

THE HAPPY PROJECT



Thank you for collaborating with us on this book project.

- Book: think through Jesus' ideas on happiness.
- Workbook: act on Jesus' ideas on happiness.
- Devotional: pray and transform through Jesus' ideas on happiness.

This week: prologue, introduction and chapter 1

- what really resonates? maybe take notes and bring back with you to Worship Cafe for discussion.
- What area drags or is difficult to follow? This can be helpful as we clean it up.
- What questions do you have?

THE [BOOK TITLE]

We don't have a title yet. After reading Prologue, Introduction and Chapter 1 what would you suggest? Same goes for the byline.

By-Line: JESUS' MASTERCLASS ON HAPPINESS

BY: MIKE HAYES AND JEFFREY GARNER

Jeffrey's Prologue

*Man wishes to be happy,
and only wishes to be happy,
and cannot wish not to be so.
But how will he set about it?*

—Blaise Pascal

In 2010 the San Francisco Giants were in the World Series with the Texas Rangers. Game 1 was tense for us Giants' fans. We had waited for over half a century, longing for a title. We headed into the series as bigtime underdogs. The city jived and buzzed in anticipation, orange and black colors were everywhere. While most my friends were down at the ballpark; I headed over to pick up my son from sporting practice at Kimball Park. I found some street parking near the Fillmore, and cranked up KNBR, the Giants flagship station.

An unhoused middle-aged man dozed under a tree one eye half-squinting at his grocery cart. Steiner Street was quiet. And just like that, Juan Uribe, Giants' third baseman, hits a 3-run homer.

I got so excited I jumped out of my car, threw back my head and yelled, "Woohoo!"

I started trotting around my car like it was a baseball diamond. As I rounded the tail of my car, I was met by my under-the-tree buddy. He was jumping up and down and throwing hi-fives at me. Before I knew it, we are hooting and pumping our fists in the air and celebrating.

After 60 seconds of joyous reveling, I turned to crawl back in my car.

"Hey, why we so happy?" my newfound party buddy asked.

"What?" I asked.

“Why we so happy?” he said and then smiled with a toothless grin.

In that moment, with that question, my fellow celebrant friend, taught me three aspects of the human condition.

First, we all want to be happy. The dozing man saw me celebrating and yearned for a celebration so badly that he jumped up, without any reason other than the joy of it all and inserted himself into my happiness. We all want to be happy. In fact, this longing to celebrate is not just cultural, its universal. Every culture celebrates. And it's not just cultural but it's psychological, I would go as far as to say its spiritual. By that I mean, it can be traced all the way down to our God-breathed existence. We will celebrate just for the heck of celebrating; that's how desperate we are to experience happiness and joy and laughter.

Second, we all want to share our happiness or share in another's happiness. It's no fun celebrating alone. A lone celebration would have been short-lived and my run around the car would have quickly stymied into an awkward trot-walk halfway round it had someone not joined in with my happiness. I would have looked like a lone crazy nut, causing pedestrians to cross the street out of fear. My Fillmore friend redeemed my socially awkward behavior by joining me in my rejoicing. Nobody was looking at me oddly any longer because someone was validating my joy.

Third, we all want to know, “Why we so happy?” I assumed by his exuberant joy that he knew why. But once I accepted him into my party, he wanted to know why we were partying. We all want our celebrations to go deeper than just being happy for happiness' sake. That gets old quickly. We want our celebrations to have meaning, depth, and spiritual reality. If the celebration and happiness mean something it lasts longer, is realer, and purer.

I frequently think about the joyful courage of my dozing friend, bravely jumping up and jumping in. The picture of that ‘Why we so happy?’ moment is imprinted in me not only as an invitation to happiness, but also an insight into the why behind our happiness.

San Francisco
January 2023





Mike's Introduction to [Book Title]

What does Anthony Ray Hinton, falsely incarcerated for thirty years have in common with the fourth century Italian philosopher Boethius? It's not just that both were falsely imprisoned. Both discovered happiness in prison. Both these falsely imprisoned men found happiness, forgiveness, and joy through their imprisonment. You would think they would be bitter, angry, enraged for decades lost, but no, they found happiness. That's puzzling.

What do four sisters living in the slums of Kathmandu have in common with Dominique an urban-city street performer? What does the Dali Lama, an exiled Tibetan leader, and Saint Francis of Assisi share? What do South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Council share with Northern Ireland's Monica McWilliams Pearl Sagar? Happiness. As shocking and unexpected as it sounds kids in the slums, an impoverished career street-performer, an exiled Tibetan leader, and people experiencing the harshest of human cruelty have all found real happiness.

Boethius, the falsely accused theologian and philosopher, wrote a book on happiness from his prison cell months before his execution! All these ordinary humans in life's struggle possess(ed) happiness in most illogical circumstances. Their happiness defies what gets peddled on Instagram or promoted on Billboards or pushed in Superbowl ads. In the most unlikely and unexpected of places they all are happy! Equally puzzling is how unhappiness frequently abounds smack dab in the middle of the scenarios touted as the hotbeds of happiness—wealth, fame, power, and pleasure.

According to the Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being Index, the overall happiness score for the United States has been steadily declining in recent years, to its lowest in decades. Many Americans living in comfort and privilege suffer from anxiety, depression, and unhappiness. With all our books, courses, and studies on happiness, why are we so UNhappy? Why do we ignorantly keep seeking happiness in places it doesn't turn up? The longest study ever to be done on happiness and just recently released, concluded that people desire happiness, make choices every day with 'happy' at the target, yet miss the mark again and again.

The same researchers wondered if we understand the meaning of happiness? Have we taken the cultural bait of happiness only to be hooked on an assortment of escapisms? Where does

the concept of happiness originate and why is it so elusive?

Socrates initiated the philosophical quest for happiness by upending the applecart of philosophy and demanding that it serve the human quest for happiness. This was novel. Aristotle expanded on Socrates defining what happiness was and wasn't and claiming that the good life and not life's goods were what made one happy. Cicero, two centuries years later, added practical advice to the Greek philosophers. He coined the Latin word *beatitudo*, from which we get our word *beatitude*, as the catchall word for the good life (*eudaimonia*), the life worth living, a life worth imitating. Seneca the Younger, the Stoic Philosopher, a contemporary of Jesus, wrote *De Vita Beata* (The Happy Life). It seems the human quest in the first century whether you were Greek or Roman was a quest for happiness. And, as we shall see, it wasn't just for Greeks or Romans, Jews too had a word for this human longing.

The word *beatitude* comes from this rich tradition of philosophers and teachers and their wisdom-teachings on happiness. Most of us have heard it in connection with Jesus' opening remarks in the Sermon on the Mount. Many of us may not however, have connected the word *beatitude* with happy. Or that the word from which we get our word for *beatitude* was connected in antiquity to several books and treatises on the philosophy of the happy life.

Somehow through all my study and reading I missed the idea that *beatitude* means happy or happiness, a state of bliss. Which got me to thinking, if I had missed this what else from these happy attitudes had I missed? Coming to see the *Beatitudes* not as platitudes but as Happy Attitudes opened my heart to experiencing God's joy, abundant and present everywhere.

In my Christian upbringing, words I connected to my faith path were holy, love, faith, and truth, but never happy! I want to share with you what happened to me the day I discovered Jesus not only wanted us to be happy but offered a real path to joy that was easily accessed and shockingly effective.

This writing and publishing process has been the most difficult I have ever faced. Not only has the idea-to-print been challenging but I have faced challenges unlike any other time in my life, not to mention a pandemic and social unrest. I wondered why and then it occurred to me.

In the midst of all the struggle I was experiencing the truths of Jesus' happy attitudes. I have wondered if God wanted me to experience the struggle to somehow purify and authenticate

the writings; as well as, make its potential for good even more relatable to you.

In reading this I hope for you too to experience happiness through Jesus' happy attitudes. I pray that your happiness would be blissfully contagious to your world. May you experience as I still do that Jesus' words, then and now, are uniquely empowering and transforming.

Dallas

January 2023

Chapter 1

JESUS' TED-TALK A Happy Idea Worth Spreading

Mike: My junior high gym was typical of the sixties, made of creaky wooden-slatted floors and ragged basketball nets. The walls of our gym echoed with fifty years of laughter and sweaty kids in baggy shorts running back and forth under the dim, dusty lights. I wanted to excel in that gym, to measure up. Our gym coach was an old warhorse with deep wrinkles and thinning hair —a testament to his years of toiling with hormone crazed, adolescents. Still, I wanted to impress him. I was a fair athlete for my age, but I had a problem. It wasn't with the gym or the coach, the other kids, or even with myself. My problem was God, or at least the one represented by my church.

During my high school years, I began to develop real consternation about my church. Specifically, the rules it imposed. I was raised in a Pentecostal church, and what I've learned in later years is every church has its own rules, its own ways, and its own culture. From Baptist to Catholic, they all have their own brand of difficult rules, and they all do their own kind of good.

Our church had something called "standards of holiness" which included modest dress. In short, I was not allowed to wear gym shorts in PE, hence my consternation. Now here's what I remember about our gym shorts. They were navy blue and always wrinkled because fourteen-year-olds make a habit of stuffing their gym shorts in their locker, don't take them home for weeks and sweat in them every day in gym class. Even with an elastic waistband and the oversized leg holes that fell to my knees, my church thought they were too immodest! At fourteen, I loved my dad and God, wanted to please both and disappoint neither. For some reason, I also wanted to be thought of as holy at my church, so needless to say, I didn't wear the gym

shorts. To worsen matters, I had to take a note from the pastor that excused me from "dressing out" as my coach called it.

In those days, there was no such thing as politically correct verbiage and the coaches could say about anything they chose. One day, the coach announced, "boys it's raining outside so we're gonna stay indoors and play dodgeball." We filed into a picking line. As the team captains chose sides, I stood there in my blue jeans while everyone was dressed out in their sweaty, wrinkled, oversized gym shorts. The whole scene must have perturbed my coach because he looked at me and said. "Hey you Mike, the loser that can't wear gym shorts, sit over there against the wall. If you can't wear gym shorts, you can't play in this dodgeball game."

I'll never forget that day because of the humiliation and shame. I walked to the bleachers to watch all the boys in shorts play ball. As is natural, the shame and humiliation led to anger and frustration, and I sat there confused about where to place my anger. Was I angry with God? Not really because the only thing I knew about God was Jesus and I liked Jesus. I just didn't think Jesus would be so uncool as to not let me wear my gym shorts. In a desperate need to have my anger land, I chose to put it squarely on the church. To me, the church had a really long index finger and a really pointed nose and that is all I could see. I didn't like the rules enforcers because I didn't think the rules were important or fair. I was miserably unhappy.

I didn't know it then, but I was facing a dilemma that millions around the world find themselves in. I really loved Jesus, but was unhappy and at times even fearful in the church. I meet people almost every day that have some kind of "church hurt" similar to mine, where the prohibitions might've been different, but the hurt similar. The hurt hindered me from seeing God as happy or wanting me to be happy. It took years before I experienced the happiness of God, this book is part of that story.

Perhaps you are like me and would not put God and happy in the same sentence. Maybe you think God has more important things to tend to than happiness. Did you know that the Bible speaks directly and pointedly about happiness? And no, it's not tucked away in some remote and hidden passage. Jesus' teachings on happiness were the basic building blocks with which he initiated his leaders and established his movement. Jesus not only wants you to be happy, but happiness is the hallmark of His City.

If Jesus gave a TED Talk distilling his three years of teaching to a 15-minute idea-worth-spreading what would it be about? How would he open it? What would his CTA be?

Of all the stories Jesus told, of all the speeches he gave, his very first speech ever given as a Rabbi could easily be considered the equivalent of an inaugural address, a masterclass, or a TED Talk. Through the years, it's been well known as the Sermon on the Mount. It covers Matthew chapters 5-7 and is taught atop a mountain.

At the start of this message in Matthew 5, four disciples followed Jesus up to the mountain to hear his message. By the time he wraps up in chapter 7, there are more than xx people in the crowd, who physically climbed up the side of the mountain to listen. Given the first century setting, what could have been so worth spreading his words down to the small crowds gathering at the base, that motivated throngs of up people climb for more?

To understand the shocking nature of this message, let's put the socio-historical context into place. Let us remember that Jesus was speaking to a gathering crowd mostly comprised of what today would be considered the poor and working class. These would be farmers, commoners, peasants. In attendance were also other religious teachers, perhaps some Roman military, aristocrats, and local politicians. All were welcome and the talk would have applied to everyone. During this time and place in human history, all citizens of Israel, including the rich, were living under the occupation of Rome and were paying extortion taxes and experiencing the equivalent of hyperinflation, curfews, and military occupation in the streets, at the markets. There were extreme economic inequalities resulting in poor health among the population including physical sickness, mental health, and homelessness. There was political oppression, corruption, as well as religious institutionalization, there was human trafficking and the oppression of women, there was child labor, and lack of human rights, speech was not free, and all behavior, speech, and activity was the tax-subsidized prolific military presence all through the country. In short, the common people were desperate, depressed, and hoping for some kind of revolution or liberator to come along and overthrow the false narrative of the supposed Pax Romana.

While the entire sermon is excellent, the Ted-Talk equivalent and the focus of this book is found in the first versus, commonly known as the "Beatitudes." The sermon is rhythmic and poetic in its famous prose, which you may recognize as "Blessed are they..."

Nine times the Rabbi Jesus prophesied "blessings." Nine times in 107 Greek words, we find in poetic pentameter this phrase opening word "blessed"—word that today reads as

unassuming and easy to overlook without catching it's historical "weight."

In the original Greek the used to translate "blessed" is word, makarios. The Greek word makarois originated as a way of describing the worry-free, high life that the Greek gods lived and offered at whim and will those they chose. By the time of Jesus, makarios was a pop culture reference for those who were rich and famous and were happy because they didn't struggle or worry like the impoverished or working class. Makarois used by the upper class as a word of bragging, by the lower as a word of envy, sarcasm, and wishful thinking. Makarios in a simple and straightforward translation means "happy." In essence, makarois conveyed the notion of "the good life." Today our equivalent pop culture phrase might be, "I'm living my best life," or "ahh, this is the good life"

Jesus seized a word monopolized by the Greek gods and the wealthy land moguls and redistributed it to common folk, boldly proclaiming they could have The Good Life too.

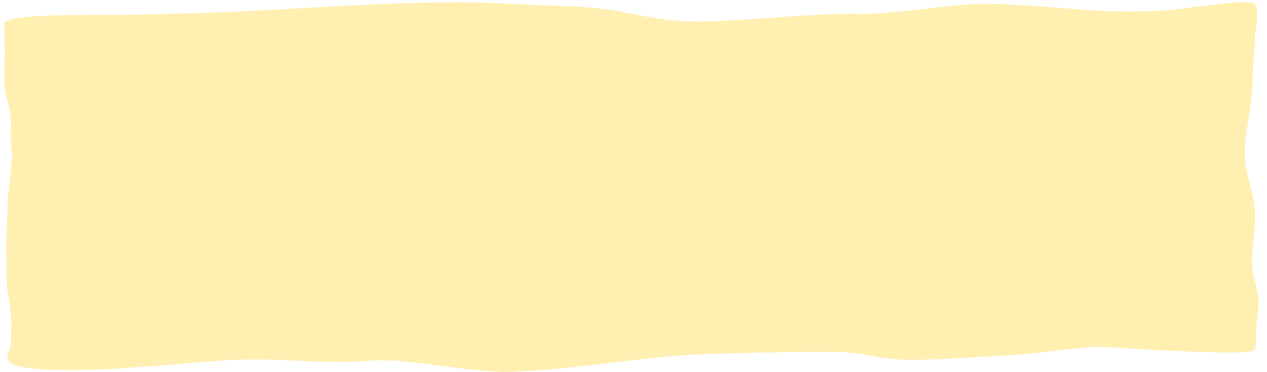
Jesus opens the talk with eight shocking statements on happiness –what it is, who gets it, and how to get it. He doesn't have to convince the gathering crowd, or his first four students of their need for happiness, they understand why happiness is so quest worthy. Of all the topics he could have chosen for his first public discourse, religious being the expected front-runner, Jesus big idea worth spreading was an idea on happiness. Introduced in eight shocking statements on what is, who gets, and how to get it, and he cleverly, almost facetiously launched with a trendy Greco-Roman, making happiness a reality available to all and certainly an idea worth spreading.

WE ARE HAPPY



Workbook 1 Following the path to unlimited joy

My Happy Quote

A large, horizontal, yellow sticky note with a slightly wavy, torn-edge effect, intended for writing a quote.

Write in the quote from the Chapter that most resonated with you.

Happy Paradoxes

“What do you find shocking as it relates to the human quest for happiness and God? We listed some below:

“Our happiness matters to God

“Among many other attributes, we worship a God of Merriment and Mirth.

My Happiness Inventory

Read and answer

1. When was the last time you believed that God delights in your playfulness and happiness?
2. How often does your happiness come with no strings attached? In other words, how often is your happiness not based on merit or reward?
3. How often are you with friends, family, and community laughing, smiling, and rejoicing.

Imagine as a Spiritual Practice

Choose one Imagination to work with today. Visualize it using all your senses. Afterwards, journal your experience.

1. Imagine God delighting to make you happy and creating opportunities for happiness in you and in your friends and your family.
2. Imagine yourself embracing and responding positively to God's delivery of happiness to you, your family or friends.
3. What does the miracle of merriment look like in you? Look and Listen.

Walk in The Way

Look at these words one more time

Happy are the poor in spirit...

Happy are those who mourn...

Happy are the meek ...

Happy are those who hunger and thirst for justice Happy are the merciful...

Happy are the pure in heart...

Happy are the peacemakers...

Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness...

Happy are you when others revile you and utter falsehoods against you...

Rejoice and be glad...

Hear Jesus as he whispers to you, "Follow me,"

He turns and begins walking out these words. You look down considering for a moment. Then bravely, you take your first step on words cobbled together with the very presence of God. The words feel good under your feet. You were made for this path, this life.

Affirm Aloud

I am blessed. I am made for happiness. My smile blesses the world. My laughter is dance-worthy music. I will let myself be happy.

Smile Wide:

Take the next few days and practice smiling. Smile to yourself in the mirror when you start the day, give an unsolicited smile to your coworkers, smile to friends and family before you disagree, smile toward heaven when you lay your head down on the pillow tonight. You are part of the City that Smiles.

Community Questions:

If you were putting together a study group what questions would you ask?

About Us

Jeffrey Garner has his Master's in Exegetical Theology from Western Seminary. He got his doctorate from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. His thesis and dissertation were on the Fourth Gospel and the Beloved Disciple.

Mike Hayes Pastored Covenant Church for 40 years in Dallas. He has worked on Racial Reconciliation projects nationally and oversees the Churches-In-Covenant Network.

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