

# The Well-Adjusted, Happy Christian (No. 1)

God, our Creator, the One who knows us best, the One who knows what's good for us, and the One who knows what we need, knows that we have a need for genuine happiness; and, make no mistake about it, He wants us to be happy, not fearful (1 John 4:17-18).

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, then we must consult the information provided to us by our Creator in His Word—the Bible.

What does this book tell us in a nutshell? Well, as has been stated so many times from pulpits around the world, happiness isn't something we can acquire as an independent commodity; in other words, happiness is only acquired indirectly as a result of soul-fulfillment. And who but our Creator knows how to fulfill the needs of the soul? And who but our Creator knows what it takes for us to live our lives to their fullest?

Solomon, therefore, 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); he wanted us to learn from *his* experience instead of wasting our lives figuring it out for ourselves.

With this in mind, I want to talk about the well-adjusted Christian, because (using Webster's definition of "well-adjusted") genuine happiness is the result of being an "emotionally or psychologically untroubled" Christian. As we begin our study, it's important to acknowledge that there's no such thing as human behavior without a reason, and that reason can nearly always, if not always, be boiled down to one's attempt to be happy.

There was an old Palestinian standing at the Wailing Wall crying over and over, "Oh I want to go where my people are! Oh, Lord, I want to go where my people are!" A man walking by asked, "What are you crying about? You're in Palestine. Where are your people?" He said, "Miami Beach."

What is it that people believe will make them happy? Well, there are at least four things.

1. People want to live. How long? Forever.

Oh, you'll hear people say, "When I'm 90, I don't care if I'm dead." And that's just the way they feel ... until they're 89.

Take the washing machine, for example: why do you think a woman buys a washing machine? You think she buys it because she wants to get her clothing whiter? No. When the salesman says to her, "This machine will add 20 years to your life," she says, "I'll take it!"

You remember King Hezekiah: when he found out he was going to die, he prayed for more life, and God gave it to him—15 more years, in fact (2 Kgs 20:1-6).

2. People want to feel important.

Have you ever seen a little boy skating and saying, "Watch, Mama. Watch me, Mama!" Why? So Mama can say, "Oh, you're so wonderful." And he loves the praise.

Adults aren't any different, except instead of verbally saying, "Watch me! Watch me!" they say it with their cars, their homes, and their clothing. Why does nearly every woman want a mink coat? Won't skunk keep her just as warm? See, there's very little difference between children and adults.

Doesn't this, at least in some degree, remind ya of the fights among the apostles about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven (Mat. 20:20-28)?

3. People want to be loved. After Jesus spoke about His love for them, He told his disciples, "These things I have spoken ... that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). Love brings us joy.

We want spouses and families so we can have people to love and take care of us.

And don't think for a moment that the business world doesn't know this: they know that people will do just about anything to attract other people.

Sly perfume manufacturers have analyzed very closely what people want, and they've labeled their products accordingly: Curves, Moves, Sex Appeal, Tabu, and so on.

Have you ever heard lovers speak? "Promise me you'll love me forever. Promise me." People want to be loved and loved forever: one woman asked her husband, "Herman, do you love me?" He said, "Sure I do." So she asked, "Would you die for me?" He answered, "No dear. Mine is an undying love."

Do you know what the fourth thing is people want? Think it's money? No, it isn't money: money only gets us what we want. Did you know that for all the money he had, Henry Ford never owned a Cadillac? Why? Because he didn't want one. No, the fourth thing is...

4. People want a little variety—something new, something different from time to time.

One of the greatest dilemmas that the industries of our world face is the problem of monotony, sameness, routine.

People like a little variety. Why else do so many move their furniture around every year?

Well, those are some of the things that we want, things we believe will make us happy; yet not one of us will ever have complete fulfillment in all of them: we're all destined to be frustrated from time to time. The important thing is not whether we're frustrated, but what kind of adjustments do we make when life hands us a dirty deal? There isn't too much success by way of adjustment in our country.

Do yourself a favor sometime: the next time you pass by a school yard full of children, count out 24 of them, trying to include your own child or grandchild in that number. Then say to yourself, "Out of these 24 children, 2 will be in hospitals for the insane before their lives are over: 4 will be profoundly neurotic, 4 others deeply neurotic, and 4 more mildly neurotic; 10 of them 'might' end up fairly normal." You see, our chances aren't too hot. Are they?

Since we're not born adjusted, happiness depends on how we've learned or been taught to adjust; so we need to be sure to teach our children how to react positively to life, not negatively.

There are some people who turn to nicotine, alcohol, and drugs, whether 'prescription' or illegal.

Then there are some who feel their only way out is death.

Remember how Judas Iscariot dealt with his problem? He committed suicide (Mat. 27:5); that was his form of adjustment, and it's probably the worst form of it because he adjusted himself ... permanently.

There was the case of Lupie Valez who was deeply in love, but her sweetheart jilted her, so she committed suicide: she was a movie star with fame, fortune, youth, and beauty who left a note that read, "Dear Harold, there's nothing left for me anymore, so goodbye to you."

One woman said, "Why should I kill myself? I'll just shoot him!" So instead of committing suicide, she commits murder as her form of adjustment.

Here's another adjustment that's familiar to everyone—a nervous breakdown. We've all heard of it. But did you know that there's no such thing as a nervous breakdown? The nerves never break down. You know what we do?

We take our fears—fear of old age, fear of death, fear of failure, fear of parenthood, etc.—and we turn them into nervous stomachs, weak hearts, headaches, tiredness, and so on.

This week alone thousands upon thousands will be x-rayed for pains that can't be seen on an x-ray. Why? Because they're results of emotional problems. I didn't say that they don't hurt; of course they hurt, but those pains don't originate with physical problems.

The story is told of a girl who was desperately in love with a sailor, but her mother was insistent that she marry a rich, prominent man. After the daughter couldn't handle the nagging anymore, being devoted to her mother, she agreed to marry the rich man.

Ten feet from the altar she fell to the floor completely paralyzed. All her emotional pain was translated into paralysis—she had a nervous breakdown, though not one nerve literally broke down. No x-ray ever showed a physical reason for her paralysis. She was paralyzed, all right, but this was her unconscious, neurotic adjustment.

And we all show such from headaches to nervous stomachs to tiredness. Ever notice how tired you get when you have something unpleasant to do? If your wife should say, "Come inside and help me clean house," you say, "Oooo, am I tired and sleepy."

Remember the three apostles who couldn't stay awake while Jesus prayed, even though He asked them to? Dr. Luke told us that they slept because of sorrow (Luke 22:45)—their emotional stress was turned into sleepiness.

We all display this condition; it's just a matter of degree.

The last form of adjustment I'll mention is a horrible one—insanity. Based on an actual case, here's how a person becomes insane.

Picture a girl named Mary in an asylum as she stands motionless the same way everyday for 20 years. She hasn't spoken, cried, or laughed in all those years; she doesn't scream or even flinch when someone pinches her. And she has to be fed with a tube to keep her body from starving to death.

How did she get that way? She wasn't born that way. She was once a little girl who jumped rope and played with her friends like any other little girl. So how did she get that way? To know the answer to that, we'd have to take a deep look into her mind, then we could see that what she became was a form of adjustment. How's that? Well, just listen to her:

"I don't have any friends. My sweetheart left me. My parents love my sister more than they love me; she's so pretty. Dad laughs at me and calls me stupid. But I'm not stupid, I'm afraid, afraid to talk to people, afraid they'll laugh at me too. I wish I could run away, some place where no one can hurt me. Yes, that's what I'll do: I'll go where I'll never love anyone else, where no one can hurt ever me again." See...

Due to her fears, she committed emotional suicide. Hemingway killed himself physically, and Mary killed herself emotionally, but both of them are dead.

You know what hurts the most? Knowing that we can learn how to face reality without going to pieces. Why aren't we taught or why don't we learn, even over a long life, how to deal with reality in a healthy way ... sort of like this lady? ...

A salesman was driving his car on New York's lower east side when he knocked over a little old Jewish lady. He slammed on his brakes and yelled, "Watch out, lady!," to which she replied, "What's da matter? Ya comin' back?" See, that's the attitude: we pick ourselves up, laugh, and move on.

Take two women who lose their sweethearts: one shoots herself while the other looks around for another sweetheart. (This second woman took Paul at his word in Ephesians chapter 4 where he taught the replacement principle: she replaced her first beau with another beau.)

Here's some biblically based advice: "As you ramble on through life, whatever be your goal, keep your eye upon the donut and not upon the hole." Listen...

Aren't there some mornings when you get up feeling depressed and just don't want to work at all? That's normal. But if you stay depressed, the men in white coats will come for you.

Aren't there some mornings when you get up feeling just excitingly happy? Good, that's normal. But if you stay excitingly happy, those men will come for you then too. Now...

For the remainder of our time, I'm going to ask 8 questions to help us see how well-adjusted we are.

1. Let's ask ourselves, "Am I happy?" If we say, "Oh, I'm miserable, miserable," then that's the first important symptom.

What is happiness? Happiness is a by-product, a result of effective adjustment to reality. Happiness isn't a station at which we arrive—it's a manner of traveling: Solomon wrote, "He who is of a happy heart has a continual feast" (Prov. 15:15).

2. Do we have a zest for living? At any age, are we interested in working, playing, and learning?

There are people in their 80s and 90s who grow younger everyday, and there are people in their 20s and 30s who grow older everyday.

In various places (e.g., 2 Pet. 3:18) where the Bible demands a growth in knowledge, did you know that it never restricts that demand to a certain age group? Why? Because we can never learn everything about God and His Word; yet joy is a result of knowledge. Are we socially adjusted? Do we like being with others? The first symptom of the most vicious mental sickness known to man (insanity) is a loss of interest.

A well-adjusted person is one who is interested in others: being with others, sharing with others, hearing the viewpoints of others, and especially helping others. Paul wrote, "You had compassion on me in my chains and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods" (Heb. 10:34, NKJV).

Nothing works as well toward maintaining a happy disposition as taking our minds off ourselves by serving others. Perhaps that's one reason Jesus spoke about self-denial so much and why Paul quoted Him as saying, "It makes one happier to give than to get" (Acts 20:35, Williams). (JOY may be viewed as an acronym: **J**esus, **O**thers, **Y**ourself.)

Then, as with the angels (Luke 15:10), there are passages which speak of the joy we experience in the conversion of others (Php. 4:1 & 2 Cor. 7:9-11).

3. Do we have unity and balance in our lives?

What do I mean by "unity"?

Well, take a woman who's on a reducing diet and is suddenly served ice-cream with whip-cream and who eats it, saying, "Oh, am I gaining weight!" She eats it and worries. Listen...

If we're going to do something and worry about it, then we shouldn't do it. If we're going to do it, then we should enjoy it. That's unity.

What do I mean by "balance"?

Balance means that we don't wrap our lives around any one thing (whether it be our parents, our spouses, our children, or our jobs), because if we do, we're building our entire personality on or around a single support.

How would we like to move into a house with one support? We wouldn't. Why? Well, if we ever lose it, we're in trouble, because it's all we have. On the other hand, if we have many supports—many interests—then we won't go to pieces when something happens to one of them. Incidentally, speaking of how balance aids us in being happy...

God helps us in keeping a balance in our lives so we can be happy: Paul spoke of this in at least two places (2 Cor. 7:4-7 & 1 Cor. 10:13), and he could do so due to experience (Acts 23:10-11 & 2 Cor. 11:23—12:11).

After speaking about the awfulness of inward strife in Galatians 5:17, Paul wrote that the fruit of the Spirit includes joy and peace (verse 22).

4. Can we live with and learn from our failures?

People worry over things they did ten years ago. Or they worry about the future: maybe there will be a depression or a war, or they won't get married—maybe, maybe, maybe. Now tell me, of all the things you worried about last year, how many of them came true? An old man was heard to say, "I'm an old man and have had many troubles, most of which never came to pass."

We can't live with guilt and worry and be pleasing to God or happy in our lives.

We must trust God that He has fulfilled His promise in forgiving us if we've submitted to Him, and should, therefore, live with and learn from our mistakes: Paul wrote, "Happy are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered" (Rom. 4:7; cf. Acts 8:39.)

We mustn't worry about the future, but, again, trust God to fulfill His promise that He won't allow anything to come our way that we can't deal with (1 Cor. 10:13); besides that, if we deal with it the way He desires us to, whatever does come our way will only help us grow in our contentment.

5. Do we have insight into our conduct? By that I mean, do we know what the real, underlying reasons are for what we do?

Do you know how a nervous stomach is cured? Not with mineral oil. It's cured when we have insight, when we know it's caused by fear and when we attack that fear. Yet there are none so blind as those who refuse to see. Some just don't want to see.

A professor wanted to show some students what alcohol can do to the body, so he placed a worm in a glass of water. The worm crawled right out. Then he threw the worm into a glass of alcohol, and it was instantly killed. So he asked, "What's the moral of this experiment?" One student answered, "If you drink alcohol, you'll never have worms."

6. Do we have a confidential relationship with another person?

Everyone needs someone to whom he can talk his heart out without being betrayed. Haven't you ever sat next to someone on a bus or plane and have him tell you things he wouldn't dare tell his best friend? That's because he's certain that you can't double-cross him, so he feels better.

Let's be sure we have just such a relationship with someone, for, as Solomon wrote, "A happy heart does good, like medicine" (Prv. 17:22). Let's also be that type a friend to others, for we gain joy from making others happy: Paul was happy because Titus was happy (2 Cor. 7:13).

7. Do we know how to worry effectively? There's only one thing to do when we're worried—do something about the cause of the worry. The difference between a happy person and a broken soul is never the problem, it's our attitude towards the problem that makes us what we are.

The story goes that a mother had two identical twins, but you'd never have trouble telling them apart: one was always *cheerful*, while the other was always *cheerless*.

Mama took them to a psychiatrist one day asking if he could just balance them out a little, so he told her what to try: he said, "When their birthday rolls around, buy the pessimist a room full of toys, and buy the optimist a box of manure."

Although she thought it was nuts, she followed the doctor's suggestion, sticking her head in each of their rooms to see how they were doing.

The pessimist was sitting there looking at all the toys, saying, "Just look at this mess. I can't believe Mom bought me all this junk."

The optimist was found cheerfully digging through the manure, saying, "You can't fool me: where there's manure, there's a pony." See...

How we approach our daily problems determines how well-adjusted and happy we'll be. There are passages on top of passages which deal with this, but since we don't have time to read all of them, I'll just read one and refer you to the others.

James wrote, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. And let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing... Happy is the man who endures temptation...." (James 1:2-4 & 12).

Other passages are Romans 5:3-4, Acts 5:41, Second Corinthians 6:4-10, Hebrews 12:3-11, First Peter 3:14, and First Peter 4:13-14. Lastly...

8. Do we have a sense of the ridiculous? Can we laugh loud and long at what the world hurls our way? Most of all, can we laugh at ourselves? Laughter is the sunshine of the soul, so let's don't forget to laugh. At the moment we forget how to laugh, whether we know it or not, we're dead.

Whenever we get to feeling too important—too important to laugh, think about this: there was a mental patient standing very grandly just outside the door of his room. The doctor walked by and asked, "So who are you today?" "I, sir, am Napoleon." "Oh really. Who told you that you're Napoleon?" Just as he said, "God told me," a voice from inside the room said, "I did not!" You see, there's always someone who feels more important. Listen...

Here's a hint that'll prevent ulcers, provide happier marriages, and prolong lives; this is one of the most important chemical laws in the universe, and I doubt there's one school in America that teaches it: the human body cannot sprout an ulcer or be angry and laugh simultaneously.

It's chemically, physically, and mechanically impossible, as if God has said, "To you who laugh, no ulcers and no anger."

Try this sometime: if your wife's mad at you, make her laugh—she'll stop being angry ... at least for a moment if she's the stubborn type.

One of the most important things we can learn to do is laugh! Solomon said that there's a time to laugh and be happy (Ecc. 3:4); the father of the prodigal son knew that, for he said to his older son, ""It was right that we should make merry and be glad"" (Luke 15:32).

LAUGHTER...

- Strengthens the immune system,
- Burns calories,
- Relieves stress,
- Reduces blood pressure,
- Reduces pain (by increasing endorphins, the body's natural painkillers),
- Improves lung capacity and oxygen levels,
- Provides a good massage for internal organs,
- Is contagious, like yawning, and...
- May even help prevent heart disease.

("Laughter relieves stress..." Amanda Strindberg, The Orange County, CA, Register, 11/05.)

When was the last time you laughed, I mean really laughed? Well...

If we ever stop to think about our lives, we'll see that they're like climbing a slippery hill: we climb and slip, climb and slip; we all have frustrations and failures to deal with. The question is, what do we do when we slip? Do we pick ourselves up and try to get just a little bit higher on the hill? Or do we lie there and whine and have "a nervous breakdown"?

Let's not forget that happiness is like chasing a butterfly: the more we chase it and chase it and chase it, the more it eludes us. But if we'll just sit down and quietly turn our thoughts to other things and other people, the butterfly will come and softly sit right on our shoulders.

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