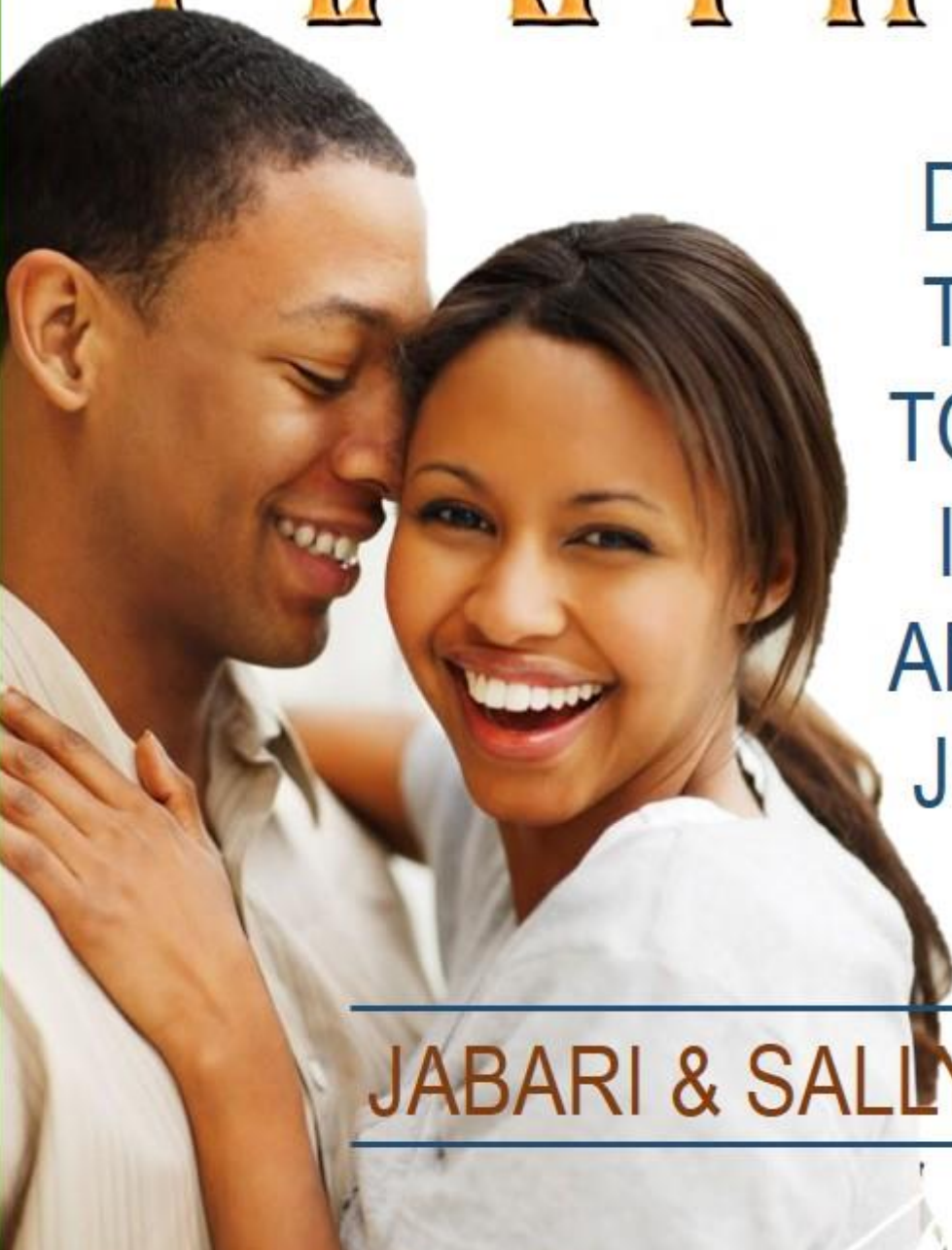


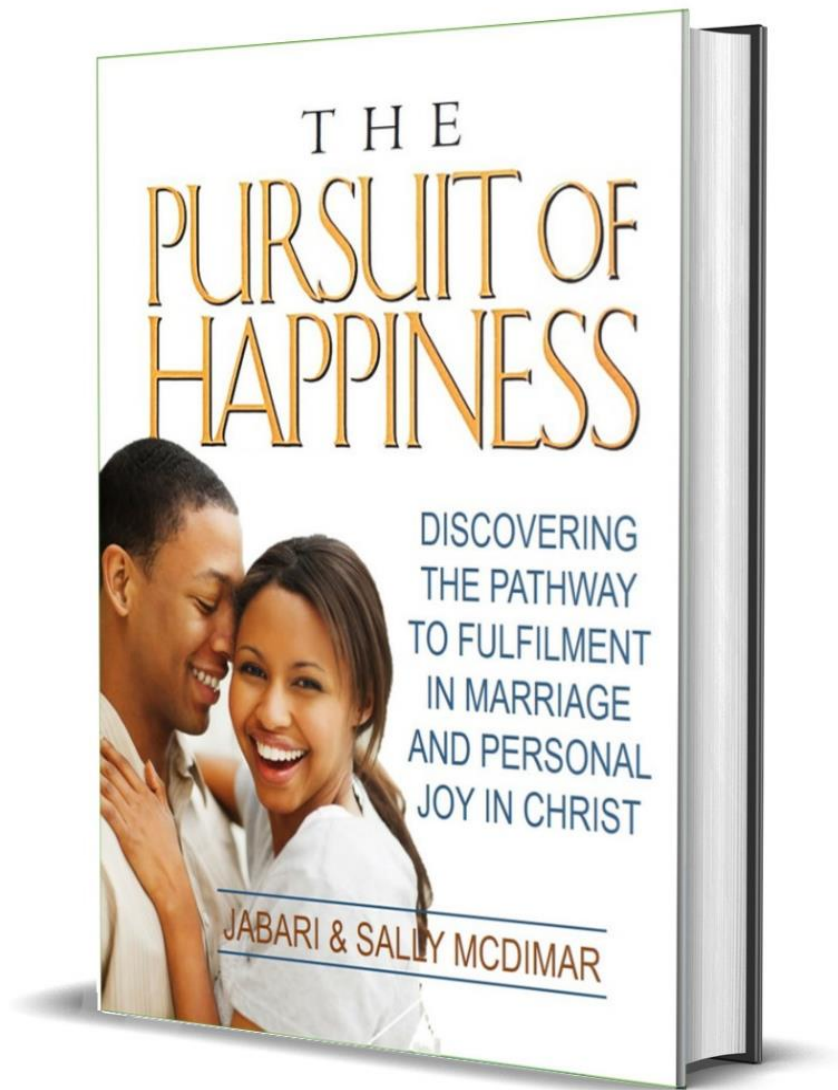
THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

DISCOVERING
THE PATHWAY
TO FULFILMENT
IN MARRIAGE
AND PERSONAL
JOY IN CHRIST

JABARI & SALLY MCDIMAR



The Pursuit of Happiness



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INTRODUCTION



MAN HAS ALWAYS chased after things: sex, money, position, honor, fame, and everything under the sun trying to find happiness. At the root of it all is the *Pursuit of Happiness!*

Now it is interesting, from the Word of God, that happiness does not come from a chase. Happiness is the direct result of living the Christ-life. There is no other way to have real and lasting happiness, especially in marriage without Jesus Christ.

Most of us – if we are honest – are dreaming of a *happily ever after* marriage. We expect marriage to lead to that fairy-tale ending in life. But we end up becoming unhappy and

Real happiness never comes from the pursuit of happiness, but instead from the provision of God

miserable. Only a few married couples are happy. And a huge majority of married couples have one totally happy partner, while the other partner is living a

life of quiet desperation and waiting to die if divorce is not an option. The remainder is in some phase of emotional abuse.

Such was the case of Linda who came for counseling and said, “*Rev. Jabari, I thought married life would be more than this. I thought it would be full of happiness. But rather, I am unhappy with my spouse*”.

Has that phrase ever crossed your mind or spilled from your lips? I know it has mine. My premarital daydreams featured fairy-tale moments and sweeping gestures worthy of Romantic Comedy scenes. While I knew that daily life included mundane tasks, monotony, and opportunities for perseverance—those weren't the realities I focused on.

Even further, I couldn't fathom the loneliness of what I call *relationship winters*. Those seasons of missed connection when your marriage can't seem to rekindle its warmth. I thought the path to happiness in marriage started with one of two statements:

- *If only my spouse would ...*
- *If, as a couple, we could ...*

And right there, I missed the secret. Yes, there are things a husband or wife can improve upon. And it's always great when a couple can get on the same page to work on their marriage together. But, sometimes we underestimate a vital way we contribute to our unhappiness.

And as I faced those things I began asking God '*What does the Bible say about happiness in marriage?*'

After studying the Bible and reading other books on happiness, I realize that when it came to my happiness as a husband, I spent too much time focusing on external things I couldn't change. Happiness in marriage is about turning my attention to God's Joy, His provision, and His instruction for my life. I then realized that marriage is not necessarily a

requirement for happiness. An unmarried person can lead quite a happy, and peaceful life, while a married person can experience serious marital adjustment problems leading to unhappiness and tension.

We are conditioned by fairytales, movies, and the myth that we will find our Prince Charming or “*the one*,” and then we will live happily ever after. We’re taught to pursue love and marriage for our *happiness*. The resolution of all of life’s challenges and the deep need to be known is to get married. Your happiness should not and cannot be wrapped up and dependent on your spouse. He or she is not the key to your happiness. One of the best ways to ruin a perfectly good marriage is to make it your spouse’s job to make you happy. Happiness is an inside job that only Christ can do.

Real happiness never comes from the *pursuit of happiness* but instead from the *provision of God*. The trick is to unlearn what our culture has taught us and instead turn to God for our ultimate source of joy. We marry for pleasure not for joy. Psalms 37:4 doesn’t say, “*take delight in your spouse and he will give you the desires of your heart*,” it says to “*take delight in the Lord*,” This means pursuing Christ above your spouse, your happiness, above ALL else.

Your spouse is not perfect; he is flawed just as much as every other human being on this planet. Your spouse came packaged with past experiences, emotions, hang-ups, and bad habits. So when you come home looking for your spouse to be your source of happiness only to find him making your

heart miss a beat, it's because he wasn't meant to be your source of happiness. You're putting your marriage in grave danger if you are.

Have you wrapped your happiness around your spouse, people, or things? How have you pursued God for your happiness? How have you taken delight in him? If you've expected your spouse to be your ultimate source of sunshine and daisies, you can still turn to God and begin taking delight in him. I have a feeling as you unlearn what our culture tells us and delight in the Lord, he will give you the desires of your heart in marriage, “*a peace and joy that surpasses happiness*”.

Chapter One



WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN

HAPPINESS COMES through happening. When good things happen, we are happy. When bad things happen, we are sad. This is proof that happiness is temporal.

All unhappiness is a result of trying to meet our needs through human relationships. When another human being fails to meet our needs, we become frustrated and unhappy. For example, the husband comes home from work tired, short-tempered, and feeling a need for a kind, understanding word from his

*Marriage gives us our **walking** partners to discover happiness in God, not our **paths** to happiness.*

wife. He is depressed and he wants his wife to make him feel better. In turn, his wife has her needs. She is feeling down, lonely and she is wanting him to lift her spirits. So they lean on each other. The unspoken message rings out, "*I'm hurting, honey; heal me. I'm down; lift me. I'm depressed; make me happy. I'm blue; take my blues away. I'm in need; meet that need. Put your arms around me and love all the hurt out of me.*"

Of course, neither of them can meet the needs of each other, because those needs are spiritual and only God can meet them. You can be in the arms of someone you love all night

long and still wake up crying inside. The discovery is soon made that those needs cannot be met by sex or by a tender word. Only God can meet your deepest need for true and lasting happiness.

That's why Ecclesiastes 9:9 says "*live happily with the wife whom you love*". What it means here is that, even if nothing good is happening around us, let's make things happen. Then we can be happy.

The miracle of marriage is that it's not meant to make you feel happy in that dopamine-laced, movie-ending kind of way. It's meant to make you aware of yourself, and the more deeply you can grow, the more joy you will experience.

It's counterintuitive, but the less you expect marriage to make you happy, the more it will.

We often say our failed relationships teach us more than anything else. But it's our ongoing relationships that can teach us the most. Our interactions with others show us who we are, how we behave, and what we are doing. They can be the most enlightening medium for self-awareness. There is no relationship that does this more than a person with whom you commit to build your life, home, and share a sexual and intimate relationship for the rest of your existence.

Your life partner is an asset to you in the evolution of your becoming, but that partnership is not the whole of your becoming. You can choose to see marriage as a gift, as an incredible privilege. Marriage gives us our walking partners,

not our paths. When you view your partner less as your savior and more as the person you get to hang out with until you die, you're more likely to forgive their shortcomings and accept that they're not, and never will be, perfect.

We only understand what makes us truly happy when we have a long-term perspective on life. Living for the moment can fool us into thinking that temporal pleasures bring happiness. The writer of Proverbs warns us, “*At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, ‘How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction!’*” (Proverbs 5:3,11,12). Many have discovered only too late, that what brought joy at the moment caused hardship and grief in the long run.

The apostle Paul reminds us that it was only when he kept the eternal lens fixed tightly to his spiritual eyes was he kept from utter despair in times of great difficulty (see 2 Corinthians 4). Looking at the big picture gives us perspective at the moment and helps us see that God is good and is doing something good in us, even during a difficult marriage (Romans 8:28, 29).

Our partners don't exist to satiate our every emotional need. They exist to be companions — separate, but equal — at once our responsibility, and yet very much out of our control. Learning to love them better is essential. It gives so much more than it takes. When we can strip away the assumption they should be different from who they are, we find

something beautiful underneath: harmony. Which is what we've been hungry for all along.

Marriage will not always make you happy, but it will do something even better. It will allow you to find happiness in peace, in letting go, in learning what's worth fighting for, in figuring out how to love an imperfect person, in seeing what commitment is and what compromise feels like.

Marriage won't do the work for you. That work is yours—always and forevermore. Real work is not about finding the right person. It's about becoming the right person.

Chapter Two



BEYOND HAPPINESS

EVERYONE IS IN pursuit of happiness. A new job, a new car, a new wife, a vacation, even a promotion can all bring us happiness. But what happens when you lose your job, your car doesn't start, or your spouse is cheating on you? Are you happy then?

Nearly all of us buy into what I call the *myths of happiness*—beliefs that certain adult achievements (*marriage, kids, jobs, wealth*) will make us forever happy and that certain adult failures or adversities (*health problems, not having a life partner, having little money*) will make us forever unhappy. This reductive understanding of happiness is culturally reinforced and continues to endure, despite overwhelming evidence that our well-being does not operate according to such black-and-white principles.

One such happiness myth is the notion that “*I’ll be happy when _____ (fill in the blank).*” I’ll be happy when I get that promotion when I say “*I do,*” when I have a baby when I’m rich, and so on. The false promise is not that achieving those dreams won’t make us happy. They almost certainly will. The problem is that these achievements—even when initially perfectly satisfying—will not make us as intensely happy (*or for as long*) as we believe they will. Hence, when fulfilling these

goals doesn't make us as happy as we expected, we feel there must be something wrong with us or we must be the only ones to feel this way.

The flip side is an equally pervasive, and equally toxic, happiness myth. This is the belief that “*I can't be happy when _____ (fill in the blank).*” When a negative change of fortune befalls us, our reaction is often supersized. We feel that we can never be happy again, that our life as we know it is now over.

A selfish desire for happiness is as sinful as any other selfish desire. Its root is in the flesh which can never have any standing before God. “*The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*” (Romans 8:7).

People are coming more and more to excuse every sort of wrongdoing because they are *“just trying to secure a little happiness.”* Before she will give her consent to marry the modern young lady may ask outright whether or not the man *“can make me happy,”* instead of wondering selflessly whether she can bring happiness to her life partner. The lovelorn columns of the newspapers are wet with the self-pitying tears of persons who write to inquire how they can *“preserve their happiness.”* The psychiatrists of the land are getting fat off the increasing numbers who seek professional

Happiness is a reaction to something great. Joy is the product of someone great.

aid in their all-absorbing search for happiness. It is not uncommon for crimes to be committed against persons who do nothing worse than “*jeopardize*” someone’s happiness.

Happiness is fleeting, changing as quickly as our circumstances do. That’s why pursuing happiness will not cure us from feeling sad, empty, or alone. Happiness never lasts.

Peter tells us that when we believe in Jesus, we are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy! Joy is different from happiness. Joy is not based on your circumstances, and you don’t have to pursue it. Joy is God’s gift to believers, and it is constant through all circumstances.

Happiness is dependent on what happens to us. Joy is received because of what Jesus did on the cross. Jesus’ death paid the penalty for our sin, shame, and disappointment, allowing us to have a relationship with God. Jesus’ resurrection showed that He is more powerful than any circumstance we will ever face.

In Jesus, we find forgiveness, fulfillment, and a future. Nothing that happens to us — no job loss, busted car, or bad marriage — can change that fact. So, instead of pursuing happiness, pursue Jesus. Happiness is good, but Jesus is more.

THE DIFFERENCES

The difference between joy and happiness is substantial. We often assume that the fleeting feeling of happiness, giddy laughter, and contentment in the comforts of life is akin to the joy we experience in Jesus. But joy supernaturally sustains our souls in seasons of heartache, injustice, and sorrow. Enduring the valleys of life is nearly impossible without the life-giving fuel of joy in Christ.

“Be joyful always...” (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

There is a big difference between joy and happiness. Happiness is a *reaction* to something great. Joy is the *product* of someone great. Let us never forget the difference, nor fail to enjoy both happiness and joyfully on this earth.

Merriam Webster defines happiness as “*a state of well-being and contentment; a pleasurable or satisfying experience.*” Whereas joy is specifically stated, even in the dictionary, as “*the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires; the expression or exhibition of such emotion.*”

The *Biblical* meaning of joy, in contrast, is not a fleeting feeling with worldly roots. The best personification of Biblical joy is the story of Job. He was stripped of every good thing he had on this earth, but never lost his faith in God. He says, “*I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth*” (Job 19:25).

Job knew his experience was unfair and did not sugarcoat his pain. His conversations with God were frank, yet he never

forgot who God was. Job 26:7 says, “*He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing.*”

Joy is rooted in who God is. “*The Spirit of God has made me;*” Job 33:4 says, “*the breath of the Almighty gives me life.*” Our Father is fair, compassionate, and all-knowing. His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. We are wise to pray for our plans to align with His, not just to ask God to bless our intentions. Job possessed the wisdom to know God’s character, and the strong faith to hold onto what he knew to get him through.

That’s the difference between happiness and Biblical joy. Though our lives seem to be falling apart, and we may have every right to fly the victim flag, we instead choose to place our lives in the capable hands of the Father, our Defender. Joy isn’t fleeting, and it doesn’t exist with peachy-keen circumstances. It remains. “*The Spirit gives us eyes to see the beauties of Jesus that call joy up out of our hearts,*” wrote John Piper.

The difference in the Biblical definition of joy is the source. Worldly possessions, accomplishments, even the people in our lives, are blessings that make us happy and fuel joyfulness. However, the *source* of all joy is Jesus. God’s plan from the beginning, the Word made flesh to dwell among us is rock solid, allowing us to navigate difficult situations in the absence of happiness while sustaining our joy.

Happiness is more of a state of mind, while joy is emotionally rooted in our faith in Christ. Jesus has experienced all pain, physically and emotionally. Pastor Rick Warren is quoted as

saying “*Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.*”

Joy allows us the perspective to trust God with our daily lives. Happiness is attached to the blessings in our lives. It’s laughter at a funny joke or bliss in accomplishing a goal we’ve worked hard for. We’re happy when our loved ones surprise us, on our wedding day, when our children or grandchildren are born, and when enjoying time with friends or amidst our hobbies and passions.

There is no bell curve to joy like there is happiness. Eventually, we stop laughing. But joy sustains our reactions and fleeting feelings. “*Simply put, Biblical joy is choosing to respond to external circumstances with inner contentment and satisfaction because we know that God will use these experiences to accomplish His work in and through our lives,*” writes Mel Walker. Joy allows us the perspective to be grateful and happy, but also to survive trying times by reminding us we’re still loved and cared for no matter what direction our daily life goes. Happiness is external. It’s based on situations, events, people, places, things, and thoughts.

Chapter Three



THE QUEST FOR HAPPINESS

I HAVE COME to find out that the reality of life is that usually each time you are desperate for something you often overrate the satisfaction that you will derive when you get that thing, and as soon as you possess it you soon realize that what you experience is an anticlimax. If you are not clear about your focus in life you find that life becomes a cycle of the pursuit of things that has a disappointing effect at the end of the day. That is why a man or woman who breaks one marriage almost always ends up never settling with one person all their life.

There is so much pursuit for happiness around us and yet all we see is pervading unhappiness. What we think will give us

It's not that we married the "wrong" person. It's because our expectations are ideals, not realities.

great pleasure almost always end up complicating our lives. Why is life so tricky for some people? Why does marriage breed so much unhappiness? Why do jobs that we so earnestly pray for ultimately cause us so much

unhappiness? Why does a child ultimately destroy a toy that he was so desperate for only a few days ago?

Now I submit that the whole hectic scramble after happiness is evil as certainly as is the scramble after money or fame or success. It springs out of a vast misunderstanding of ourselves and our true moral state. The man who knows himself can never believe in his right to be happy. A little glimpse of his own heart will disillusion him instantly so that he is more likely to turn on himself and own God's sentence against him to be just. The doctrine of man's inalienable right to happiness is anti-God and anti-Christ and its wide acceptance by society tells us a lot about that same society.

Before you take a single step, it's critical to consider the happiness myth that is likely driving those first instincts. This is the assumption that "*I'll be happy when . . . I'm married to the right person.*" You may have devoted a great deal of time, energy, and consideration to finding a fitting or ideal partner, and you applied yourself to caring for your marriage. Yet despite your efforts and good fortune, you are now beginning to realize that your marriage is not giving you the satisfaction that you thought it would or that it once had. This is a determining moment, as it calls for you to understand whether your expectations are realistic and whether you are asking too much of your marriage. As I describe below, even the happiest marriages cannot maintain their initial satisfaction level, and only with a great deal of energy and commitment can you approach that initial level.

Many of us have grown up with these *unrealistic expectations* of marriage. Hollywood, Harlequin, and Nollywood have taught us that we must find our perfect match—our soul mates—to

be happy. When difficulties occur in our marriage, we may wonder whether we have found the right person or may even think we have made a terrible mistake. After many years of counseling couples, I have learned that God created marriage to mature us and for us to enjoy, but it was never intended to fulfill us or make us happy.

We grow up thinking the hardest part will be finding the “*right*” person, who we assume will be the key to a happy life. The more right a person is for us, we think, the less suffering we will experience in marriage. And, generally, people do pair up with other people they believe they’ll be happiest with (*even if, in some cases, that happiness is more about security, status, or tradition than love*). But sometimes, people choose who they think they’ll be happiest with only to find out they are incorrect.

This isn’t because they’ve committed to the “*wrong*” person. It’s because their expectations were *ideals*, not *realities*. These unrealistic expectations can wreck you if you let them.

We have been conditioned and taught that happiness is proof that we are doing right. That if we make the right choices, the right decisions for our lives, then happiness is what we get. If we are miserable, then we made the wrong choice. Because of this belief, we look for that happiness as the evidence we need to back up our choice to stand. Sin makes us HAPPY! We can be so far away from the Lord, walking in the lusts of our flesh, following our desires, and find great happiness in

those moments. Happiness proves nothing about the state of our soul!

When you see a picture of your spouse all smiles and laughter, yes, they are most likely happy at that moment. It's normal to grab the camera during the happy moments, especially when they have something to prove. *“Hey, we are doing right! Look at how happy we are. You can't tell us we are wrong, SEE the smiles? SEE the happiness? We are fine and you can't tell us we are living a lie! Here is the proof.”*

You can be happy in your sin, but you can't have soul peace or joy, as a child of God, your conscience won't allow it! And that is, my friends, what it all comes down to. When your conscience lets you know you did the right thing by giving you PEACE!

1 John Chapter 3 is proof because John talks about the sons of God and the sons of Satan and how it's the SEED that is in the sons of God that sets us apart. We all know right from wrong.

1 John 3: 8-10 *“The one who practices sin [separating himself from God, and offending Him by acts of disobedience, indifference, or rebellion] is of the devil [and takes his inner character and moral values from him, not God]; for the devil has sinned and violated God's law from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.9No one who is born of God [deliberately, knowingly, and habitually] practices sin because God's seed [His principle of life, the essence of His righteous character] remains [permanently] in him [who is born again—who is reborn from above—*

spiritually transformed, renewed, and set apart for His purpose]; and he [who is born again] cannot habitually [live a life characterized by] sin, because he is born of God and longs to please Him. 10By this the children of God and the children of the devil are clearly identified: anyone who does not practice righteousness [who does not seek God's will in thought, action, and purpose] is not of God, nor is the one who does not [unselfishly] love his [believing] brother.

Vs 19 and 20 “*By this, we will know [without any doubt] that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart and quiet our conscience before Him 20whenever our heart convicts us [in guilt]; for God is greater than our heart and He knows all things [nothing is hidden from Him because we are in His hands]”.*

Accordingly, all people have this God-given capacity to know right from wrong because each is a free moral agent. We need to stop believing that happiness is the most important thing, because when you search the scriptures for finding happiness, the Word doesn't say much, but has a lot to say about our conscience and peace because PEACE is very important when it comes to helping a man make choices between good and evil. This is called having a GOOD CONSCIENCE! When you are at peace with what you have decided and feel GOOD about the choices that your moral compass told you to choose, which all comes from the seed of God inside.

We are all looking for true peace. The peace that comes when you have made the right choices and decisions for your life. Your conscience will tell you when you are wrong, and there

will be no peace as much as you try and lie and prove to the world and everyone else how HAPPY you are. Pride will help you subdue your conscience, for a time, but in the end, your conscience will win. You can't run from it. You would have to be in a constant state of working to suppress it. But the moment you let up, it's right there again.

You have to TRUST in the Seed that is planted in your hearts when you become born again.

“But the goal of our instruction is love [which springs] from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith”. I Timothy 1:5 Amp.

Chapter Four



HAPPINESS IS A CHOICE

MARRIAGE IS GOD’S great idea, but in every marriage, there are seasons of difficulty and times of dryness where one or both partners may feel dissatisfied with the marital relationship. As we work to improve our marriage, sometimes our efforts don’t produce the changes we want. During these times, the question we need to ask ourselves is not, “*Should I leave my spouse so I can find another person who will make me happy?*” but rather, “*Can I learn to find contentment and joy while during an unhappy marriage? And if so, how?*”

What would make you happy right now? If you could have anything in the world, what would you ask for right now to make you happy? New car? New house? New job? New kids? New wife? What would it _____
take to make you happy?

Happiness is not a feeling of getting what we want, it's a choice. Nothing can make you happy.

Happiness is a choice to focus on what you have, not on what you lack.

You are the only one who can make you happy. Happiness is a choice to focus on what you have, not on what you lack.

If you don’t believe me, go read Philippians 4. In it, you’ll see someone suffering in prison and going through one of the

toughest times in his life. He was old, alone, sick, and awaiting death in prison. There wasn't much to be happy about or look forward to for St. Paul at this point in his life.

But what does he say? What would you say? What would your outlook be?

"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
(Philippians 4:11-13)

Content means that he is choosing to focus on what he does have instead of focusing on what he doesn't have.

So often we quote verse 13 *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"* without realizing its connection to verse 11 *"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content."* The two are more connected than you think.

Happiness is not a feeling; it is a choice. Right now, you can be happy. But you must choose it. You must choose to focus on what you have, not on what you lack. If you do that, then there's nothing that you can't do. You'll be able to smile and find happiness in any situation... even in a room full of manure!

Many of us feel dissatisfied in life because we are not content with what God has given us. We want more. How does this apply to our marriage?

Jesus tells us that where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also (Matthew 6:21). If our treasure, or deepest desire, is in having a great marriage or a fat bank account, or certain other things we deem essential to our well-being, then we will feel unhappy when we don't get what we want. For whatever has our heart, has us.

No one is more concerned with our happiness than Jesus is. He just tells us a different way of obtaining it than the world does. He tells us that happiness is never found by pursuing happiness or pleasure or people, but only found by pursuing him. He says, "*Blessed [or happy] are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled*" (Matthew 5:6). Too many of us hunger and thirst after happiness (*or a good marriage or a big house*), instead of hungering and thirsting after God. We forget that Jesus is the only one who can deeply satisfy our soul. Everyone desires unfailing love (Proverbs 19:22); it's just that we will never receive that kind of love continually from our spouses.

Created in his image, God designed us to experience happiness when something brings us great delight. For example, God is delighted when we find our greatest pleasure in him. But often it is not God that brings us our greatest joy but what he gives us. We desire his gifts but we don't realize that our greatest gift is God himself. Oswald Chambers explains: "*The great enemy of the life of faith in God is not sin, but the good which is not good enough. The good is always the enemy of the best.*" We want and pursue good things but often neglect the best thing. The psalmist reminds us where lasting happiness

is found. He writes, “*You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand*” (Psalm 16:11).

Did you know, that God designed you for a life you can enjoy? You don't have to wait for everything to be straightened out in your family, for your business to run smoothly, for all your problems to be solved. You don't have to wait till you lose weight, break a bad habit, or accomplish all your goals. You can choose to be happy today. No matter where you are in life, or what challenges you're facing in Marriage, you can start living your best life now.

Friends, happiness is a choice. You can choose what kind of day you're going to have. You can choose to be in a good mood, or you can choose to be in a bad mood. You can choose to live that day happy, in faith, expecting God's goodness, or you can choose to be irritable and sour, just try to make it through. How you live your life is totally up to you. If you don't set the tone for the day, negative thoughts will set it for you. When you first wake up, before you check your phone before you see what the weather is like before you see what kind of mood your spouse is in, you need to decide, "*this is going to be a great day. I'm excited about my future. I know God is directing my steps. Something good is going to happen to me today*". That's setting the tone for a blessed, prosperous, happy day.

Chapter Five



DON'T DEPEND ON YOUR SPOUSE

A SAD YOUNG COUPLE came to me for counseling. After four troubled years of marriage and two children, they were contemplating divorce. She was the saddest-looking wife I have seen in years. Her husband stood nearby, shuffling his weight from foot to foot, while his teary-eyed wife sobbed out her confession to me.

"There is absolutely no hope for our marriage," she cried, "We are in two different worlds. He is so wrapped up in his work, he has no time left for me and the children. My whole world has been wrapped up in him, but now I'm getting tired of sitting home waiting for him. I'm not accomplishing anything on my own. I don't even know if I love him anymore."

It hurt me to see such a lovely couple acting like strangers to one another. I recognized the cause of their problem immediately. Both were bored, restless, and unhappy with each other. Just like multitudes of other couples, they once stood before a minister to be married, gazing lovingly into each other's eyes with their hearts filled with hope and anticipation that their marriage would be happy and fulfilling. Now, just a few years later, their hopes are in ashes. They become disillusioned and, try as they may, they can't seem to

rekindle the spark of first love. It is then the ugly thoughts of divorce surface.

I looked that young wife in the eye and said, "*What a shame that all your happiness depends only on what your husband does. If he is a good husband, if he treats you the way you think you should be treated, if he spends a little time with you - then you may find a little happiness. But when he lets you down, you have nothing left. Your whole world rises and falls on the actions of your husband. That is why you are so empty*".

She nodded affirmatively, then bowed her head sheepishly while I continued. "*Young lady, you're not a whole person. You're just half a person. You cannot survive if you depend on someone else for your happiness. True women's liberation means finding your happiness in yourself through God's power. You must become your person and quit depending on your husband or someone else to make you happy.*"

She knew I was right - I had hit the nail right on the head. She promised to change her way of thinking and get involved with life herself. I left them, convinced she was determined to step out of her role as an emotional cripple and find her source of happiness through a new relationship with God.

Husbands and wives are becoming emotional cripples who lean all over each other, causing both to fall. We mess up our relationships because we live under the influence of a lie. We have convinced ourselves we have a right to happiness and that our spouse is morally obligated to create it for us. The danger of that lie is that when we can't find the happiness we

expect from them, we put all the blame on their failure to do what was right.

FIND YOUR HAPPINESS IN YOURSELF

Our divorce courts today are overcrowded with husbands and wives seeking divorce simply on the grounds their marriage gives them no happiness. One such divorced husband told me, "*God bless my dear wife; she tried so hard. I gave that woman three of the best years of my life, hoping she could learn to understand me and make me feel like a man. She just didn't have it in her. She simply did not know how to make me happy.*"

That man will probably get married once or twice again, hoping a new wife will succeed where the first one failed. Some keep marching down the aisle one new partner after another, trying desperately to find one understanding soul mate who will create happiness for them. But they seldom find it. Their misery and unhappiness increase with each new marriage partner.

No other human being on earth can create happiness for you. You must create it for yourself through the work of God in your own life. Marriage is not made up of two halves trying to become a whole. Rather, marriage consists of two whole people who are bridged by the Spirit of God. Marriage never works unless both parties maintain their own identity, settle their values, find their sense of fulfillment, and discover their source of happiness. They must be complete in themselves through the Lord.

Why allow what someone else does to destroy your life? Why permit the actions of another to rob you of your peace and joy? Why can't you be your person? Why can't you look life right in the eye and say, *"From now on, I'll not allow someone else to drag me down? I am determined to be a whole person and I will discover my source of happiness. No more leaning on someone else to give meaning and purpose to my life! I want happiness that will not be lost just because somebody fails me."*

I say to every housewife who will hear me: *"Step out of your bondage of living your life only through others."* God never intended that you find happiness only through your husband or your children.

Chapter Six



RECLAIMING YOUR HAPPINESS

A LOT OF TIMES we think, "*I'm unhappy because somebody is not treating me right. I'm unhappy because I have to work late. I'm unhappy because I'm not where I want to be*". But the truth is, you're unhappy because you're choosing to be unhappy. The scripture says, "*No man can take your joy*". That means no person, no obstacle, no disappointment, no sickness, nothing can take your joy, you have to give away. You're in control. You're in charge of how happy or unhappy you want to be as we saw in the previous chapters. Are you allowing someone else to keep you unhappy? You have to draw that line in the sand and say, "*That's it, I'm not going to allow them to upset me anymore. This day is a gift from God, and I'm not going to waste it being unhappy, upset, discouraged, I'm going to enjoy this day*".

You are responsible to get up each morning and receive the gift of joy.

SOW THE SEED OF JOY

Life is full of choices. Sometimes the choices are not clear. Sometimes they are too clear and we miss it. Not all of the choices we make are right. But one thing seems especially clear. The choices made on behalf of other people are the ones that reap the most bountiful results. When we sow seeds

of joy, we reap a crop of happiness. But when we sow seeds of discontent, we reap a bounty of unhappiness.

Except for the grace of God, there is no margin for error. Life is exactly what you make of it. If you blunder your way through, then you can only expect absurd results. If you strive to make others happy, then you can expect to be happy yourself.

Reaping what you sow is an idea that has been around for centuries. In the verses from Galatians 6:7-10, one finds this law of the harvest applied to the Christian's walk. To reap the eternal rewards of salvation, a person must pursue the Christian life God has set before him or her.

The pursuit of happiness is the wrong goal for a believer in Christ. You don't become happy by pursuing happiness. Happiness is a butterfly — the more you chase it, the more it flies away from you and hides. But stop chasing it, put away your net and busy yourself with other, more productive things than the pursuit of personal happiness, and it will sneak up on you from behind and perch on your shoulder.

The happiest people are probably not the richest or the most famous. They are probably not the ones who work the hardest at being happy by buying and reading books on the latest fads. The happiest people you know are the ones who choose to work at being kind, helpful, and reliable. Somehow happiness sneaks into their lives while they are doing those things.

If you choose to be a happy person, you must first sow the seeds that will produce happiness in others. We are not put here with so many other people simply to seek our self-interest. On the contrary, we are to bring delight to the lives of those around us, especially, to our spouse.

MARRIAGE IS ABOUT GOD’S LOVE

The most popular myth about marriage is that good marriage have no conflict. If we accept this, we’re probably wondering what we’re doing wrong. But it is a myth because almost all marriages have conflict. The important thing is how we approach the conflict.

Usually, a reorientation is needed. We need to look at things from God’s perspective. Marriage is not about happiness; it is about holiness.

What an accurate reflection of the self-centered society we live in, everyone believing that their main goal in life is their happiness. What a small and shallow way to live.

Marriage is not about your happiness, it’s not even about you, walking in God’s love and holiness, which is something we choose to live by. It’s about sacrifice, serving, giving, forgiving, and then doing it all over again.

No wonder we often choose divorce over-commitment, because most of the time, we’re choosing “*personal happiness*” over real commitment—over real love.

They say marriage teaches you more about *selflessness* than you ever wanted to know. I have found that phrase to be true in my relationship with my wife. Because at the heart of it, real love is all about sacrifice. About the giving of yourself, in ways big and small. That's what marriage will cost you.

- *It's about offering forgiveness when you've been hurt.*
- *It's about giving your time though it's not always convenient.*
- *It's about sharing your heart when you'd rather hold back.*
- *It's about cleaning the kitchen after a long weekend, even if it's your least favorite job.*
- *It's about choosing to respond with love when you'd rather respond in anger.*
- *It's about offering a listening ear when you'd rather tune out or go to bed.*
- *It's about putting someone else's needs and desires before your own.*
- *It's about giving up that last bite of cake, just so your spouse can enjoy it.*
- *It's about putting aside your rights, to make space for the rights of another.*

The list could go on and on, but it always ends with the same formula.

In conclusion, a happy marriage is being happy with what you've got, rather than expecting your marriage to be a certain way. Being content and grateful for what you have, instead of constantly trying to live up to some unrealistic standard set by movies and romance novels, is real happiness.

Have you struggled to find happiness in your marriage? Perhaps it's time you and your spouse invited God to direct your relationship. If you would like to do so, we encourage you to pray the following:

“Dear God, thank you so much for bringing us together as a couple. We know that you have a plan and a purpose for our marriage, and we invite you, Lord Jesus, to forgive the past self-centeredness, and come into our lives and relationship. Direct our steps from now on. Please give us the grace to put You and each other first every day. Make our relationship a blessing to others. But most of all; make it a blessing to You. Amen.”

If you prayed this prayer, we would love to hear from you.

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The duos are committed to conveying the **New Covenant** message of **Marriage Grace** to a *hurting and dying world*.

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