

rB Two-Step Happiness | Rod Brace

<http://rodbrace.com/article/happiness>

Tom seemed to have it all. With a great job, terrific wife and two of the cutest kids around, Tom should have been one of the happiest men alive. He was not. For years, Tom pursued and received promotion after promotion in his company. His continued advancement in position and income provided his family with the luxurious lifestyle of his dreams. Yet, for Tom, there was always something missing. Life was complex and mostly meaningless.

Tom and countless millions men and women like him struggle daily with the simple concept of happiness. The trial and error lifestyle of chasing that next "elixir of happiness" has become our national pastime. We search for the happiness we desire in things, status and relationships. And the result is as predictable as the conquest.

Our culture aspires to have it all. We are led to believe that attaining is the sure-fire path to happiness. So we buy new cars each year. We upgrade neighborhoods (and sometimes even spouses) for those addresses and partners we deem more desirable. Our primary passion is to achieve those positions of influence and affluence that we hope will provide real happiness. Our error is evident, however, when we find that once these goals are reached, we still feel a void; we are not happy.

This seeking-to-no-avail is routine in our popular culture, yet we are slow to realize its futility. We keep looking in the same old places while genuine happiness has always been within reach. The Apostle Paul encountered a group of people much like us that failed to realize the source of genuine happiness. The good people of Corinth had a reputation in biblical times as being a hard-charging, party-prone crowd. Paul had served as their pastor for almost two years and knew their party paradigm well. He tried to convince them that true happiness is found by loving others in a generous fashion. But to this morally corrupt town, thinking about others was odd and uncomfortable. They preferred instead to focus on themselves with lavish spending and self-indulgence. To sway them toward a different happiness paradigm, Paul offered up an example. He suggested that the people of Corinth consider the actions of a church that Paul had worked with in the Macedonia province. The Macedonians had endured crushing problems that pushed them to the very limits of their existence. Yet Paul pointed out that their Macedonian friends were "incredibly happy, though desperately poor." (2 Corinthians). He went on to say that the pressure of their troubles caused the Macedonians to react in a way that was surprising, even to him. Instead of becoming more self-focused in their pain, the struggling Macedonians responded with an "outpouring of pure and generous gifts" for others!

Here was a group of people who had little to begin with -- yet when confronted with problems that would send most of us into a defeatist mode, they reacted by giving generous gifts to those they perceived as being worse off. In fact they reportedly were "pleading for the privilege of helping out in the relief of poor Christians." Their generosity was not only surprising -- it was entirely their own idea. They recognized the needs of others at a time when they could have easily focused on their own hardships.

The Macedonians thought little of themselves. Paul attributed this behavior to a two step process -- they first gave themselves "unreservedly to God" and then gave themselves to others. Meeting God does funny things to people; at least funny by the world's standards or expectations. A self-centered person can hardly understand why anyone who was suffering would be generous to others. It goes against human nature. But understanding who God is changes all of that. Understanding Him makes humble generosity just as possible as prideful self-absorption.

When we realize that God is bigger than all of our problems and He promises to provide a way through these difficult times, we begin to see ourselves differently. We begin to see our problems as resolved and are then free to look beyond our immediate circumstances. We see before us millions of people who need to hear this God-paradigm of faith and provision. When the Macedonians realized this, their generosity "simply flowed out of the purposes of God working in their lives." With their newly gained, God-sized purpose they found what we all so desperately desire -- "they were incredibly happy." And their happiness came through the two-step process of giving to God, then giving to others.

Simple solutions are not always attractive in our popular culture. Nevertheless, happiness can in fact be found through the simple action of giving ourselves (all we are and all we own) unreservedly to God, and then just as unreservedly to others. When we give everything we may appear to be left with nothing, however, it is at that very point we gain everything. The tight grip of our materialistic desires keeps us from relinquishing the relatively little we have in order to gain a full, rewarding and meaningful life through God. When we give everything we are left with the one thing we need most: our relationship with God. It is at that point in our spiritual journey that we understand the purpose of life. Material things get in the way of truly experiencing God. When we let them go and begin to treat them as things God has given to us to care for, we find happiness. God does not intend for us to be without possessions, He merely asks that we not place our possessions in prominence over Him.

We are blessed by God so that we can bless others. The promise of Paul to the Corinthians that true happiness is found in giving our life unreservedly to God and then giving to others, is still ours to seize. Find happiness in the Giver of all things. Think about yourself in a different way. See yourself as capable of doing great acts of service, and in the end finding incredible happiness. The power of popular culture can be counted on to feed our pride as long as we allow it to consume us. But when you know the truth, well -- that can set you free. You're two steps away from finding true happiness today.

An excerpt from *Simplify* by Rod Brace available at popular online booksellers.