

Lessons in Happiness from The Garden of Eden

By James E. Gibbons



THE BOOK of Genesis not only is the first book in the Bible, it is a key book. It is the book of beginnings. Here we see the beginning of the creation and the climax of it in the creation of man (as the conclusion of making everything). After creation was completed, God beheld it all and called it “very good,” including man (Genesis 1:31).

But man was especially favored. God had everything prepared for him when he arrived on the scene. Man was even made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26,27). Then the cream of this special favor is seen in the special provision of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8,9,15). Eden means “garden of delights.” Man was here in his original innocence, and everything seems to have been conducive to his pleasure and enjoyment.

Since this was the “garden of delights,” man was intended to be happy here, and certainly was for a time. Inasmuch as that is true, we can find many lessons in happiness from the Garden of Eden (and especially since this antedated sin and man’s fall). And, furthermore, since happiness seems to be such an illusive thing in our modern world, it is well that we stop now and consider these lessons.

I. Unbroken Communion with God is Necessary for True Happiness.

In this paradise on earth, Adam and Eve were in a state of constant communion with their benevolent creator. Not only did God know them, and all about them, they knew God, they listened to his voice, and all was well. In such a context, happiness was their fortunate lot. This was the case until sin severed them from God and removed them from the Garden Home (Genesis 3). Thereafter the situation became a confused one. Paul observed: “For we

know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain until now” (Romans 8:22).

But the lesson in happiness has been established, and the New Testament bears this out, too. Let us learn it. A man right with God is a happy man. The “beatitudes” witness to this. Jesus said, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). Of course “blessed” means to be happy and fortunate, even to the point of being envied. And this happiness does not come by seeking after it. It comes as a by-product of seeking after righteousness, being right with God. Paul speaks of this blessedness which comes by knowing God and casting all of our cares upon Him (Philippians 4:6,7). John relates that in fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ, our “joy may be full” (1 John 1:3,4).

Even the Old Testament offers a little insight into this happiness. The first psalm shows that the restrained life in communion with God is a happy one. The psalmist in verse one shows that this man is happy because he abstains from doing certain things, then we read: “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” The Proverbs tell us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Then it tells us in 3:13, “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.” Truly the fear of God is like medicine for the soul, bringing wisdom and happiness.

Sometime ago we ran across the following information in a national magazine. “A Gallup Poll showed most Europeans believe in heaven but not in hell. In Sweden, the least orthodox nation, only 60 per cent believed in God. Other conclusions: morals, honesty, happiness, and peace of mind are all on the wane.” This vindicates and illustrates what we are saying. There is a definite relationship between belief in God, morals, and happiness. One may think that he is happy in sin, but we only “enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25). Then we will be unpleasantly, if not rudely awakened, to find that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7), and the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Yes, in store is “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile” (Romans 2:8,9).

II. Employment is a Prerequisite to Happiness

Man was created, “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Genesis 2:15). The “garden of delights” was not a place for the lazy to leisurely spend their time, but one of work. Work is not part of the curse later placed on man. The aggravating conditions surrounding the work involved the curse (Genesis 3:17-19). The Lord has so constituted us, it seems, that we are not really happy unless we are active doing something (and especially something worthwhile and constructive). At least that seems to be the case with “normal” people. Much enjoyment is to be found in employment.

The Proverbs frown upon laziness and condemn it as sin. Listen to Proverbs 6:6, “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise,” then read on through verse 11. These several references will show the sentiment of the Proverbs: Proverbs 10:4; 12:27; 13:4; 18:9; 20:4,13; 24:30-34. Then Proverbs 31:10-31 describe the virtuous woman. Many works are ascribed to her, and it says she “worketh willingly with her hands.” She is praised because she “looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.”

The New Testament has much to say about work. While among the Thesalonians Paul worked very hard to support himself. Why? He could have demanded support, for this was God’s will (1 Corinthians 9:14). But, no, he wanted to set them an example of what every Christian ought to do (2 Thessalonians 3:8,9). Christianity does not thrive on the bread of idleness, whether in the shop or in the church. “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread” (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12). Truly, an idle mind is the devil’s workshop. Most trouble in the church and elsewhere is produced by those who produce nothing else. (Also in reference to work, examine Ephesians 4:28 and Romans 12:11).

Yes, Christianity looks upon all honest employment as honorable, regardless how menial it may be. It is a dignified thing to be an honest man and throw your heart into your work, as unto the Lord (Colossians 3:23). The Lord has so constituted us that we are not really happy unless we are busy. (A body ought to be busy, but not a busybody). In this day of slackers (“entitlements” and “hand outs”), let us remember this lesson.

III. Companionship Adds to Happiness

Listen: “And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet [helper suitable] for him” (Genesis 2:18). “And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from him, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man” (Genesis 2:21,22).

The Lord God said that it was not good for man to be alone. The implication is that man realizes his greatest happiness in relationship to others. Marriage is the highest form of this in our earthly connections. How then a Christian needs to marry only another Christian if he or she really wants to be happy (as well as pleasing to the Lord). Consider 2 Corinthians 6:14 and 1 Corinthians 7:39. Marriage can be a little heaven on earth or a lot of hell.

Christianity has to do with man’s relationship to God and man’s relationship to man (1 John 1:3). The essence of both relationships is LOVE (1 John 4:20). And, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John

4:18). Love is overflowing, and this produces happiness as we get our minds off of SELF. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

The opposite of love is selfishness. A preacher once considered preaching a sermon on "egocentric sins," but decided not to because he concluded that all sin was of this nature. Think about it, and you will probably conclude that all sins have their roots in selfishness (SELF). And, it has been said that a man all wrapped up in himself makes a mighty small package. People who merely live for themselves usually fail to enjoy themselves. It is not good for a person to be alone indefinitely. Companionship adds to happiness.

**IV. The Garden of Eden Experience Proves
That Environment is Conducive to Happiness,
But Does Not Always Bring Happiness.**

Surely in such a beautiful setting as the Garden of Eden one would be happy, but this is not always the case. Adam and Eve soon experienced the loss of perfect happiness. They sinned (Genesis 3:6-10). If man is not in communion with God, happiness becomes a fleeting and illusive thing. The mansion on the hilltop and everything that one could desire does not necessarily bring happiness. Sometimes these people are the most miserable; especially if God is left out of the picture.

However, if a person is in communion with God, he can find happiness in the most wretched and unlikely places. Paul, writing from the prisons of Rome, admonished the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). He continues in verse 11, "...for I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." If the inner man is right the outer man can adapt to external circumstances which are far from ideal. A hovel may become a sanctuary of heaven.

We hope that calling your attention to the book of beginnings will begin to help you find happiness. There is much truth in these lessons from the Garden of Eden. You have everything to gain by learning these lessons. May God be praised as we let the peace of God rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15). □



E-mail: jamesgibbons@embarqmail.com

The SWORD and STAFF

Post Office Box 147

Mt. Airy, NC 27030 USA