

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, 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.^{22} 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 (accessed August 26, 2011).
2. Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, inc., s.v. "happiness," 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

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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Spiritual Life and the Kingdom of God

Tom Davis explores how recovering the practice of classic spiritual disciplines can enhance believers' relationship with God and our impact on the world around us.

There is a loss of spiritual knowledge of the truth of Christianity and how we live in light of that truth. This loss of spiritual knowledge is the result of shifts in cultural attitudes toward faith, happiness, ethics, freedom, and tolerance. The answer to the loss of spiritual knowledge is a return to the practice of spiritual disciplines. After examining the benefits of suffering and the disciplines of study, prayer, and fasting, I will show how these disciplines restore spiritual knowledge in society.

Loss of Spirituality

Today's society is in spiritual turmoil. Most people are not knowledgeable about spiritual things. The National Study of Youth and Religion indicates that the Church has become less

influential in the lives of people. The effects of modernity and post modernity have created a popular culture that is suspicious of any claim to objective religious knowledge and any idea of an authoritative source of information concerning spiritual issues. Christian Smith writes, "In this culture religion lost, at least in theory, any remaining principled, authoritative standing to make truth claims that it has enjoyed in previous eras of history."[\[1\]](#)

Basically, this means that most people have adopted a mindset that says, "You can't know anything for sure about religion. And if you think you do, you're an arrogant bigot."

Five Steps to Spiritual Death

In his book, *Kingdom Triangle*, Biola professor and theologian J.P. Moreland claims that there are five cultural shifts that have contributed to today's state of spirituality in the culture. The first shift separates knowledge from faith.[\[2\]](#) All spiritual beliefs are considered valid because they are not real knowledge. Many people think that all religions lead to the same God. They say that we should not criticize other religions because they call God by a different name or hold different theological beliefs. These things are a matter of faith, not knowledge. This kind of attitude relegates all things spiritual to the subjective arena of faith. The things of the spirit are relegated to the "upper story" of faith. Real knowledge only exists in the "lower story" of the academic disciplines.[\[3\]](#) The result of this view of faith is that spirituality becomes something that is neither true nor false. Separating faith and knowledge ultimately leads to a denial of spiritual truth.

The second shift is the definition of happiness.[\[4\]](#) In the Bible happiness is portrayed as part of a right relationship with God. To live the good life meant that a person had intellectual and moral virtue. God created people to live well according to what they were created to be. J.P. Moreland

explains, "So understood, happiness involves suffering, endurance, and patience because these are important means to becoming a good person." {5} The pressure of modernism and postmodernism has changed this view. Happiness is now associated with pleasure. Television commercials promise to deliver happiness through the next fad diet that will increase your sex appeal. Male enhancement drugs promise to give men happiness by giving them back their youth and an increased sex drive. Happiness can be achieved by buying the newest car, toy, accessory, or a trip to an exotic place or amusement park. The good life now means having fun and collecting things so that you can feel good.

The third shift that Moreland notes is a shift from duty and virtue in morality to a minimalist view of ethics. {6} Previously, moral knowledge was viewed as an objective set of propositions about right or wrong, or good and evil. It used to be that everyone would agree it was always wrong to torture and kill small children. Now moral knowledge is viewed as subjective feelings or opinions. This change can be seen if we look at the language we use when making moral statements. People used to say things like, "I know," or "I think that this is the right thing to do." Now we say, "I felt that it was right for me to do this."

Duty to one's society used to be viewed as an essential part of a moral life. People were expected to help their neighbor. If an old lady was trying to cross the street, young men were expected to help her. Now, as long as they do not push the old lady into traffic, or rob her, the young men are considered to be moral. This change is the result of culture. People are no longer expected to contribute to their society. As long as people are not hurting anyone else, they are now considered to be moral. This view of morality changes a person's view of life. Life is now about having the most fun without harming anyone. Life used to be about living for something bigger than the individual. People used to live for God and country. Now

people live for themselves and their own pleasure.

The fourth shift is in how people view freedom.[{7}](#) Freedom used to mean that people could live the way they ought to live. People were free to do what was right without government interference. Now freedom means the right of people to do what they want, when they want. Popular culture says that as long as you do not hurt anyone you can do what you want.

The last shift that Moreland notes is a shift in the meaning of tolerance.[{8}](#) Classic tolerance is when people will allow others to be, do, or believe differently than they do, even though one person thinks that the view of another person is wrong. People were allowed to critique the views of other people, but respect for the other person was still maintained. Contemporary tolerance is the view that people are not allowed to critique another person's beliefs. People are no longer allowed to say that someone is wrong. This attitude ends all public discussion. Every idea must be tolerated, except ideas that claim that other ideas are wrong. Ironically, the new tolerance fails its own definition of tolerance because they do not tolerate intolerance.

Returning to Spiritual Health

The popular culture has raised five strongholds against the knowledge of God: separation of faith and knowledge, a self-centered view of happiness, a minimal view of ethics, a new view of freedom, and a new view of tolerance. How are Christians to respond to this? Paul writes, "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Christians must recapture our spiritual disciplines.

Theology, the Intellect, and Spirituality

The first thing that needs to be addressed is that Christians

need a renewed interest in theology. J. I. Packer, while discussing the influence of the Puritans in his life, writes, "All theology is also spirituality, in the sense that it has an influence, good or bad, positive or negative, on its recipient's relationship or lack of relationship to God."[{9}](#) Theology comes from two Greek words. *Theos* is the Greek word for God; *logos* is the Greek word for logic. Theology can be understood as the logic, or science of God.[{10}](#) Spirituality, in the Christian context, is a person's relationship with God. In order to claim to have a relationship with God a person has to have knowledge of who God is. It would be odd to have a man talk about having a relationship with a woman and then say he does not know her and has never met her. The concept of a relationship presupposes that each party in the relationship has knowledge of the other party.

The Bible and Books

An essential step to gaining spiritual knowledge is a disciplined approach to reading the Bible. Billy Graham addresses the importance of studying the Bible: "Your spiritual life needs food. What kind of food? Spiritual food. Where do you find this spiritual food? In the Bible, the Word of God."[{11}](#) Paul writes, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God gave the Bible to people so that people can learn about God. By studying the Bible a person will gain knowledge about God and strengthen that person's relationship with God.

Christians should also read other books. The Bible contains essential information for salvation and knowing God. However, the Bible is not exhaustive in its knowledge. Christians can grow intellectually and spiritually by gaining knowledge about God's creation. David Naugle, head of the philosophy department at Dallas Baptist University, sums up the impact of

books on his life: “I have sought and still seek to be a person of the Book and of books, that I might know God and more and more about his world in the context of faith.”[{12}](#) The study of the disciplines of theology, philosophy, the humanities, and the sciences helps people develop a coherent worldview. A worldview gives people the ability to understand the world through the corrective lens of the knowledge of God.

The medieval priest Thomas à Kempis advises, “If you would profit from it, therefore, read with humility, simplicity, and faith, and never seek a reputation for being learned. Seek willingly and listen attentively to the words of the saints; do not be displeased with the saying of the ancients, for they were not made without purpose.”[{13}](#) We grow intellectually and spiritually when we read the books of others. We gain insight to their wisdom. We should humbly read the books written by the ancient teachers. They left their wisdom in writing so that we can learn from them.

Suffering

Contemporary society thinks that suffering should be avoided at all costs. However, suffering can have a good outcome. Paul writes, “More than that, we rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (Romans 5:3-4). When we suffer, we can learn to endure. Our endurance produces character—that is, we mature and learn to trust God. God is the only hope that will never fail. Matthew Henry writes, “He who, being thus tried, comes forth as gold, will thereby be encouraged to hope.”[{14}](#) When soldiers train, they punish their body; they suffer. Their suffering in training makes them better soldiers in combat because their suffering has made them stronger and given them more endurance. As a Navy veteran, I know this is true personally.

Prayer

Prayer is the spiritual discipline of talking to God. God speaks to us in the Bible like the way people communicate through writing letters; the communication is one way. Praying is more like a discussion between two people. In prayer we get to talk with God.

Paul told the church at Thessalonica to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The best way to start a disciplined prayer life is to pray every day. This is easier if we begin each day with prayer. J. P. Moreland writes, “When you get up in the morning, start off with praise and thanksgiving to God for the things you honestly appreciate about him and his dealings with you. Then lift your burdens to him until you have a sense of rest before the Lord.”[\[15\]](#) By beginning each day with prayer we turn our minds and our hearts toward God and His will. Each day is a new opportunity to minister to someone in need. Our prayers will give us spiritual discernment so that we can recognize those in need. Our minds will also be turned towards God and the things of heaven, and we can continue to keep these things in our minds throughout the day.

John Calvin used four rules for prayer. First, we must “have our heart and mind framed as becomes those who are entering into converse with God.”[\[16\]](#) We must prepare ourselves to pray. Minds that are distracted do not make for good conversation. This is no ordinary conversation. People prepare themselves for meeting with important people. We should be prepared to open our hearts and minds to God when we pray. We should be aware that we are praying to our God, but that this God loves us and wants to bring our concerns to Him. Paul writes, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). We should not be anxious when praying because we know that God cares for us and can do all things. We should pray about all our concerns. Our

prayers should be full of worship, thanking God for all that He has done.

One way to prepare to pray is to remember what David Naugle calls the “Three P’s.” These are “(1) my purpose, or what I would live my life for, (2) my profession, or what I would spend my life doing, and (3) my partner, or who I would spend my life with.”[\[17\]](#) David Naugle’s “Three P’s” cover the most important decisions we will make in our lives. Our purpose fills our life with purpose. We should pray for purpose so that God will align what we want our purpose in life to be with what He wants our purpose in life to be. Our profession is where we fulfill our purpose. A car mechanic can glorify God in fulfilling his purpose to be God’s representative in the auto shop. Our spouse is our ministry partner. Husbands and wives are not separated from each other. They share each other’s joys and burdens. Praying for these things will focus our minds on what is important and orient our hearts toward living a life pleasing to God.

John Calvin’s second rule is “That in asking we must always truly feel our wants, and seriously considering that we need all the things which we ask, accompany the prayer with a sincere, no, ardent desire of obtaining them.”[\[18\]](#) Our requests should be things that we truly want or need. When we pray for the wants and needs of others, we should try to feel their desire for the request so that we can better minister to them through prayer. James tells us, “Is anyone suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise” (James 5:13). We should be honest and sincere in our requests and in our thanksgiving. A sincere prayer would be praying for a loved one to get well when they are sick. An insincere prayer might look like praying for a job promotion when you know that you have not been putting your best effort into the job.

Third, “discard all self-confidence, humbly giving God the whole glory.”[\[19\]](#) When we pray, we should realize who we are, and who God is. Jesus said, “And when you pray, you must not

be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand in the synagogues and at the street corners so that they may be seen by others" (Matthew 6:5). The hypocrites' motivation to pray in the street corners was so that people would see them and think that these people were righteous. Jesus makes this point with more clarity in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector:

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and one a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself prayed thus: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortionist, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I 9give tithes of all that I get." But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:10-13)

The Pharisee came to God in prayer thinking that he was righteous and better than other men. He even pointed out his fasting and tithing as if God should be impressed with these things. The tax collector was humbled in the presence of God. He would not look up to heaven because he understood that he was guilty before God. The tax collector prayed sincerely for mercy. Asking God for mercy gives God glory and humbles the person.

John Calvin's fourth rule of prayer is, "We should be animated to p-ray with the sure hope of succeeding." [\[20\]](#) God is all powerful, able to meet our every need. Jesus teaches this same principle, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). By grace we have been made children of God. If we ask, God will give us what we need. When we humble ourselves before God, He will be merciful. God knows what we need and will give us what is good for us. Jesus said, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your

Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him" (Matthew 7:11).

Through our prayer life we should conform to the image of God revealed in Jesus. Andrew Murry taught:

And of all the traits of a life *like Christ* there is none higher and more glorious than conformity to Him in the work that now engages Him without ceasing in the Father's presence His all-prevailing intercession. The more we abide in Him, and grow unto his likeness, will His priestly life work in us mightily, and our life become what His is, a life that ever pleads and prevails for men.[{21}](#)

Our prayers should make us more Christlike. By praying, we conform to God's will. Christ makes intercessions to the Father for us. We have the privilege of making intercessions to Christ for others.

Fasting

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "Strict exercise of self-control is an essential feature of the Christian's life."[{22}](#) One way to exercise self-control is by abstinence (saying no to ourselves by not doing something we want). Fasting is one of the most difficult abstaining disciplines. Calvin defines fasting as "when we retrench somewhat from our accustomed mode of living, either for one day or a certain period, and prescribe to ourselves a stricter and severer restraint in the use of that ordinary food."[{23}](#) In short, fasting is abstaining from food for a short period of time.

Jesus taught:

When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father

who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:16-18).

Fasting is to be done in secret. Again, Jesus points to the hypocrite, who wants to gain a reputation from his spiritual discipline. Jesus taught that people would be rewarded by not making a spectacle out of their spirituality.

What is the goal of fasting? Augustine taught, “While we live in the temporal order, we must fast and abstain from the enjoyment of what is temporal, for the sake of the eternity in which we desire to live.”[\[24\]](#) Fasting reminds Christians that they do not depend on temporal things. God wants Christians to rely on Him to supply our needs. In a world where tight schedules are kept and frivolous distractions are available everywhere, it can be easy to forget God. Fasting emphasizes the importance of a right relationship with the world by abstaining from the sustenance of food. John Calvin lists three goals for fasting: “We use it either to mortify and subdue the flesh, that it may not wanton, or to prepare the better for prayer and holy meditation; or to give evidence of humbling ourselves before God, when we would confess our guilt before him.”[\[25\]](#) Many times the flesh (the part of us that operates independently from God, either in active rebellion or passive indifference) will want to rebel against the spirit. Fasting deprives the flesh of sustenance and weakens it. The spirit can then rule the flesh. There are times when a Christian will need to place special focus on prayer and meditation. Fasting is one way to prepare the spirit for these activities.

Reversing the Shifts

In our contemporary culture faith is viewed as being completely separate from knowledge. This faulty view originates within Christianity with the ideas of some Christian philosophers and theologians. Soren Kierkegaard saw faith as “the highest passion in a human being.”[\[26\]](#) He

applies this view to Jesus: "The proofs which Scripture presents for Christ's divinity—His miracles, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven—are therefore only for faith, that is, they are not 'proofs,' they have no intention of proving that all of this agrees perfectly with reason: on the contrary they would prove that it conflicts with reason and therefore is an object of faith." [\[27\]](#) Kierkegaard believed that Jesus lived and died and rose from the dead. But he thought that Jesus was unknowable through knowledge and reason. One could only know Jesus through faith, and that meant that faith was opposed to knowledge and reason.

When writing to Theophilus, Luke says, "Just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, to write an orderly account for you" (Luke 1:2-3). John writes "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you" (1 John 1:3). The New Testament authors were writing about what they knew. These men walked, talked, and ate with Christ for three years. These men knew Christ face to face. Wayne Grudem addresses the harmony of faith and reason: "Rather, saving faith is consistent with knowledge and true understanding of facts." [\[28\]](#) Faith is not separate from knowledge, it is trust in knowledge.

Once the facts of the Bible are known, faith in those facts will affect how we experience happiness. Happiness defined as satisfaction of desires is an empty pointless feel-good emotion that lasts only for a moment. But the joy of God does not fade. Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). Christians get joy through meditating on the things of God. Neal Anderson and Robert Saucy state that "Meditation on the Word should produce thoughts that reach our emotions." [\[29\]](#) A relationship with God produces happiness, a deep well-being of the soul, that lasts. The Psalmist writes, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in

your sight" (Psalm 19:14). What we study and put into our minds affects our relationship with God. When we have knowledge of God then we can meditate on God. It is impossible to meditate on an object that you have no knowledge of. Meditation on the things of God brings joy.

The cultural shift to a minimalist ethic, the idea of contemporary freedom, and the meaning of tolerance are the result of relativism's effect on the culture. Relativism is the idea that there are no objective moral values, and morality is either decided by each person or each community. There are many problems with this view. Relativism makes it impossible to criticize others. If moral truths are subjective then each person gets to decide for himself what is right or wrong. Relativism cannot place blame for wrong doings. What people do is neither right nor wrong. Right or wrong is up to each individual. Why should we expect each person to reach the same conclusion? Relativists cannot promote tolerance because any definition of tolerance is an objective definition that, if true, applies to everyone.[\[30\]](#) But if morality is objective (meaning that there are things that are right and wrong for all people at all times), then freedom cannot mean that people can do what they want when they want. People will have responsibilities. They will be free to do what is right, and they will be free to do what is wrong. Being free means that we make choices of our own volition.

Conclusion

The loss of spiritual knowledge has caused a fractured society and people who lead fractured lives. The cultural shifts are a result of people not taking spiritual knowledge seriously. Spiritual knowledge must have absolutes to provide meaning for life. Francis Schaeffer observes, "we need absolutes if our existence is to have meaning—my existence, your existence, man's existence."[\[31\]](#) Absolutes are learned by practicing the spiritual disciplines. A careful study of the Bible will bring knowledge ABOUT God; heart-surrender to Him, coupled with

learning to abide in Him, will bring knowledge OF God. Prayer will keep people in touch with God. Fasting will break down the resistance of the flesh to living a spiritual life. The five shifts of contemporary culture mean death. The spiritual disciplines bring people spiritual life. True spirituality can only be found in Christ. Only meditation and learning about Christ can return wonder to life. I pray that through spiritual disciplines we may retain the wonder of a life given to us by God.

Notes

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2. J.P. Moreland, *Kingdom Triangle: Recover the Christian Mind, Renovate the Soul, Restore the Spirit's Power* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 91-94.
3. Ibid., 93.
4. Ibid., 94-96.
5. Ibid., 95.
6. Ibid., 96-98.
7. Ibid., 98-99.
8. Ibid.. 99-104.
9. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 15.
10. William G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* 3rd ed. (Philipsburg NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2003), 52.
11. Billy Graham, *Peace With God* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1984), 205.
12. David K. Naugle, *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives: Learning the Deep Meaning of Happiness*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 195.
13. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2004), 7
14. Leslie F. Church, *Matthew Henry's Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961), 1764.
15. Moreland, 149.

16. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 565.
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18. Calvin, 567.
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21. Smith, 101.
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23. Calvin, 821.
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27. Soren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity and the Edifying Discourse Which "Accompanied" It* (New York: Random House 2004), 21.
28. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 712.
29. Neal T. Anderson, Robert L. Saucy, *The Common Made Holy* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1997), 204.
30. Francis J. Beckwith, Gregory Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids: Backer Books, 1998). 61-69.
31. Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 205), 145.

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*.^{1} As head of an institute supported by philanthropist Sir John Templeton^{2}, 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.
2. Institute for Research on Unlimited Love: www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org.
3. [Acts 20:35](#) NASB.

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Giving Can Be Good for You: Science Says So

“All You Need is Love”

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

“It really is good to be good,” claims Stephen Post, PhD., professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. “Science says it is so.”[\[1\]](#)

Post and coauthor Jill Neimark present evidence in their book, [Why Good Things Happen to Good People](#). The institute Post heads has funded “over fifty studies [related to giving] at forty-four major universities.”[\[2\]](#) 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.[\[3\]](#)

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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.

Ten years of playing mixed with depression. Eventually she reconnected with the Christian 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 twenty-three hundred 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.”[{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
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.asp; 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