

Real joy is a rich emotion. Achieving it presents some complex and perplexing problems.

We're told joy is precious, even rare, and yet that it's something within the reach of all. How is that possible? We're told joy is a deep inner feeling that can fill our being, even in the midst of personal sufferings. How is that possible?

An important thing to know about joy is that it can enrich our life—as we realize that we're here for some definite purpose given by God; one that's ours alone to find and fulfill at home, school, factory, farm, office.

Finding that special role—by looking inside ourselves and, as important, by reaching out to others—isn't easy.

But if real joy comes at least partly from understanding our role in life, then to be happy we have to take time to consider that role. And we need to look for opportunities to find joy in everyday circumstances of our lives.

To find our God-given purpose in life involves an active search and an important and ultimately rewarding one. Ignace Lepp, a priest/psychologist, says in his book, *The Challenges of Life*:

"If today there are so many joyless people around it is most probably because they have not found their right road or that for some reason or other they have not followed it."

While some men and women seem to live joyless lives, others have found and continue to find real joy in many different places, in many different ways, under many different circumstances.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say,

(Phil. 4:4)

Finding Joy in...

... Laughter

Comedian Sam Levenson found joy in everyday events and made them a source of the humor he generously shared.

Telling how he became a comedian, the former Brooklyn schoolteacher recalled talking to a student who had greeted him with, "Hi ya, Levenson." Believing teachers deserved more respect, he told the boy, "You shouldn't call me Levenson."

"What should I call you?" the boy asked. "You should call me Mr. Levenson," he said. To which the youth responded, "Oh, you got married?"

Believing material such as this was too good to waste, he made a career of sharing it with others.

... Suffering

Writing about Kathryn ("Rainbow the Clown") Tambling, a friend said her life story was a "saga of fulfillment."

Kathryn had "found herself" as a performer, able to bring smiles to the faces of countless children. So she kept on clowning—in schools, hospitals and shopping malls—even after developing cancer so painful she had to put a pillow under her clown suit to cushion her tender body from the hugs of unknowing youngsters.

She told her friend, "How can I say, 'stop—don't hug me, I hurt'? That's what pillows were made for!" When she died in April, 1981, Kathryn Tambling was eulogized as a woman "deeply motivated to love, to serve and bring joy to others. It was her 'magnificent obsession'."

... Acceptance

While raising four active children, Anne Morrow Lindbergh experienced dejection over her inability to find time to write. When managing a busy household became a strain she'd slip into her adolescent dreams of doing the kind of writing others would recognize.

Yet she learned to find happiness despite the daily limitations. She writes in her book, *War Within and Without*, that instead of daydreaming she decided to "think out, that instead of pure immediate joy I have had during the about some pure immediate joy I have had during the day with my children or husband or friends. Every day has moments of pure joy—even the dullest and saddest day."

... Creativity

Ray Charles found enjoyment and challenge in more than 35 years as a musician. "Nobody knows everything there is to know about music. There's always something that is new or fun that you want to practice," he says. "It's been said that pain and the blindness which afflicted him at age six shaped his musical genius. Yet he says he would have become a musician anyway. 'I don't remember a time when I didn't feel music.'"

He believes people have to ask "Why was I born? Was it just to die? When you get down to the bottom line, that's the question. The important thing is to make the best of your life, to try to contribute something."

... Helping Others

The writer Catherine Marshall tells of a husband and wife who moved to a new area where they had no friends. They became increasingly irritable and unhappy with each other. Yet they found a way to turn their unhappiness into joy by reaching out to others.

The couple befriended a waitress who apologized to them for slow service. She was new in town and very unhappy. They invited her to their home after work.

In time, other people were asked to join in the visits. Soon this grew into a project called, *Adventures in Friendship*. As Catherine Marshall notes, "this couple soon became so concerned with the needs of others that their life was enriched beyond anything I can describe. Happiness found them."

"The ability to laugh at its own pretensions and shortcomings is the true mark of the civilized nation, as it is of the civilized man."

S.N. Behrman

(1893-1973)

"What Makes Comedy High?"

Euripides
(484-407 B.C.)
Phigeneia in Tauris

**There is something in the pang of change
More than the heart can bear,
Unhappiness remembering happiness.**

...The Unexpected

Travis Rusheon Vardell wrote in the Christian Science Monitor about an incident that provided a moment of joy for at least two people.

The writer, while stuck in traffic, glanced out of his car window and into the window of a music shop where a piano was on display. "At it sat a man who, by his rapt expression, was playing it for all it was worth," Vardell wrote.

"Though I could not hear a single note, I watched him pantomime his song. When he finished... I caught his eye, held my hands up and applauded rapidly and silently, mouthing the words—'Bravol Bravol!'"

"He stood... turned in my direction and there in the store window bowed deeply in his best maestro fashion. Then we both laughed, the light changed and I drove off, pleased with myself, my fellowman and life in general."

Kill Joys

Here are some enemies of joy to avoid:

Self-Pity—How can I be joyful when I have to suffer so much?

Pessimism—How can I be joyful when there are so many problems in the world today?

Envy—How can I be joyful when many people worse than I have so many better things to enjoy?

Cynicism—How can I be joyful when others are looking out only for themselves?

Negativism—How can I be joyful when nothing ever turns out right?

Keys to a Happier Life

Here are some keys to a happier life:

Love—I can be happy because of the love of family and friends—something more important than material success.

Work—I can be happy because I believe in doing the best job I can and can take pride in it.

Values—I can be happy because I've decided what's important to me rather than trying to keep up with the Joneses.

Acceptance—I can be happy because I don't dwell on what I can't control, I find ways of getting over bad experiences and getting on to the next thing.

Balance—I can be happy because I try to lead a balanced life with time for work and recreation and rest and prayer.

...Appreciation

"It would be totally unrealistic and unbelievable to claim that I am now living happily ever after without a single disappointment, angry moment or care in the world. No mature person expects this or even thinks it is deserved," says Nancy Brandenberger, a writer who suffered the death of one child ("never would I have been so sympathetic to others' grief had I not experienced it myself"), and the mental disability of another.

In a determined effort to count her blessings, she set aside five minutes a day and wrote down only the positive aspects of her life and closest relationships. Her list included her other children, her husband, parents, friends, material possessions and, finally, herself.

"My own personal prayer of thanks lasted two weeks. I can't pinpoint the exact day when my step became a little lighter and my smile more frequent. The awareness that the sheer magnitude of my blessings was overwhelming put me in a positively glowing mood."

...Work

Welder Joseph Spruill today finds joy in his work, something that eluded him as a teacher. "I really love my work. It makes me happy. I like making things; it gives me a feeling of pride."

"I'm just enjoying life. Construction is wide open. You never have to do the same thing every day. You don't have someone standing over you, pushing you. You just work, do a good job and enjoy it."

Decisions

Throughout life we have to make all sorts of choices, taking one route and disregarding another. Robert Frost, in his poem *The Road Not Taken*, says:

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by. And that has made all the difference."

But the joy that comes when we've begun to realize our potential is only a part of it, says Leo Buscaglia, a professor of education at the University of Southern California and a noted lecturer. Another decision must be made, "a decision to recognize others and to make life easier for them, because joy comes in that, too."

"It's wonderful to reach out," Dr. Buscaglia says. When I include you in my life, I double my possibilities for joy."

Signposts

While there are no surefire ways of knowing if we're on the right road in life, certain signs can help. If we're generally involved in living each day as it comes along—sharing, laughing, loving, finding satisfaction in work well done, and even suffering with some courage—we're moving in the right direction.

Joy and peace seem to follow in those who have stuck with the search and found God's meaning for their lives.

Joy Now

Any search for earthly joy ought to include a talk with God. When we ask for help in achieving joy, we're assured of a Divine reply:

"For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds." (Mt. 7:7)

God wants us to be happy. And faith isn't supposed to be doom and gloom. In fact faith without laughter can lead to "dogmatism and self-righteousness," according to Conrad Hyers, a United Presbyterian minister and the author of *The Comic Vision and the Christian Faith: A Celebration of Life and Laughter*.

Of Jesus, he writes: "The first thing He did after starting His ministry was go on a week's vacation at the wedding feast in Cana, turning jugs of water into wine."

"It's seriousness we share with the animals. When we laugh, we're already to some extent, laughing out of, or displaying, the image of God," he says.

Joy to Come

The joy possible for us to experience now is limited. People occasionally get sidetracked in their search for total happiness. St. Augustine, for instance, found fleeting pleasure as a young man. But eventually he realized that he wouldn't find complete joy in sensuality. He concluded that God created us for Himself and that we wouldn't find rest until we rest in Him.

So, while we are meant to have joy—and there are ways to attain a degree of it in this life—it won't be a total joy. Not yet.

Real joy will be found with God. We have this promise:

No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him. (1 Cor. 2:9)

The Source of Joy

Joy is the happiness of love—love aware of its own inner happiness.

Pleasure comes from without, but joy comes from within, and it is, therefore, within the reach of everyone in the world. For if there is sadness in our hearts, it is because there is not enough love.

But to be loved, we must be lovable; to be lovable, we must be good; to be good, we must know Goodness; and to know Goodness, is to love God, and neighbor, and everybody in the world.

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen
That Tremendous Love