

As Each Part Does Its Work

Part 2: Our quest for happiness

We were drinking tea in a friend's kitchen when she said to me, "You know, when we bought this house, I thought my life was finally perfect. I have a great family, a good job, more possessions than I ever dreamed of having, this wonderful house.... So—I don't understand—why am I still not happy?"

We all dream of being happy. But what, exactly, *is* happiness?

Most of us have said we'd be happy if we just had some more money, better health, a spouse, a child, a better job, more time...and the list goes on. Except, the truth is, even when we get whatever we thought would make us happy, we realize there's just one more thing, and then one more.... Why else would well-to-do people keep working 24/7 and never take time to enjoy what they have? Why do drop-dead gorgeous people go to any lengths to add to their beauty? Why do corporate workers seek promotion after promotion, never saying, "Good enough. I'll stay here where I'm comfortable." And then there's the compulsion to find the perfect match, and the marriage-go-round, with its constant lure of greener pastures and easy divorce. The truth is, it's extremely rare for people to say they're content with what they have.

We're the disposable generation, constantly searching for something new – clothes, make up, tools, equipment, music, food, books, ideas, people... And we have thousands, if not millions, of options to choose from. But...are we happy yet?

Unfortunately, material things can only make us happy for a short time. There's an inevitable let-down. How many kids have persuaded their parents to buy that amazing new toy, only to discover it isn't half as exciting as it looked in the ad? How many "perfect" people have annoying flaws? There are always strings attached.

Even as Christians, we're on the lookout for churches with a more exciting worship services, better kids' programs, more dynamic preaching, softer pews...

Will finding these things make us happy? No.

The problem is that most of the things we expect to make us happy are transitory, while every person on earth was created with two deep, eternal needs.

1. The need to be loved "as is."
2. The need to live lives that have meaning.

True, these needs can be partially met by other people and by the things we have and do, but they can only be fully met through a genuine relationship with God.

In the first chapters of Genesis, we learn that Adam and Eve's disobedience blocked their relationship with God and each other, and sent all of creation spinning out of whack. But the needs we were created with are still there. We can try to meet them in other ways, but nothing except a genuine relationship with God, where he talks to us and we talk to him, will ever really satisfy our longing.

The sad thing is that, even among the people who call themselves Christians and attend a church service every week, many don't actually have that kind of relationship with God. They don't know the joy that comes from knowing God loves them "as is," and the contentment that comes from realizing he has a plan for their lives. My friend found these things. And even when, a few years after our conversation, her life turned upside down, she still felt the peace and contentment only God can give.

I trust you've found it, too, because if the church is actually going to accomplish the purpose God had in mind back when he first created the world, it's absolutely vital that each and every part of it knows firsthand what it means to be loved and used by God. ♦