

The Well-Adjusted, Happy Christian (No. 2)

God wants us to be happy.

After talking about how all the pleasures of the world couldn't give him fulfillment, Solomon wrote, "A man has nothing better under the sun than to ... be happy; for this will remain with him ... all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun" (Ecc. 8:15). So...

If we want genuine happiness, we must go to the information provided to us by our Creator in His Word—the Bible, which is why Solomon ended his book by writing, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (Ecc. 12:13).

With this in mind, I want to talk about how we can become well-adjusted Christians, because genuine happiness is the result of being an "emotionally or psychologically untroubled" (Webster) Christian. As we begin our study, it's important to state that there's no such thing as human conduct without a reason, and that reason can usually be boiled down to "an attempt to be happy." For example, on her deathbed Mrs. Long confessed to her husband that she hadn't been true to him, to which he replied, "Why do you think I poisoned you?" Today...

I'd like for you to leave here knowing what the "bluebird of happiness" is. {1909 fairytale: "The Blue Bird"; 1934 nationwide hit song: "The Bluebird of Happiness"; & 1939 Wizard of Oz song: "Over the rainbow, bluebirds fly."} What's this bluebird's true name? How do we capture him? How do we hold on to him? You know, if you want to strike up a conversation with a stranger, don't talk to him about the weather, talk to him about something meaningful by asking him, "What would you say is the bluebird's real name?," and listen to his answer.

They'll be those who'll tell you that the bluebird's name is "Money." Money, money, money.

One fellow said to another, "Why ya working so hard? There are things more important than the dollar bill," to which he replied, "Oh yeah? What?" "The 10-dollar bill; the 20-dollar bill...."

For some people, there's nothing in this world but money, but you and I know that "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10).

Then are those who'll tell you that the name of the bluebird is "Love." "When I fall in love, that's when I'll be happy."

What a ridiculous statement: it's like saying, "I was just walking along, and I fell in a hole. What can I do? I fell in." There's no such thing as falling in love. I couldn't find that phrase anywhere in the Bible. Rather, love is a creation: anyone who wants it can have it, if he knows how to create it and keep it.

There's also no such thing as love at first sight, at least not in the sense we use it today. Can we plant a seed and have it sprout before our eyes in three minutes? No.

There's only one place we can have love at first sight, and that's on TV, because they only have a few minutes. So don't trust television.

We also mustn't be deceived by love songs.

Remember the old song called, "One Enchanted Evening?" The lyrics read, "One day you'll come into a room, there she'll be. Once you have found her, never let her go, never let her go." Another song came out the same year that said, "Don't cry, Joe. Let her go, let her go."

We mustn't get our ideas from TV or songs, things that are created to make money.

Then there are those who'll tell you that the name of the bluebird is "Marriage." "When I get married, I'll be happy." Well, I have news for you. [Maybe it's no news to you at all! ☺]

If we're single and unhappy, all we have to do is get married. Right? Wrong. Listen to this overheard conversation: "Do you have any life insurance?" "No." "Then with what will your wife bury you?" "With pleasure." See...

Marriage isn't the answer to happiness. If we're not happy unmarried, we can't expect to be happy married; in fact, there's a very good chance we'll just multiply our unhappiness.

As with nearly everything else in life, our attitude determines our relationship with others.

John Maxwell told of a time when he was speaking at a pastors' and wives' retreat.

He said that during the question and answer period someone asked his wife, Margaret, if John made her happy. John said that he loved that question, because he thought he was a marvelous husband and couldn't wait for Margaret's answer. But he couldn't believe his ears when she answered, "No, he doesn't."

Taking a risk in his faith in her, he asked to please explain herself, so here's what she said: "I learned in the first six months of our marriage that he'd never make me happy. Because for the first six months, that's exactly what I expected him to do. I'd say, 'Oh, he's comin' home. Now I'm goin' to get happy.' But then six months into the marriage I realized something that I wish everyone of you in this conference would realize: the only person who can make you happy is you. And the moment that you become a happy person, everyone else will add to your happiness. The moment I made up my mind to be happy, John added to my happiness immeasurably."

After that, John said he started smiling again.

There are so many people who have what we might call, "Destination disease." They think that happiness is over there.

Did you know that moving vans move people everyday to Happy Land?

Did you know people move because they're unhappy? They think that the grass is greener on the other side, not realizing it's only because it's over a septic tank.

I heard a statement once that went like this: "No matter where you are ... there you are!"

There are also people who have what we might call, "Someone sickness." They think that if they can just get to know so-and-so or marry so-and-so, they'd be happy. But, again, we must remember that we're the only ones who can choose our happiness (Php. 4:4), and the moment we choose to be happy, everyone else will add immeasurably to our happiness.

Let me ask this: what's the most important thing we could ever learn? While you're thinking about your answer, let me share a true story with you.

In 1923 a very important meeting was held at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago.

Attending this meeting were nine of the world's most successful men: among them was the president of the largest independent steel company in the world, the president of the largest utility company, the president of the largest gas company, the greatest wheat speculator, the president of the New York stock exchange, a member of the president's cabinet, the greatest Wall street speculator, the head of the world's greatest monopoly, and the president of the bank of international settlement. Now certainly we'd admit that gathered there was a group of the world's most successful men.

Well, let's see what became of these nine men.

The president of the largest steel company in the world, Charles Schwab, died bankrupt, living off borrowed money for the last five years of his life.

The president of the largest utility company, Samuel Ensel, died penniless as well as a fugitive from justice in a foreign land.

The president of the largest gas company, Howard Hobson, died in a mental hospital, totally insane.

The greatest wheat speculator, Arthur Cotton, died as a recluse in a foreign land.

The president of the New York stock exchange, Richard Whitmy, spent many of the last days of his life in Sing Sing prison.

The member of the president's cabinet, Albert Fall, was pardoned from prison so he could die at home.

The greatest Wall street speculator, Jesse Livermore, died a suicide.

The head of the world's greatest monopoly, Ivar Kruger, died a suicide.

The president of the bank of international settlement, Leon Frasier, died a suicide.

All these men learned how to make money or be successful, but none of them learned one of the most important things that anyone could ever learn—how to live!

What do I mean by learning to live? Two little boys were playing on the seashore. Along came a wave that knocked them over. One little boy jumped from the beach screaming for his mother. The other little boy scrambled to his feet, ran toward the water, took a deep breath, and laughed.

The first little boy saw the ocean as a malicious enemy, so he learned nothing except how to be a bigger cry baby; the second little boy enjoyed the encounter and the challenge and was ready for the next one.

When a wave of life knocks us over and we scramble to our feet, take a deep breath, and laugh, then we've learned how to live. Notice I said, "learned"; we aren't born knowing how to live.

If anyone ever knew "how to live," it had to be the apostle Paul who gained joy from his trials: he wrote such things as, "I rejoice in my sufferings" (Col. 1:24), "as sorrowful, yet rejoicing" (2 Cor. 6:10), and "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, [and] in distresses" (2 Cor. 12:10).

When I asked, "What's the greatest thing we could ever learn?," you may have very well been thinking, "peace of mind." But you couldn't be more wrong.

What's peace of mind? To most, peace of mind means a life without problems. But, you see, peace of mind has nothing to do with our problems: there are people loaded with problems who have more peace of mind than others who have very few.

Peace of mind actually has to do with how we handle our problems. One psychology professor said he always began his classes with a 20-second experiment. Before I tell you about the experiment, let me set it up for you with a story.

The professor who performed this experiment said that when he was in South Africa on a speaking tour once, he was in his dressing room reading in *Time* magazine about how Margaret Sullivan, a celebrated motion picture, stage, and television star, had ended her life because she was losing her hearing. He said that at the same time he was reading that article, a totally blind, 19-year-old boy knocked on his door: "My name is Herbert Lavine. I've heard your speeches many times and have been anxiously waiting to meet you. May I come in?" You know...

I've often said that I'd rather lose my hearing than my sight. Imagine being blind, living in total darkness forever, never to see the faces of those you love and who love you! Well...

After some chit-chat, the professor said he got around to asking, "What does the color red look like to you?"

"Oh, he gave me an answer," the professor said, but he could no more describe red than we can describe the face of mother Eve. If we've never seen it, how do we know?

Then he asked, "Have you ever heard of Helen Keller?" He replied, "Of course." The professor asked, "Then you know she was deaf as well as blind?" He said, "Yes, I do." But then the boy continued by saying, "You know, I always thank God that I wasn't born deaf."

Famous, young, and beautiful Margaret Sullivan ended her life because she was losing her hearing, and then there's this fellow, who had never seen a ray of sunshine, saying, "I always thank God that I wasn't born deaf." Puts us to shame. Doesn't it? Now...

Are you ready for the experiment with which the professor always began his classes? Take some wax, some meat, some sand, and some wood shavings, and throw them all into a fire and watch what happens to them: one instantly melts; one dries up; one hardens; and one blazes.

Think of it—all of them are acted upon by the same element, yet they all react differently; just so, under identical circumstances of life, one becomes weaker, one becomes stronger, and another withers away. Likewise...

Paul wrote, "If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:12-13). See...

It isn't what's done **to** us, but what we **do** that determines our future and our happiness! Notice, for example, how Mr. Goldberg was handling his demise: while was on his deathbed, his wife kept yelling, "Sam, don't leave me. Sam, don't leave me." He finally replied, "Stop yelling, and come along."

Being a normal, well-adjusted Christian is a two-sided coin: one is the ability to squeeze as much joy and happiness out of every hour of every day of our lives, and the other, more important side, is the ability to face reality without going to pieces.

One of the main things that helps us learn how to live with reality is knowing what the purpose of it all is: Paul wrote, "We rejoice in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; perseverance produces character; character produces hope" (Rom. 5:3-4).

If we know what it's all about, then we can confront life more dynamically! Furthermore, it's only in Christ that this true joy can be found, because only in Him does it all matter—that's the "hope" to which Paul was referring: we "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2).

One of the most dramatic, exciting things we'll ever see in life that the stage, movies, and TV have never been able to capture is how human beings learn and teach their children to take their guilt, fears, and shame and turn them into the aches and pains of the body; that's right, take your guilt, shame, and fears and disguise them by letting them come out as an ache or even some compulsion.

Are you the type, for example, who has to check the locks on your door three or four times before going to bed, then still wonder if they're locked? One fellow spoke of being so paranoid that he had six locks on his door, and what he'd do is lock every other one so that when a thief would try to pick the locks, he'd always be locking three of them. Listen...

There are other types of physical problems besides viruses and diseases: perhaps most sicknesses today are caused by guilt, fears, shame, and even over ambition. Well...

Here are Six Wonder-Tablets, if you will, to fix our problem with facing reality and acquiring happiness.

Wonder-Tablet #1: Let's stop lying to ourselves.

We need to stop pulling the wool over our eyes: until we see our own problems, we'll never be able to deal with them in the right way.

We need to do as the prodigal son did and "come to ourselves" (Luke 15:17), or as James put it, see ourselves in the mirror of God's Word and do something about it with that Word (1:21-25).

Wonder-Tablet #2: We need to give our old age a good swift kick in the pants. We have too much fear of losing youth and beauty in our world.

One lady asked her husband, "Honey, will you still love me when I'm old and gray?" He replied, "Why not? I've loved you through all the other colors." Another woman said to her husband, "You know, Sam, I don't want to grow old." So he said, "OK, die young." Notice how these men dealt with growing old: instead of fretting over it, they joked about it and went on with life.

One of the top depression-proof industries in the world today is the cosmetic industry: the cosmetic industry is based on fear—fear of losing youth and beauty; they have a cream for everything: a cream for dry skin, for wet skin, for leaky skin, for stinky skin, for creepy skin, for wrinkled skin, and on and on it goes. Listen...

No one has yet been born who knows how to bottle youth and beauty in a jar; it just cannot be creamed in. One woman was vigorously creaming her skin before going to bed. Her little five-year-old daughter asked, "What's that for, Mommy?" "It's to make me beautiful, darling." But when she wiped it off, the little girl said, "Awww. It didn't work. Did it?"

For Christians, growing old isn't supposed to be something detested or feared, for every day is another day closer to God: "Blessed [happy] are the dead who die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13).

Wonder-Tablet #3: Let's commit a little murder: murder our worries before they murder us.

One day in Colorado, a great stalwart tree fell down. What a day!

It should have been on the front page of every newspaper of the nation, because this great tree was but a sapling when Columbus landed on San Salvador. It had been struck by lightning 14 times and had braved storms for hundreds of years.

Do you know what killed it in the end? Tiny beetles that dug under the bark and ate at the heart, bringing down this lordly king of the forest.

Life for all of us is never made of a series of lightning strikes—it's made up of a series of little things. Most of us manage to stand up under the lightning, but we allow ourselves to be eaten up by the little beetles of worry and anxiety until we, too, are destroyed.

Paul wrote, "Be anxious over nothing, but ... let your requests be made known to God; and His peace, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts" (Php. 4:6-7a).

Peter wrote, "Cast all your care upon God, for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

We simply must learn to kill our worries before they kill us. Every problem has a solution: as mentioned so many times before, God won't allow us to be tried or tempted in such a way that we cannot find the way out (1 Cor. 10:13), if we want to, that is.

Wonder-Tablet #4: This tablet could potentially close up every mental hospital in the world—we must live every day one day at a time. Jesus spoke wonderfully about this in Matthew 6:25-34.

If you ever visit a mental hospital, remember that everyone inside was once outside: they're inside because they insisted on piling on their weak little backs all the accumulated yesterdays and all the frightening tomorrows; they just kept piling it on until one day their backs cracked.

Since we can really only live one day at a time, why do we so often turn our days into major crises over what we cannot change and what we cannot predict?

Wonder-Tablet #5: There's a psychological law that says, "If you form and keep a picture in your mind of what you'd like to be like long enough, you'll eventually become exactly as you picture."

So if we fill our minds with sad thoughts (think sad, feel sad, sound sad, & look sad), then we'll be sad. But if we fill our minds with happy thoughts (think happy, feel happy, sound happy, & look happy), then we'll be happy. We can't be happier than we think or determine we are.

Solomon said something along these lines in Proverbs 23:7: As a man thinks, so is he. Lastly...

Wonder-Tablet #6: We need to laugh. Without laughter, no amount of millions will make us rich.

There's no place in the world we can buy laughter; and, as Jesus indicated, a thief can't steal it from us: "Your joy no one can take from you" (John 16:22b).

There's nothing that will help us rub shoulders with happiness more consistently than to have the ability to laugh; in other words, it's nearly impossible to talk about happiness without talking about laughter. How healthy is our sense of humor?

A new teacher to physically impaired children told about an incident that taught him a lesson.

One day one of the children was getting off the bus when she fell. When the other children began laughing, the teacher couldn't figure out why they would laugh at her, especially since they were impaired as well. So he asked, "Why are you laughing?"

The answer was quick in coming: "Teacher, it's sort of an unwritten rule with us to laugh when things like this happen to us, because if we don't laugh, then she'll cry. We try to laugh together, not at each other so much as with each other."

If we don't learn to laugh at ourselves, if we don't learn to deal heartily with reality, then we'll surely cry! So let's give our laugh muscles a little exercise. Besides, it takes 5 times more muscles to frown than it does to smile.

We know that the shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35: "Jesus wept." But did you know, ironically, that the next shortest in the Bible is First Thessalonians 5:16: "Rejoice always."

Let me read Ecclesiastes 8:15 from the NIV: "I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun."

As I conclude, let me answer our question in the beginning: What is the bluebird's true name, the true name of happiness? The bluebird's name is your name. [Name off some people in the audience.] Why? It's in us to determine how we're going to deal with reality and if we're going to be happy and/or content with our circumstances (especially if we had a part in creating those circumstances in the first place). People say, "Oh, just get up and go to beach." But the problem is, our problems pack their bags and get on the plane with us ... and at no extra fare. Trouble isn't in our house, in our city, or in our state ... it's in us—it goes where we go. (No I don't mean to *completely* rule out that changing our environment won't help our outlook on our circumstances, because I believe it can at times; it's just that some folks are too dependent on such. Anyway...)

I once heard this prayer in the form of a rhyme.

*Give me a good digestion, Lord, and also something to digest.
Give me a healthy body and sense to keep it at its best.*

*Give me a healthy mind, O Lord, to keep the good and pure in sight,
Which seeing sin is not appalled, but finds a way to set it right.*

*Give me a mind that isn't bored, that doesn't whimper, whine, or sigh.
Don't let me worry overmuch about that fussy thing called 'I.'*

*Give me a sense of humor, Lord; give me the grace to see a joke,
To get some happiness from life, and pass it on to other folk.*

[Tony Denton, 4/01; slightly revised 5/07. Much secular info., stories, etc., taken from a recorded talk by psychiatrist, Dr. Murray Banks.]