



KEYS TO A HAPPY LIFE

"I'll be happy when
I get married and
have children."

"I'll be happy when
I have my own home."

"I'll be happy when
I land that job."

"I'll be happy when..."

HAVE you felt like that? And when you attained your goal or acquired the desired item, did your happiness last? Or did it begin to fade? To be sure, reaching a goal or obtaining something we have desired can make us happy, but that kind of happiness can be fleeting. Lasting happiness is not based solely on achievements or acquisitions. Rather, like good physical health, true happiness depends on a variety of factors.

Each of us is unique. What makes you happy may not make someone else happy. Additionally, we change as we grow older. Yet, evidence suggests that some things are more consistently associated with happiness. For example, genuine happiness is linked to finding contentment, avoiding envy, cultivating love for others, and building mental and emotional resilience. Let us see why.

1. FIND CONTENTMENT

“Money is a protection,” observed a wise student of human nature. But he also wrote: “A lover of silver will never be satisfied with silver, nor a lover of wealth with income. This too is futility.” (Ecclesiastes 5:10; 7:12) His point? While we may need money to survive, we should avoid greed, for it is insatiable! The writer, King Solomon of ancient Israel, actually experimented to see whether wealth and luxurious living fostered true happiness. “I did not deny myself anything that I desired,” he wrote. “I did not withhold from my heart any sort of pleasure.”—Ecclesiastes 1:13; 2:10.

Having amassed great wealth, **Solomon** built grand houses, made beautiful parks and pools, and acquired many servants. Whatever he wanted, he got. What did he learn? His experiment made him somewhat happy, but not for long. “I saw that everything was futile,” he observed. “There was nothing of real value.” He even came to hate life! (Ecclesiastes 2:11, 17, 18) Yes, Solomon learned that a life of self-indulgence ultimately leaves one feeling empty and unfulfilled.*

Do modern studies agree with that ancient wisdom? An article published in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* observed that “after one’s basic needs are satisfied, additional income does little to advance one’s subjective well-being.” Indeed, findings show that increased material consumption, especially at the cost of moral and spiritual values, can erode happiness.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Let your way of life be free of the love of money, while you are content with the present things.”—Hebrews 13:5.

* The account of Solomon’s experiment is found at Ecclesiastes 2:1-11. You can read the Bible online at www.jw.org.

2. AVOID ENVY

Envy is defined as “the painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another, accompanied by a desire to possess the same advantage.” Like a malignant growth, envy can take over one’s life and destroy happiness. How might envy take root? How can we recognize this trait? And how can we combat it?

The *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology* observes that people tend to envy their equals, perhaps in age, experience, or social background. A salesman, for instance, might not envy a famous movie star. But he may envy a more successful fellow salesman.

To illustrate: Certain high officials in ancient Persia envied, not the king, but a brilliant fellow official named Daniel. Indicating how unhappy those men must have been, they even schemed to kill Daniel! But the plot failed. (Daniel 6:1-24) “It is important to recognize the hostile nature of envy,” says the aforementioned



Adopt a Healthy View of Mistakes

When people who are resilient make mistakes, they do not berate themselves with self-defeating language, such as “I’m a failure” or “I’m useless.” The Bible says: “A crushed spirit saps one’s strength.” (Proverbs 17:22) The book *The Power of Resilience* states that if you want to lead a resilient life, “you must recognize that mistakes and failure are a natural occurrence . . . Your choice is the manner in which you respond to these events.”

“Show Yourselves Thankful”

Found at Colossians 3:15, that is sound advice! Studies suggest that reflecting on positive aspects of our life and showing appreciation for kindnesses rendered us can foster a heightened sense of well-being.

encyclopedia. “This hostility explains why envy is associated with so many historical cases of aggression.”*

How can you recognize envy? Ask yourself: ‘Do a peer’s successes delight or deflate me? If a sibling, talented classmate, or fellow worker fails in some way, am I sad or gleeful?’ If you answered “deflate me” and “gleeful,” you may be nurturing envy. (Genesis 26:12-14) “Envy,” says the *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology*, “can poison a person’s capacity to enjoy the good things in life and snuff out feelings of gratitude for life’s many gifts. . . . Such tendencies are hardly conducive to happiness.”

We combat envy by cultivating genuine humility and modesty, which enables us to appreciate and value the abilities and good qualities of others. “Do nothing out of contentiousness or out of egotism,” the Bible says, “but with humility consider others superior to you.”—Philippians 2:3.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Let us not become egotistical, stirring up competition with one another, envying one another.”—Galatians 5:26.

3. CULTIVATE LOVE FOR PEOPLE

“People’s feelings about their relation-

* An outstanding historical case involved Jesus Christ. Mark 15:10 says that “out of envy the chief priests” handed Jesus over for execution.

ships have a bigger impact on their overall satisfaction with their lives than do their job, income, community, or even physical health,” says the book *Social Psychology*. Simply put, in order to be truly happy, humans need to give and receive love. “If I . . . do not have love, I am nothing,” said a Bible writer.—1 Corinthians 13:2.

It is never too late to cultivate love. For example, Vanessa had an abusive, alcoholic father. When she was 14 years old, she ran away from home and stayed in foster homes, as well as in one bad shelter where she remembers begging God for help. Then, perhaps as an answer

Envy can poison a person’s capacity to enjoy the good things in life

to her prayers, she was placed with a family who lived by the Bible principle that “love is patient and kind.” (1 Corinthians 13:4) That environment, coupled with what she was learning from her own study of the Bible, helped Vanessa to heal emotionally and progress mentally. “At school, my grades went from D’s and F’s to A’s and B’s,” she said.

Vanessa still bears emotional scars. Nevertheless, she is now a happily married mother of two girls.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Clothe yourselves with love, for it is a perfect bond of union.”—Colossians 3:14.



4. BUILD RESILIENCE

Who has a problem-free life? As the Bible says, there is “a time to weep” and “a time to wail.” (Ecclesiastes 3:4) Resilience helps us to get through such times, to bounce back from adversity. Consider Carol and Mildred.

Carol has spinal degenerative disease, diabetes, sleep apnea, and macular degeneration that has blinded her left eye. Yet, she says: “I try not to feel discouraged for too long. I allow myself my ‘pity party.’ But then I set my feelings aside and thank God for what I am still able to do, especially for other people.”

Mildred too has a number of ailments, including arthritis, breast cancer, and diabetes. But like Carol, she tries not to focus on her problems. “I have learned to love people and to comfort others during their illness, which helps me as well,” she writes. “In fact, I find that when I am comforting others, I am not worrying about myself.”

Although both women are interested in receiving good medical care, they focus, not on their physical health, but on their attitude and how they use their time. As a result, they have an inner joy that no one can take away from them. Additionally, they are much loved by others and are an inspiration to people who are going through various trials.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: *“Happy is the man who keeps on enduring trial, because on becoming approved he will receive the crown of life.”*
—James 1:12.

When applied, the Bible’s wisdom is “a tree of life to those who take hold of it, and those who keep firm hold of it will be called happy.” (Proverbs 3:13-18) Why not discover that truth for yourself by tapping into the wisdom recorded in the Bible? After all, the Author of this sacred book, who is also called “the happy God,” wants you to be happy too.—1 Timothy 1:11. ■

Carol and Mildred find joy in comforting others

