fun in life anymore, and somewhere along the line, I lost the fire of the Spirit. I wish I could get it back.

I realize yours is a very serious question, and having walked through deep depression with our son several years ago, I would be the LAST person to give you the cliché of "read your Bible and pray more."

Sometimes, depression is caused by a brain chemical imbalance. In that case, medications are the best way to adjust the brain chemistry. Sometimes, depression is caused by unconfessed sin. That needs to be faced, repented of, and confessed, both to God and to other people. Sometimes, depression is caused by loss and sorrow. The way out of that kind of depression is to embrace the grieving process. That means facing and feeling the pain of loss and grief so that you can let go of it. (That also means crying, yelling, journaling one's feelings, or all of the above.)

One very wise person has said that an intrinsic part of happiness is having something to look forward to. I have found this to be true.

So what causes happiness? Generally speaking, it's:

- cultivating a positive attitude (This is admittedly harder for people with melancholy temperaments.)
- not having anything sad going on

- the presence of something worth anticipating
- having friends; healthy relationships is an important part of happiness

And probably the most important thing I have to offer you is the suggestion that you cultivate a grateful heart. People who get in the habit of looking for and expressing gratitude for the small and large blessings of life find themselves in better physical and emotional health. One of the best things you can do for yourself right now is to invest in a small notebook and write in your "Gratitude Journal" every single night before going to bed. Write down ten things you are grateful for, things in which God showed you He loves you, things that went well during the day. Things like parts of your body that work and aren't in pain. Things that are easy to take for granted but which you would REALLY miss if they went away tomorrow, like your bed, running water, electricity, heating and air conditioning, having transportation, paved roads, lungs that breathe for you without having to think about it. . . you get the picture?

Usually, I suggest people write down three things, but if you're really struggling with depression, ten will help more. It will help you focus on the many, many good things in your life instead of focusing on the flatness and darkness of your depression.

Let me know several months down the road how you're doing, OK?

Sue Bohlin