

Blessings and curses: Chapter 5 "What makes you happy"

Cheryl Crow sings **"If it makes you happy it can't be that bad."** A good laugh and a smile are good tonic. If something makes you happy enough to laugh and smile, maybe it's not that bad. Of course, there is also the other side to things. Albert Camus writes, **"You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life."** I do wonder what happiness is because many of us seem to have a hard time finding it.

The Wizard of Oz gave Dorothy a companionate look as she realized there was nothing in his bag for her to get home. In his infinite wisdom he decided to take her home himself. Ironically, she must go back up into the air in the same way as she had come down. As mistakes happen the Wizard accidentally leaves without her and Dorothy is left standing before the Good Witch, Glenda, with seemingly no way home.

Glenda tells Dorothy it's okay. She has had the power to go home anytime, but she had to learn that for herself. The Scarecrow, glancing annoyingly at the Good Witch asks Dorothy what she has learned. Dorothy now knows more than she did before because, in her trials, she has become a kind of a philosopher. She says, **"If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard. Because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with!"**

That advice from Dorothy comes through many things. She missed her home. She learned to fight for others and take her eyes off herself. She probably learned a ton of things. However, the most important lesson learned was that her heart's desire was within her. What she thought might make her happy was never really it all along. Pliny the Elder in Greek Philosophy agrees, **"Home is where the heart is."** We tell the dead to rest in peace. I think it's to be at peace with one's self, even in the grave.

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What makes you happy? I have become quite the philosopher myself. Life's trials have changed me. I have a perspective that was not there before. I think I look at blessings and curses differently because I have experienced them. One day I feel good about myself, and bad things happened. Another time I hurt someone's feelings but found twenty dollars. In the long run I have learned to base my day on the fact I am still alive. I look at life like the "Game of Life" by Milton Bradly. We are given money as we go. Throughout the board I have received good news and bad news. I'm happy playing the game. That's why, win or lose, I play it again and again because it's fun.

Philippians 4:11 says, **"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."** Paul went through several trials but learned that happiness is not based on circumstances. I know there are days I feel fat. There are days I also feel skinny but the scale says otherwise. That's why I embrace winter as I embrace summer. There is good in all we have. Let's face it, in winter, snow (in Canada) is all we have.

I wish I could sit here and give you great insights into what makes us happy. I am sure it has to do with chemicals in the brain. There are hormones and the hypothalamus. What does that thing do for us anyway? There are probably good reasons we think like we do, but have you ever met a woman? Women are all over the map daily because of there feelings. My daughter is utterly useless when she is on her period. I knew what time of the month it was for my ex three days in advance. I find women add entertainment to the happiness meter.

I get in a mood when my kids are frustrating. I think, as a father, I want answers to make it okay for them. Men tend to evaluate how they feel inside. I wonder if the reason we men explode so often is that we tend to keep it bottled up. The mood between the sexes is predictable and random. Yet here we all sit, happy and unhappy based on the things around us. Maybe if we

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have a good chat about happiness then we might at least gain some insight like Dorothy did. If you could reflect on the events in your life would you see blessings that became curses and curses that became blessings?

I will admit I am at a crossroads. I became a Christian and met the most wonderful people. They loved more, gave more, and cared more than I had ever experienced before. Strangely enough, as I went further into ministry, people started to get worse. I do believe with all my heart that the meanest people I have ever met have been in ministry, and yes they were the leaders. I have reflected on this until the cows came home and left again. Why did wonderful Christians become mean? You would think that the further up the chain of command we would find more loving Christians. Aren't they the best of the best? My crossroads is that I think they are good people who have gone the wrong way.

I have met so many church leaders who are unhappy. They say they are in love with the Lord and the work they do, but I hear the off the cuff comments. I see the strain in the meetings. I find that many of these people truly want to spread joy, but they find themselves in joyless positions. I mention this because so many people have cast themselves into the wrong roles. At first it's fine because you wanted a job, but soon enough it begins to eat away at the core of who you are.

People are people; different yet the same. There are those who think our sex type is irrelevant because men and women are the same. Only a dumbass would think such a thought. These well meaning do-gooders think if we say men and woman are different then we are attaching value to it. Women are like women in many things they do. Men are quite like men in their own way too.

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Attaching value to gender traits is irresponsible. If men or women do something the other does not do well, it's okay. There is no higher value put on doing something better. A painter is an artist. I deliver mail. They might paint better than me, but that does not make them better than me. A woman might have better discernment than men. Maybe the man can punch harder (maybe). We have learned to put value and worth on actions. People are miscast in roles because of this thought. Just because you can does not mean you should or are suited to succeed in that role.

The same could be said of status or talent. I wonder if people become unhappy because they think they are supposed to be where they find themselves, only to discover it's not for them. I love my thoughts on this, yet they could appear crooked to you. I am made a certain way. I am a leader in how I run things, yet I am a freelance individual. I have to run to the beat of my own drum. I work well with others but better alone. Sometimes we peg a person to lead because they fit the part. The problem is that leading and passion are two different things.

A pastor sees a need in the community, who appoints someone to do the job. That person could lead and run things well, yet maybe they lack passion for the community, so often the project is a disaster. The most unconventional person might be the best person because of their passion. How many Hollywood stars become a disaster because they were miscast for a role? I find some are very talented but can't handle success. Some of them can act but not in a miscast role.

Taylor Swift is the perfect example. She had talent but there were those who did not think so. I think her parents recognized her talent and passion, and let her run with it. Taylor has become her own biggest fan. She loves to sing, laugh, and dance with herself. It's not pride half

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as much as being in the right place in life. I think she would be a disaster as a talent scout. She needs to be in the game as the player. That's why her success is found in sharing her own stories.

There was a man named Paul Martin who owned a company and was very successful. He dreamed of running the country as Prime Minister. The problem was, he lacked the passion. He thought he was built for the role. Being a leader is so much more than being good at leading. The passion for the country must overshadow the blessings and curses. Taylor Swift knew that no matter what happens she was bred to entertain. When trouble came Paul Martin was called Mr. Dithers (wishy washy undecided). He froze in the spotlight because he did not live for the moment to shine in bad times.

There are different people who were made for a special moment. Sir Winston Churchill was bred to lead in times of war. Barack Obama has had eight years of turmoil. I bet he would make a fine president in the good times, while George W Bush was made for trouble. How are you bred? Do you do well in good times? Do you tend to panic in bad times? How do you react to daily blessings and curses?

We need to be very careful when we say yes to a role. I know a guy who is looking for a career. Right now he is in a role that suits his talents, but he has so much more to offer. The problem is they only want him to express certain parts of who he is. We're not built that way. To ignore some parts of you will leave you wanting more and inspired less. Well-meaning leaders lead but that's not all that inspires them. I find they become a monster to employees and themselves because they are cast in the wrong role.

Take Bill Gates, for instance. I don't know him personally but his actions say a lot. He is a leader and can run a business so he looks the part. The other side is his creative talents. Microsoft and computers didn't simply appear on a drawing board. They came from a creative

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mind. I think he left the company because, in the end, there was more of him to give outside of the CEO role. He could be the boss, but he needed to create. The problem could have been that the company only demanded the leadership and cooperate CEO side of Bill Gates. There was no time left for Bill the creator, so he left.

They say introvert people make the best pastors. Really? I have met tons of people cast into ministry roles that suit them because they have the tools to do the job. The problem is they have other tools and desires. These people become uninspired in life because only part of them is being used properly. I think some good Christian leaders became mean because they feel boxed into roles that are good but not fun. Did you know that fun is part of working? Enjoying what you do is inspiring, invigorating, and intoxicating.

On the remaining pages I want to explore how you are made. What makes us happy is where we are in that moment. Are you miscast in a certain role? Do you only place yourself in roles fit for you? How is your compromise meter? That is the big one. Do you know yourself completely? Equally, do you know how to nurture that person? Sometimes to nurture yourself is to say no. Saying yes to things because it's the nice thing to do might be the worst thing you could do. Let's begin by taking the value out of the conversation.

What weight or value do you place on how your day goes? On Facebook do you post a happy face when you're on holidays and a grumpy face when it's January 11 in the middle of winter? How do you embrace the day? So many successful people have quotes that make them famous. The Roman Poet Horace created this phrase in Odes and it says, "**Carpe diem (Seize the day).**" This might be his phrase or a Roman cultural saying, but after all these years it is one of the best inspirational sayings. How do you seize the day?

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A happy meal is a happy meal. Kids are very happy when that box is placed before them at McDonalds. If they tried to save that happiness for twenty years, there might be a problem. Try eating it then? There are happy memories of receiving the box 20 years before, but happiness would not be based on eating it now. A kid may be happy simply because he or she is in McDonalds or they might be hungry. Is happiness in the meal or in being there in that moment?

Ivan Petrovich Pavlov did research on the hunger correlation to saliva: it's called Pavlov's dog and it is an interesting study. He discovered is that the dog's saliva increased when food was given. He then noticed the dog began to give the same responses weeks later when the person in the lab coat entered the room. The dog did not associate hunger with the food. The dog began to associate hunger with the giver of the food instead.

I believe we work the same way. A blessing makes us feel happy. There have been studies that prove the McDonalds signs induce hunger feelings. We know who has the food: it's the golden arches. Let's say a player knocks out your favorite player. I have seen people react to bad hits the same way. They mention the hitter and not the victim. The incident induces greater feelings than the player you loved. A blessing or curse induces feelings that control our hunger for happiness.

I think it's natural as we were made to be emotional. I am not asking anyone to be a robot. To recognize that we do have feelings on blessings and curses is important. We know how others react to particular subjects, so we avoid certain conversations. We respond to happiness as the dog did to hunger. If we could see what inspires us and triggers certain feelings in us, we might be able to mold our roles so that contentment comes naturally.

It's time to look at yourself and understand how you tick. What makes you happy and what scares you to death? So many people avoid the scary parts and embrace the happy parts. I

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think that's partly why people have issues with sex, money, and gambling. These things represent happy moments. These same people might equally avoid bills and tough conversations.

What if you were happy just because today is another day? I saw a picture the other day of Charlie Brown and Snoopy sitting together. Charlie Brown said, "Another day closer to death." Snoopy replied, "It's another day that I didn't die." Two perspectives embracing the same moment in time. What if we had feelings about blessings and curses but looked at them in the same way? In the last chapter I mentioned that the apostles looked at life differently in the book of Acts, chapter 5. These men saw everything as a gift from God. The apostle Paul was in jail but took the time to befriend the jailer. These Christians figured God gave everything to be used for good: **"Carpe diem (Seize the day)."**

Each one of us is built to love life in a certain way. I was in the dentist office yesterday and I could see people so clearly. There I was relaxing while getting my teeth drilled (okay, that's weird). While I was in the moment there was a show on the TV screen of a man teaching viewers to paint. I am not a painter but I love watching people paint. They see the canvas and the world differently than I do. I wanted to see what he saw. The dentist likes drilling teeth. His world is so different than mine. Each of us is different but we can embrace what each has to offer.

I'm not a car guy but I'm glad someone had the vision to make one. I like driving more than walking so they made something that helps me and many other people to get from A to B. I think the early 1<sup>st</sup> century mentality is that everything is good for something. What was given or taken today will be reversed tomorrow. I accept bills and money in the same light. A bill is a challenge to pay and a cheque is a challenge to spend. I'm happy I have money but I'm happy the bill was paid too. In the end the day was seized and things are good.



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I have talked to my wife at great lengths about healing. She would love to be healed of her skin problems. In her particular case, stress makes things worse. She is the perfect example. If she dwells on her skin, her condition worsens. If she lives with it, it seems like it will never be fixed. I said in the last chapter that sometimes a curse is a blessing in disguise. The blessing part needs time to grow. It might be better for my wife to dwell on the good things we receive rather than the bad in order to bring her stress level down.

In the moment, hunger, pain, and heartbreak are very real. I believe we need to admit we hurt. Then it comes down to that particular curse. Do we live with it or embrace it? I said before that Rick Hanson ended up in a wheelchair. He embraced it and became the hope for disabled people all over the world. We have a better world because people like Rick took a curse and longed for the blessing. I mentioned that prayer needs legs. So when it comes to the curses in your life, what are you going to do about them?

So many people are passionate about so many things. We take things personally because they are personal. What if the other person's point of view could be of benefit to you? What if what makes them happy could make you happier? My wife introduced me to coffee, and I love it now. I also watch sitcoms that my kid introduced me to. A friend of mine and I were reflecting on how much our music tastes have been influenced by each other and the people we know. We are happier guys because of the new things we experienced through others.

I know smells can also make us happy. As a kid, farting was funny. A good one made people mad but we laughed. The smell of a woman is intoxicating. The crisp smell of winter is wonderful. The city sometimes smells smoggy and awful. The spring rain brings out the best in smells. There are trees and flowers in Victoria B.C. that I can still smell in my mind. I hate the smell of burnt chili. The odor of grape makes me gag. We gain feelings off of smell. Some of

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those feelings make us happy or feel awful (like grape), yet we are forced to smell things every day.

So many things bring up the good feelings inside. How can we contend with such powerful emotions? Albert Camus said in the beginning of this chapter that chasing happiness will be our undoing. That goes for chasing good feelings. Only being happy when blessings come our way is entering a dangerous zone. To seize the day means the whole day.

There is a scene in Jurassic Park where the kids are being attacked in a car by a T-Rex. Eventually the car is tossed over a wall into a tree. The kids escaped and climbed to the ground. At that moment the car falls and lands on the kids. The boy says, "We're back inside the car." That whole traumatic event began and ended in the car. At points during that experience they were happy, scared, terrified, and relieved.

What if we seized the day that way? In the morning the buzzer goes off and we want to clobber the alarm. On a Monday that seems to be worse. Have you ever set your alarm on Saturday by accident? That might be the even more horrible. Still, we wake up in bed and were alive. There are more troubling places to wake up like in jail. We finally get out of bed and begin the day. Imagine receiving a blessing. Were happy about it but continue on through the day as if all is normal. Then we receive a curse and remain happy knowing the day is not over. Maybe the last thing you will do that day is sleep. Sleeping is good because it means you're not dead. You might say after the whole day "we're back in bed."

Jewish tradition has them starting the day at 6 pm. Really the day by our standards is over. For them it's just begun. Imagine going to bed in the beginning of the day. The day literally ends with supper. I think that's partly why the ancient peoples thought about blessings and curses

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differently. Don't let the sun go down while worrying. It makes sleep difficult. In their world tomorrow is still today so to speak. It just makes sense to treat your day as a whole day because things are always changing.

Happiness is running the race more than finishing it. That man I watched painting had a look on his face and I could tell he loved painting. I bet he loved painting more than the finished product. We love the human being and doing part. At the end of the day we tend to evaluate our performance. The interesting part is that, while were in the moment, there is little evaluation of painting, running, or working. We judge, critique, and evaluate when the work is done.

Albert Camus is right that the striving for blessings is bad news. Eeyore in Winnie the Poo seems to strive for curses. Either way the striving part is bad. There is a video of a man stumbling before he finished the race. He didn't quit but got up and limped towards the finish line. The cool part is his father running out to help him across the line. That moment is captured in our hearts by how he got over the line. That whole scene was certainly more amazing than winning or losing.

Bill Gates could run Microsoft. Being wanted as Bill (the inventor) might have meant more to him. His happiness is found in Bill more than chasing the dream. Significance in this world has never been found in success. Sure, it's nice to win but losing means you live to fight another day. Teams tend to struggle the next year after winning a championship. The loser tends to win. The loser comes back harder with a fire within. The winner is talented enough to do it again, but they have reached their goal and there is nothing to fight for. Think about this quote from Jim Beaver: **"Today we fight. Tomorrow we fight. The day after, we fight. And if this**

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**disease plans on whipping us, it better bring a lunch, 'cause it's gonna have a long day doing it."**

Happiness is not found in being cast in a role you can do. Happiness is not found in feeling good. Happiness is found in enjoying what you bring to the table. Someone will say, "Yes, participation medals do work." Oh, they got it all wrong. Winning is the goal, but how we get there is where most of the fun is. I think older players stay in the game too long because they love the game. I have found it interesting that many NFL players love playing over winning the Super Bowl. They love what they do and they love expressing themselves on the field.

Happiness is indeed in the moment.

The most successful people might not be the happiest people. Colonel Sanders failed for most of his life before he discovered Kentucky Fried Chicken. Presidents tend to be older. A lot of water goes under the bridge before we usually find success. Yet life is flowing in the form of a journey. I have had people say they got a new job and were promised to be a manager soon. If I had a dime for every person who told me it did not work out, I'd be rich. They focused on the prize instead of the task at hand.

Life is seriously a game. We are either playing or dead. Along the way are trails and trials. We get off track and find our way. Happiness is within us. We want to be loved. We want to have fun. So be happy in all you do and love, and fun will find you. The best relationships were found by accident. Looking for love as Garth Brooks said, "In all the wrong places" usually ends in a disaster. It's good to be hired in a great position. To find yourself wanted by an employer is nice; however, the best fit might look fairly ugly at first. Embrace the bigger picture of you inside. Give an imperfect fit time to mature, and you might be surprised in the end.

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There is this thought called, "Putting yourself in harm's way." I know that sounds stupid. The best "you" encompasses everything about you. The best job might be leadership and hands on. Just doing part of that is incomplete. Challenging yourself in places of failure will grow you. There is another thought that, "Our job is our sustainer for what we were really meant to be." The harm's way is taking a chance on completing you. Maybe working is work and exploring your talents is another. Paul made tents, but preaching was his passion, yet both things needed each other to survive.

Challenging your talents and traits will build you up. Yes, you will fail, but the fun part is making failure have a very long day. During this time, blessings will come and curses will try and ruin the party. Invite the curses in and embrace what they bring. Learn from curses and mistakes. I have said that each of Edison's ten thousand failures to achieve the light bulb helped him to see the light.

Happiness is found in dreaming and hoping. "Are we there yet" breeds impatience and anticipation at the same time. Faith in the process will turn curses into blessings. We are more than a good looking suit or a smart CEO. We are creative, persistent, loving, and generous. We are many things to many people. What are you when you look in the mirror? Because we live and die with the happiness we have gained. "Rest in peace" might mean the happiness we have is the only thing we can take with us no matter where we are.