

The Search for Happiness (conclusion)

Let us consider this final false formula for happiness.

Happiness= Fame times Success

I challenge you to find happiness reported in the Hollywood gossip columns or even in *Who's Who*. The low percentage of truly happy people there will discourage you.

Near the close of his life, agnostic H. G. Wells said, "I am 65, I'm lonely and have never found peace." Isadora Duncan, the great ballet dancer wrote, "I have never been alone when my heart did not ache, my eyes fill with tears, and my hands tremble, for a peace and joy I have never found." She went on to say that, in the midst of millions of admirers, she was a lonely woman.

The daughter of a Governor, who showed vestiges of remarkable beauty, referred to the world of high society she had abandoned in disillusionment, "I've been all through that. I know all about it and there's nothing in it!"

In recent weeks we have examined various formulae for happiness but they all fall short in providing lasting fulfillment. So, what is the true formula for happiness? The answer: there is none! You won't find happiness in things, pleasure or even success. You search there in vain. Why? Because happiness comes as a by-product or the overflow from a way of life that seeks to make others happy. The self-centered person cannot be satisfied. In fact, the quickest way to be miserable, is to constantly think about whether or not you are happy.

Making clear distinctions between happiness, pleasure and joy, reveals their differences: *Happiness* comes from people and through daily happenings. But these can be as changeable as the weather. *Pleasure* comes from things and through the five senses. Yet, at any moment these can be taken from us. But *Joy* is of the heart and a gift of God's Spirit. Deep within it is fed by springs of faith, hope and love and these never run dry no matter what happens.

I invite readers to choose between two very different answers regarding happiness. Note, the same key words are found in both formula but with completely different meaning:

Christ taught: Worship God; Love people; Use things; Deny self. This is the paradox of the gospel of Christ. We win by losing; we triumph by surrendering; we come first when we are last.

In contrast, the World says: Worship things; Love self; Use people; Deny God. Get all you can by whatever means you can; look out for number one; use people to gratify your own desires and leave God completely out of your life. And then we wonder why our world is falling to pieces at every level.

Searching for pleasure is not the problem but rather seeking it in the wrong places. Fleeting worldly pleasures give the illusion of happiness but in the end bring emptiness, bitterness and regret. They are shabby substitutes for that abiding joy, a gift of the Spirit bestowed by God alone.