

# HAPPINESS

by Rev. Thomas Soltis, Stewardship Director

## How Happy Are You?

Why do some people seem to be happier than you? Just how happy are you? There's no "*happy-mometer*" you can push under your tongue to tell you. Mental issues can impact the level. Should this be the case, psychiatric help and medications should be sought. Even without such issues, happiness can hit a low. Researchers are assessing what they call "*subjective well-being*". That's how individuals regard their own happiness level, not what the rest of the world thinks it should be.

## Questionable Criteria for Happiness

Some people are happiest when complaining. Others delight in suffering, enjoying the deluded pleasure of feeling sorry for themselves. Materialists are happiest when the bucks pile up. Yet unhappiness strikes when they observe some of their peers richer. Who can be happy when jealous? Money can't buy happiness. Yet greed stimulates the need to have more. Pride motivates people to pursue that bigger house, luxury car, bigger yacht or perhaps even a personal jet. For some, many impressive possessions are a measure of success and superiority. I once observed a woman, expensively dressed and adorned with glittering gold gemstone quality jewelry, gambling in a Las Vegas casino. (I went to watch, not to engage the subtle sin) She mechanically pulled the slot machine lever again and again with a sad look of boredom on her face. When the bandit didn't gush with a jackpot, she slapped the machine and staggered away, unhappy, cursing under her breath. Some parents endeavor to ensure their children's happiness by flooding them with material things. To raise their self-esteem, they give false praise and saturate them with unrealistic future expectations. Later, in maturity, when the realities and adversities of life strike, gone are all their illusions for happiness. Ours is a competitive culture demanding constant comparisons with others. If we end up frequent losers and gaze up on those well above us on the ladder of success, we could end up with a very unhappy sense of inadequacy. Several prominent writers have quipped, "It's not enough to succeed; one's friends must fall."

## Spiritual Criteria for Happiness

Discovering our personal limitations and illusions can be sadly depressing. However, for those who realistically face up to them, it can be liberating. The key to liberation? "*Contentment*"! Are you unhappy? Perhaps it's time to do away with your sense of entitlement - thinking you deserve this and that and a host of other things. Sinful pride can elevate us to a pinnacle where we feel we deserve stuff because of what we think we are. But just what are we? Sinners! God evaluates us not on scale of one to ten. In His sight everyone is a "*zero*". If you have broken just one of God's commandments, you are guilty of breaking them all. James 2:10 condemns us: "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." Theologically it is called "*Total Depravity*". If you were hanging on the side of a cliff by a chain and one link broke, down you go. Break just one commandment, and it's hell to pay. However, God in love sent His Son to redeem us. 1 John 1:7 declares the joyous news: "The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from *all* sin." The "*zero*" sinner status of repentant Gospel believing Christians is covered with the *100%* perfect status of Christ. Assurance of God's love and salvation is the foundation for true happiness filled with hope and contentment.

## Contentment

The shortest route to unhappiness is discontent. Christians, knowing that God loves them, pray "Thy will be done" and contentedly accept whatever He allows in life, even loss and suffering. 1 Peter 1:6 assures us: "In this (the promised heavenly inheritance) you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." Christians "rejoice in the Lord always" - in good times and bad. (Phil. 4:4) Their Christ-centered contentment produces joy. 1 Tim. 6:6-8 states: "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." Shakespeare had it right: "I earn that I eat, get that I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness, glad of other men's good, content with my harm." ("As You Like It"; Act III, Scene 2)