

The Happiness That Follows Holiness

Remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive. "

Acts 20:35

On radio programs, at seminars, and in churches across the country, I'm often asked what I mean by the subtitle of my book Sacred Marriage: "What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?"

Please note, I didn't write "*instead of* to make us happy" - Christians, of course, seek happiness like everyone else. The difference is the means by which we pursue happiness, and what we find our happiness in. Holiness and true happiness are not adversaries; they are allies. They do not go to war with each other but rather build each other up. This is not to say, however, that they are equals. Biblical happiness is the offspring of holiness, giving holiness the pride of place as the parent.

Henry Drummond writes, "There is only one thing greater than happiness in the world, and that is holiness; and it is not in our keeping; but what God has put in our power is the happiness of those about us, and that is largely to be secured by our being kind to them."

What a profound thought! We can't fully determine how others treat us, but we can determine how we treat others - and God has made us in such a way that how we treat others in the little routines of life lays the foundation for our own happiness.

I fear, though, that the contemporary meaning of happy doesn't do justice to either Scripture or Drummond. Perhaps joy is a better choice for modern readers. as I've heard many people say, "Doesn't God want me to be happy?" as justification for leaving their spouses and taking up with someone else. In today's society, "happy" has been reduced to "euphoria."

Drummond takes us deeper, telling us to find our happiness not in an emotional response but in a sacrificial policy called love:

Where Love is, God is. He that dwelleth in Love dwelleth in God. God is love. Therefore *love*. Without distinction, without calculation, without procrastination, love Lose no chance of giving pleasure. For that is the ceaseless and anonymous triumph of a truly loving spirit. I will pass through this world but once. Any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.

Can anyone doubt that such an attitude would refresh, reenergize, and revolutionize virtually every marriage on the face of this earth? If each spouse would honestly say, "Any kindness I can do to my spouse, any act of affection, any motion of goodwill. let

me do it now. I don't know how long I have left to live, so let me not defer or neglect any act of kindness, but let me truly love."

Each of us can choose to do this individually, regardless of how our spouses respond. Their actions toward us are not in our keeping, but our ability to be kind and giving lies entirely within our realm. And the beauty of God's creation is that when we love, we experience God -- and that's what brings true happiness. When we act in love, we invite God into our house, and God brings a soul-fulfilling joy that transcends contemporary notions of mere euphoria.

When marriages break down, they often do so in a context of resentment and a feeling that we're not getting what we need or want. But looked at in the light of love, this enemy loses all its power and place: "The most obvious lesson in Christ's teaching," Drummond writes, "is that there is no happiness in having and getting anything, but only in giving. I repeat, **There is no happiness in having, or in getting, but only in giving.**" And half the world is on the wrong scent in the pursuit of happiness. They think it consists in having and getting, and in being served by others. It consists in giving and serving others He that would be happy, let him remember that there is but one way - it is more blessed, it is more happy, to give than to receive."

Great minds think alike. Albert Schweitzer once told a group of graduating seniors, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know; the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

Do you seek happiness? Then seek to love. Move toward your spouse. Serve him. Love her. Cherish him. Sacrifice for her. Don't miss a single opportunity to demonstrate a kindness or to speak some word of affirmation. In doing so, you will invite God into your life, home, and soul, and you will find true biblical happiness.

The Happiness That Follows Holiness. #31 ; Devotions for a Sacred Marriage, by Gary Thomas, pp 86-88.