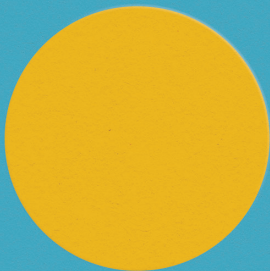




finding



true

happiness



Everybody wants happiness.

They may not always agree on what it is or how to find it. But they all want it. So do you.

But there's a problem. Happiness can be elusive, like a bar of soap in the bath. We chase it and pursue it. We prioritize it and make sacrifices for it. Sometimes we catch it for a few precious moments—but then something happens and it slips out of our grasp. A crisis comes. We get used to the new relationship, new job, new environment, new salary, and we want more. The quest for happiness begins all over again.

Humans have always found this challenging. People have written about it for thousands of years.

But if anything it is even harder today, because there are so many false promises out there, mostly made on screens and sold for money. Every advertisement and notification promises fulfillment, but each time you find (at best) the same old fleeting pleasures, and (at worst) addictions that enslave you. It is tempting to give up completely on the search for permanent happiness and to settle for distractions instead.

Is real happiness possible? The answer is yes.

Here are four things to know about real, lasting happiness.

First, it's deep, not shallow. We all know that some kinds of happiness are deeper than others. The rush of seeing more 'likes' on a social media post doesn't compare with the joy a young couple feels on their wedding day. But one of the oddities of human life is that we can experience happiness and unhappiness *at the same time*. We can be momen-

tarily miserable about a sudden downpour or a stubbed toe, while also being substantially joyful and contented in our relationships or situation in life. The opposite is true too. Most celebrities can tell plenty of stories about smiling for the camera while being inwardly depressed.

The trick is to prioritize the deep over the shallow. Thin pleasures are quicker and easier to find. Deep pleasures are harder, slower, and much more satisfying. So we have to learn how to reach for, and even fight for, our deepest and richest joy. And that means engaging with the latter.

Second, lasting happiness is fundamentally spiritual, not fleshy. Human beings are mammals, and we all crave a few basic things: food, sleep, sex, comfort, power, and so forth. But we are also spiritual beings who find deeper and richer joy in things like love, beauty, compassion, creativity, and awe. Every time you delight in something that

True and permanent happiness is
found in the presence of one who is
truly and permanently happy: God.

has no survival benefit whatsoever—sunsets, art, kindness, mountains—it is a reminder that you are spiritual as well as physical.

The challenge, as the apostle Paul puts it in his earliest letter, is that “the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17). When the New Testament refers to our “flesh,” it often means the ungodly part of our character that we are born with: the selfish, sinful part of all of us. Our fleshly desires put us at odds with each other, and this fills the world with greed, power struggles, sexual rivalry, and violence. The fruit of the Spirit, by contrast, involves all the things that make life truly delightful: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:19–23). This is why happiness does not come from having more money, sex, or power, but from immaterial things like virtue,

community, and love. It is why the happiest people you know are also the kindest, humblest, and most generous.

Third, deep happiness results from presence, not absence. Many of us describe happiness as what happens when you take something away—sadness, suffering, conflict, stress—and we talk about happy places as *breaks*, *vacations*, *escapes*, or *getting away from it all*. We think we become happy by running away, not running toward.

The Bible says this is completely upside down. True and permanent happiness is found in the presence of one who is truly and permanently happy: God, who created the heavens and the earth, who became human in the person of Jesus Christ, and who gave those who trust in him his Holy Spirit, whose fruit is joy. God rejoices over his people by singing loudly (Zeph. 3:17), welcomes us into his own joy (Matt. 25:21), and fills our heart with “joy that is inexpressible” (1 Pet. 1:8).

Thirsty people need more than the absence of dust; they need water. And you and I need more than the absence of sorrow (which is not always possible, at least for now). We need the fountain of life and happiness, in whose presence are “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11).

The danger with this is that it sounds like God is just a means to an end. It is tempting to see religion as a tool, a life hack you can try if you want to get happier, like Prozac or yoga. It’s true that, statistically, if you pray and attend church, you will probably be happier. But crucially, this only works because God is the goal, not happiness itself. Lasting happiness—like sleep—is something that comes only when you stop focusing on it and center yourself on something (or someone) else.

Making happiness our priority is like putting the cart before the horse. It is secondary, not the primary goal.

The happiness that lasts forever
is a gift, not a reward.

It is a delightful mystery. Love grows by focusing on the Beloved, not the love. Faith expands as we reflect on whom we believe, not the belief. And happiness is greatest when our attention is not on the happiness itself but on the source. We are planets, not suns: We find our highest joy and purpose when we are orbiting a center whose glory and gravity is far greater than ours. Jesus put it like this: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt. 6:33).

Finally, the happiness that lasts forever is a gift, not a reward. You cannot achieve it by traveling the world, trying every experience, satisfying every ambition, and following every desire. Nor can you qualify for it through self-improvement, moral virtue, religious devotion, and spiritual intensity. The truth is that you cannot earn it at all. True happiness is received, not achieved. It is a gift that God provides for us, not a wage for services we provide

for him, or a reward that we discover for ourselves. The Christian word for that is *grace*.

It happens like this: God the merryman offers us eternal happiness with him. But all of us have refused. We've chosen independence and misery instead of worship and delight. We turn from the light into the shadows, seek the flesh rather than the Spirit, turn ourselves from planets into suns, and hunt for pleasure in the shallows rather than the deep. It fails. We are separated from God and estranged from joy.

That should be the end of the story. But God is love. So he comes in the person of Jesus Christ to show us what flourishing looks like. He teaches, heals, tells stories, and works wonders. And above all he demonstrates what life in union with God can be. And then he does what only love in human form could ever do: He takes the punishment of sinners

onto himself and dies on the cross. In his suffering and crucifixion, the God of joys becomes a man of sorrows, fully bearing the weight of sin and death and allowing it to crush him, so that it might never again have to crush those who truly desire joy. And then on the third day he rises from the dead, releasing the happiness of heaven to crash like waves over those who trust in him, and pouring out his Spirit on them as a guarantee of the glorious delight that is still to come (Eph. 1:13–14).

So how do you receive God's gift in Jesus Christ? Jesus said that we need to turn away from our sins and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15), and finding a local church that believes the Bible will help you make sense of how to do that and what comes next. In the meantime, though, you could start by praying the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples (Matt. 6:9–13):

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
Amen.

© 2026 by Andrew Wilson. All rights reserved. Adapted from the book *Happiness* © 2026 by Andrew Wilson. Published by Crossway. Printed in China. Bible references: English Standard Version® (ESV®).



The Lord Jesus saves all who believe in him.
To learn more about Jesus as Lord and Savior
visit ESV.org/Jesus.



Finding True Happiness

In this tract, Andrew Wilson, the author of *Happiness*, explores four biblical truths that reveal what happiness is and how to find it.

Learn More

To browse more tract themes and accessories, visit crossway.org/evangelism-resources. To place an order, email sales@crossway.org or call 1 (800) 872-2871.

BIBLE REFERENCES: ESV • PACKAGE CONTAINS 5 TRACTS

 **CROSSWAY**
crossway.org


9 781682 164464
EVANGELISM