

A newspaper article showed five simple ways to make one's self feel happy right now. I would like to share that information:

1) Make'em laugh: Nothing is better for the spirit than a good yuk. Tell a joke or play a joke. Get a gut buster going. 2) Color your world...YELLOW: Banana and daffodil hues are like instant sunshine. Yellow is a visual pick-me-up. 3) Hanging time is good: Get with your friends for a movie. 4) Get horizontal: Studies suggest that the more sex you have, the happier you are. 5) Start making scents: Good smells can trigger good moods. Try a new perfume. Buy some flowers for your desk. Wake up and smell the coffee.

There. But did you notice, according to the suggestion, that one's sense of happiness depends on controlling certain little things located outside one's self? By casting happiness as the consequence of certain frivolous acts, the article presents happiness as nothing much more than triviality. I think the article confused happiness with amusement.

This is far from the religious teaching that happiness is a profound experience, and that it is found inside the person, not outside. If happiness is found within, one's happiness does not need to depend on anything outside the self. Conversely, if one's happiness depends on what is located outside, once that source of happiness dries up, he or she is in trouble.

We have to admit, though: whatever the religion may say, finding one's happiness inside one's self is not an easy thing to do. It may take many years of meditation in the desert to find the inner happiness, and who has the time and patience to do that? In this age of instant gratification, the five ways of feeling happy seem like a practical advice for the people who grew up in the culture of instant gratification.

So, the religious people, who consider themselves not the product of the culture of instant gratification, might want to investigate further: does happiness depend on things

located outside one's self, or does happiness generate itself inside one's self? Do the religious people believe that happiness is something more spiritual, something not dependent on material things, something that requires a hard work, instead, in order to obtain? Or, is happiness nothing more than a feeling or a sense—something that can be controlled with a dosage of certain chemicals in the brain? Or is happiness buying or owning things, a rich husband, or a trophy wife?

We hear about those successful child actors in Hollywood who tend to turn to drugs and alcohol. Things came to them so easily that they cannot sense the happiness by the normal things for which ordinary folks work hard. There is a limit to what you can do with money. You can go on vacations only so many days, and you can buy only so much jewelry, so many cars, boats, and houses. Once you have been there, done that, and owned this, that, and some more,

there are not many things left to do. Ordinary things cannot any longer fill the void in their lives, so they party, get trashed, do drugs, get addicted, check into a rehab, and then later maybe write a book about it. They cannot feel happy, even when they are surrounded by abundance and luxury.

Where can one find happiness? This is where the question of religion, or spirituality, comes in. Can one be happy, even when things are lacking? Or, is happiness dependent upon the presence of the material things? Depending on how we answer these questions, we can easily tell where our spirits are located, as long as religion and spirituality are concerned.

Another way of telling how religious or spiritual one may be is how much one is willing to let others have. This is where otherwise religious and spiritual people have great difficulty. How much is one willing to share the resources with others? How much right is one willing to grant

to others? How much power is one willing to share with others? Seemingly nice people tend to turn aggressive and vindictive, when these things are at stake. They guard their portions of the take, even if it meant poverty and disenfranchisement for others.

These questions are most relevant, because, there is a minimum requirement of things that makes life sustainable: shelter, food, and clothing. And even Jesus recognized this need, and taught us to pray for the daily bread. We have already established that subsistence living cannot make one's life abundant. Having the shelter, food, and clothing is not enough: there has to be a certain degree of meaningfulness, quality, achievement, and enjoyment in one's life, in order for one to sense the abundance of life.

Happiness and abundant life are synonymous, and when either one is missing in one's life, one experiences oppression. When we are robbed of the abundant quality of life, we are oppressed;

anything or anyone that robs from us the abundant quality of life is known to be an oppressor.

There is still another way of telling how religious or spiritual we are. It is found in how we deal with the ways in which we appear outwardly. A college student told me of this experience. One day he showed up at his church for worship in a t-shirt and a pair of frayed, cut-off dungarees, dragging a pair of thong slippers. The pastor asked him if he was still going to be reading the scripture that day. To his horror, the student realized that he forgot that he signed up for the duty of the reader for that Sunday. He apologized, but the pastor told him what mattered was one's heart, not the appearance, and told him to go ahead and do the job. “Wow,” the student thought. His pastor was “cool.”

Apparently, the scriptural basis for such a theological view is found in I Samuel 16, where Prophet Samuel was sent to anoint David as king. God told

the prophet that God dissd King Saul, and instructed Samuel to anoint David, instead, to be the new king.

When Samuel showed up at Jesse's dwelling, he thought Jesse's first born son must be the one, having looked at him. But the Lord told him that He rejected him. The Lord reminded Samuel that men looks at the appearance of a person, but the Lord looks at the center of the heart of the person. One by one, Jesse's sons filed in, but they were all rejected. Frustrated Samuel asks the father, if he had more sons. Yes, said the father, I have one out in the field feeding the flock of sheep, but he is the youngest. Well, fetch him, Samuel said, for I need to see him. So the story goes.

What actually happened on that Sunday, without judging the student, was that there was no preparation for the duty in the heart of the student. He just showed up in the attire he is normally found. His attire was the honest reflection of what he

had, or did not have, in his mind that day. For, if he had been planning to serve as the reader, and preparing for that job, he knew he would not have shown up in that attire. So, his attire that day reliably reflected upon what he had, or did not have, in his mind.

It was not the matter of being cool, but the matter of staying spiritually alert in the presence of God, and of being accountable to the congregation for the duty he signed up. I am afraid that the student would not have taken it well, however, if I offered up the above explanation to him. Sometimes, we are not prepared to hear the truth.

One must question, whether the appearance of the person reliably reflects what is in the center of the heart, or whether the appearance deceives what is in the center of the heart.

There is a saying that you cannot judge a book by its cover. I am sure most of us would agree with such a saying, but I am also sure

that not every of us practices it. We sometimes tend to judge a book by its cover. And this tendency of judging a book by its cover spills over to other areas of life. It is known as prejudice, and it has different names: racism, sexism, ageism, classism, you name it.

The human beings are hugely affected by the outside appearance, and that is well exploited by the commercial advertisement. People prefer the merchandise that is packaged attractively to the less attractively packaged. People judge the merchandise by its packaging. And people also judge one another by how one is packaged.

Some know it as cosmetic makeup, and appreciate its power over certain human species. The same power is also appreciated by the fashion designers, to enhance the appearance of the wearer of the design. This power was also recognized by a precocious teenager at one church I served. She told me that she tells her parents that she is

going to study at a friend's house, and when she gets there, she and her friend would put on a radical makeup, slip into something more revealing, and go to a shopping mall. After their shopping adventure, they would come home, wipe off the makeup, and change back into the parents-approved clothes. She admitted that she enjoyed seeing guys' heads twist out of the sockets, as they walked along.

The way an outfit looks, the way a car is modeled, the way a product is packaged, the way the produce is displayed in the supermarket, etc., are the evidence that such affectation has a tremendous influence on human behaviors. It is also the evidence that general public's standard of perception is rather shallow. But it helps make money, so what is this preacher's problem?

The problem is: is the appearance the true reflection of what is inside, or is it just a thin veneer that has nothing to do with what is inside? Is what the general

public see the true reflection of what it is, or is what they see nothing more than just the look? Do human beings believe that if it looks good outside, inside must look good, too? If it look bad, then, inside must be bad, also? We know that we cannot judge a book by its cover, but sometimes the cover betrays the content, as in the case of I Samuel 16. And sometimes, the cover accurately tells what is inside.

When Jesus went up the mountain and transfigured, his face shone like the sun, his garment turned bright white. So we must ask this question: when Jesus transfigured, was his appearance the true reflection of who he was, or was it just a temporary special effect?

If Jesus transfigured for the special effect's purpose, in order to impress the three disciples present at the time, then the story serves no other purpose. The special effect it served, the disciples it impressed, and closed was the case. Rather, the story is telling the readers something else.

The transfiguration reveals something about the nature of Jesus. Something that is not normally visible, but nevertheless inherent in the nature of Jesus—that is, the Sonship of Jesus, being one with God, being the beloved one of the Father.

When you are the genuine article, you do not need to argue the point that you are one. Only those who are not genuine need to argue the point, in order to maintain the façade of the genuineness. “The lady doth protest too much, methinks.” applies here.

Is that the reason why Jesus did not want his disciples tell others about what happened on the mountaintop? Such information interferes with the mission and ministry to which Jesus was called. He would have been constantly challenged to prove that he is the Son of God. His ministry would soon turn out to be a side show. The event of the transfiguration had to be kept under the wraps until the right time.

What I am trying to say is that you could not judge Jesus by his cover. The cover he wore was the form of a lowly human being. The content of Jesus was the beloved Son of God. His face shone like the sun, and his garment was brighter than the snow. That was his genuine look. Those who have the discernment would have seen through the human cover. Those who tend to judge a book by its cover would not have.

The same is true for those who trust in God, those who have been given the authority to be the children of God. Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet (I Cor. 15:51, 52).

When the right time comes, their faces shall shine like the sun, and their garments shall become brighter than the snow. Right now, our eyes may be just too conditioned to the ways of this

world, so that we may not see through the appearance of one another.

Aside this visual handicap, we suffer from another one: our eyes are easily pleased by the packages in which things come. Our eyes are trained in the materialistic things. We seek visible things, and visible things limit our vision: we can see only what we are *willing* to see. We have difficulty seeing spiritual things that lie beyond the visible. We are accustomed to judging a book by its cover. We may be raising our children to judge a book by its cover, by the way we choose to live, and by the way we value things.

The content of each disciple of Jesus is the child of God. We may not look like children of God, as we are. We may not behave like children of God, as we should. Nevertheless, we have been given the authority to become the children of God. And in God's eyes, our faces shine like the sun, and our

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Mark 9:2-9
“He Was Transfigured Before Them”

garments are brighter than the
snow.