

## Where can you find love?

The founding documents of the United States promise the right to pursue happiness, not to be happy all the time. This is an important distinction, for as Jesus pointed out, when we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, the other things we need are "added unto us."

In an article in the *Wall Street Journal* called "How to Be Happy" (September 23, 2002), Digby Anderson, director of a London think tank called the Social Affairs Unit, notes, "Pursuing happiness often does not bring it. Pursuing other goals—truth, wisdom and the virtuous life—or just getting on with the duties and chores of daily life at work and home, often does bring happiness as a by-product."

Oxford psychologist Michael Argyle systematically questioned people for 20 years about what made them happy. He found that in general women are happier than men (sorry, guys). He also discovered that the single institution which produces the most happiness is a good marriage, with going to church a close second—provocative conclusions in a culture filled with troubled families and half-empty church buildings. One of the best ways to find happiness, Argyle suggested, is devoting ourselves thoroughly to a leisure pursuit like golf or country line dancing, or a charitable pursuit like the Rotary Club.

But Anderson adds an interesting twist. "There are times when we feel neither especially happy nor unhappy, which later we see as times of great happiness. . . . Indeed, we recollect as happy some times when we were compelled by someone else to do something we did not want to do."

This is no surprise to a Christian, for the Bible teaches that God disciplines those he loves. Even when we don't feel happy, the Father is teaching and shaping us, preparing us for broader ministry—and for greater joy. "Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character,

hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts" (Romans 5:3-5).

I hated studying English as a schoolboy, but those early grammar lessons opened the door to one of my greatest joys—writing. Those tedious piano lessons my parents made me take laid the foundation for a life-long appreciation of music. Those dreaded wind-sprints the high school basketball coach made his players run in practice got us into shape so we could enjoy the game and play it with greater skill. When my wife and I were first married, we had little money, lived in a tiny lopsided apartment, and drove a rusty old Plymouth, but we were truly happy.

Happiness, it seems, can catch us by surprise. In Jesus' story about the Good Samaritan, who were the happiest characters at the end? Not the priest and the Levite. They protected their own self-interest, didn't get their hands dirty, didn't interrupt their busy schedules, didn't spend any money on another person's need. Walking by on the other side of the road looked like the safer and happier option. Yet, at the end of the day, surely the Good Samaritan and the wounded man he helped were the ones who felt the deeper joy. Loving one's neighbor is the harder thing to do, yet it produces a satisfaction few experiences can match.

Perhaps, then, instead of looking for someone to love us, we need to look for someone we can love in Jesus' name. Instead of searching for happiness, we should focus on meeting someone else's need.

For when happiness seems to elude us, we are actually thirsting for the love of God. And it is there. And it is enough. ■

**Sometimes happiness catches you by surprise.**



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