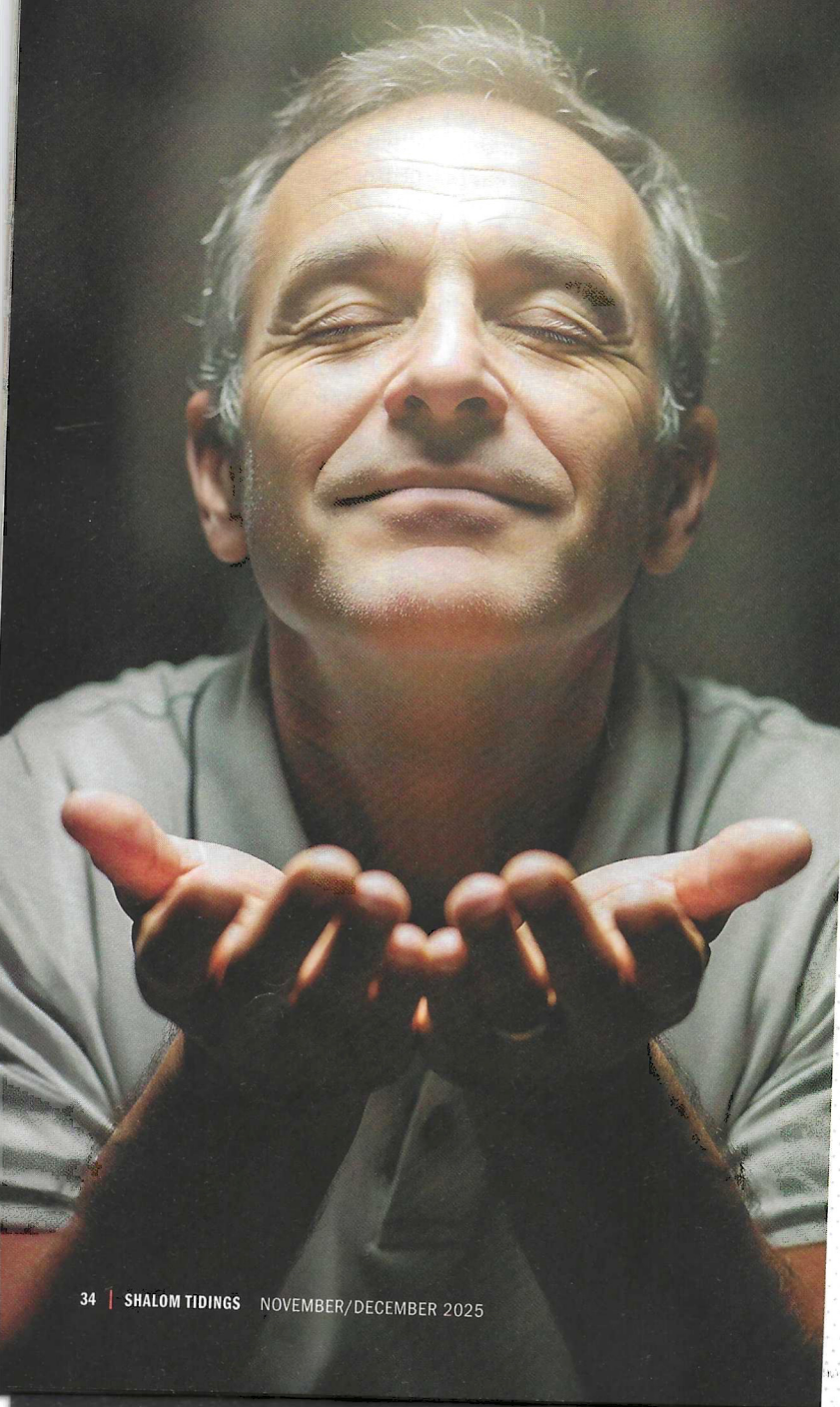


CALLED *to be* HAPPY



How can you
build the right
relationship
with God?

by DEACON JIM MCFADDEN

What does it mean to be happy? What does it mean to be blessed? How can they be found? These are ground-floor, basic, 'rubber hitting the road' questions. If we get them wrong, then we've assigned ourselves to a miserable, unfulfilled life. While these questions are perennial, the answer seems to be that happiness consists in having the goods of the world, the more the better. Commercial advertising and the internet domain of 'influencers' are based on the premise that the way I acquire value is by obtaining things that lie outside myself. It's akin to the voracious plant in the *Little*

Shop of Horrors that demands, 'Feed me, feed me!'

Discover Your Happiness

Jesus offers a radical alternative view as to what constitutes true happiness. He challenges our easy assumptions that happiness is acquired through having the goods of the world, such as money and possessions, status and prestige, control and dominative power, and self-indulgent, hedonistic pleasure. Why can't these goods make us happy?

It gets down to first principles. To begin with, human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, which necessarily entails that we are most human when we are conformed to God, which is the basis of the main petition in the Our Father: *"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."*

Okay, so what is God's will? That question is grounded in God's nature, which the evangelist John proclaims: God is love. That is not an attribute of God—e.g., being omniscient, omnipotent, etc.—but, it is about God's very nature: Love is Who God is. So, we are most human when we are in love with God and our brothers and sisters, who are made in God's image.

Money, fame, power, and pleasure cannot bring us happiness because they simply can't love us. So, Jesus insists that what can make us truly happy and really blessed is being in a singular relationship with God and

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living in His Kingdom. That means our life is no longer about us, but is about God, to whom we are due our total commitment and surrender. We move from having the goods of the world to being in the right relationship with God and our neighbor. Such a conversion will have a profound impact on how we live our lives and how we relate to others.

Live in His Kingdom


So, what does it look like to live in the Kingdom of God—to be in the right relationship with God and our neighbor? The Beatitudes describe what it is like to live in the Kingdom, to live a happy life, a freed life, a united life. The evangelist Luke arranges them into four beatitudes and four admonitions, which are both affirmations and challenges. Both open our eyes and help us look into our world through His gaze, beyond the superficial, beyond the surface, and teach us to discern our

human experience from a faith perspective.

Jesus goes way beyond conventional wisdom of our society by proclaiming that the poor, the hungry, the suffering, and the persecuted—everyone we want to avoid!—they are blessed. What's more, He warns those who've already made it—those who are wealthy, content, and praised by other people. What's behind this great reversal of values? Put simply, God is close to those who suffer and intercedes to free them from their oppression and their oppressors. In a similar vein, the 'woe to you' addresses those who are doing well today, and has the purpose of 'waking' them up from their dangerous deceit of egotism and individuality, thus opening them to the dynamic of love shared between persons.

What Are You Afraid of?

We're only going to make this conversion if we have a profound sense of faith, which means we put our



You have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. John 16:22

trust completely in the Lord and not the goods of the world. It is about detaching ourselves from contemporary, worldly idols in order to open our hearts to the one, true, and living God. He alone can give our life that fullness and completeness that we so deeply desire because He is being itself: Yahweh—the great I Am! And, here we come to a basic choice: our lives are either about God or about ourselves. It is so easy to slip unwittingly into sinning against the first Commandment: namely, idolatry, substituting God with an idol. How do we know that we are under the spell of idolatry? What is it that you are most afraid to lose? That attachment is most likely your idol.

That is why Jesus opens our eyes to reality as He sees it. We are called to happiness, to be blessed,

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and we become so to the measure that we “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” (Deuteronomy 6:5) When we place ourselves on the side of God, of His Kingdom, on the side that is not transitory, finite, and ephemeral, then we are moving in the direction of eternal life. We are happy when we recognize that we are radically dependent upon God, which is why it’s so important that we say every day: “Lord, I need you.” And, if we align ourselves to God, we will love and serve those whom God loves:

we will be close to the poor, the suffering, and the hungry. Although we may be fortunate to possess worldly goods, we experience joy when we share them with others. We don’t idolize or sell our souls out to them, but we use them according to God’s purposes—for the common good.

Our challenge is to live through our faith in the Risen Christ who actively dwells among and within us. If we do so, we will be happy and blessed.



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