

Spiritual Tip

You Don't Need Someone's Approval To Be Happy

By Rick Warren

You can be happy no matter what happens in your life if you don't let others control your attitude.

In Philippians 1:15-17, Paul talks about four kinds of people who were affecting his ministry while he was in prison in Rome. There were some who he considered comrades and who encouraged him in his ministry. Others were criticizing, competing with, or conspiring against his ministry.

"Some of them preach Christ because they are jealous and quarrelsome, but others from genuine good will. These do so from love, because they know that God has given me the work of defending the gospel. The others do not proclaim Christ sincerely, but from a spirit of selfish ambition; they think that they will make more trouble for me while I am in prison" (Philippians 1:15-17 TEV).

Few things rob your happiness faster than being criticized or feeling like others are working against you. Why? Because we all want to be loved. We all want approval. We want everybody to like us.

Yet Paul says in Philippians 1:18, *"It does not matter! I am happy about it — just so Christ is preached in every way possible, whether from wrong or right motives. And I will continue to be happy."*

You don't need other people's approval to be happy.

You're as happy as you choose to be! If others are unhappy with you, that's their choice. If you haven't got someone's approval now, you're probably not going to get it. And you're going to be miserable if you try to live for the approval of everybody else.

Paul later explains in verses 29 and 30 why you can be happy no matter what: *"For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it"* (NLT).

Paul says it is a privilege to suffer when you're doing the right thing because you're most like Jesus when somebody's nailing you to a cross and trying to get at you.

You can be happy no matter what happens if you look at every problem from God's viewpoint and never let what other people say or do control your happiness.

Talk It Over

- For whose approval have you been working? Why do you think you need that person's approval?
- Why is there more freedom in God's approval than another person's?
- When you feel most attacked or criticized, how might God be working in you and through you?

Marriage Tip

Making Right Choices in Marriage

By Tammy Darling

The first six years of my marriage were anything but happy. My husband and I constantly butted heads, each wanting our own way. After growing weary and miserable, we decided to explore God's intent for marriage.

With more than 20 years of marriage behind us now, we've learned that marriage is not a one-time "I do" and then you live happily ever after. Marriage takes work, and a healthy marriage is the result of making right choices.

Here are some of the choices that turned our marriage around:

We chose to make peace. This, however, requires humility — a virtue I don't easily embrace. Although humility is still a difficult choice for me, I've learned that when I'm wrong, I should quickly and genuinely admit to it, apologize and move on. Peace enters my marriage when one spouse restores balance through humility.

We chose to serve each other. We began realizing how often we expected more from each other than we were willing to give. We knew we could either continue to selfishly demand our way, or we could selflessly surrender to one another. As both of us chose to serve, our marriage was blessed with joy.

We chose not to focus on changing each other. We've accepted each other's differences, and we've learned not to make major issues out of minor faults. Too often I had tried to change things about my husband, not accepting the fact that any change in his heart or attitude was the Holy Spirit's responsibility — not mine. Only when I began praying for my marriage did things begin to change — in both of us.

We chose mutual submission. Although the Bible clearly teaches that the husband is the leader of the family, Scripture also emphasizes mutual submission among all believers, encouraging us to defer to one another when possible. The apostle Paul exhorts believers to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). The husband and wife who mutually submit do so with God as their guide.

We chose to place God first in our life and our marriage. God empowers us to remain dedicated to each other and to put the other's needs ahead of our own. When God is the director of our lives and our marriage, we bring honor both to Him and to each other.

Make no mistake — marriage still takes work! For my husband and me, though, we've come to appreciate that the One who instituted marriage also holds the keys to a happy marriage. When we choose His ways, things go better.

Because our marriage experiences are directly related to the decisions we make on a daily basis, every day we face the question afresh: Will we make right choices?

Parenting Tip

Having Children Made Me Love My Husband More

By Diana Landen

Research on the negative effects of parenting on a marriage can be misleading.

If we heeded all the research out there about parenting and marriage, no one would ever get pregnant. After all, the researchers are telling us that babies make couples fight more and cuddle less. Equality goes out the window. Wives resent their husbands and husbands feel unappreciated. Everyone is tired and cranky, and couples inevitably become less satisfied with their marriage. Right?

Except that, 15 years into parenting, I love my husband Marc more than ever.

So why does the research show a decrease in marital quality after couples have children?

I should point out that, like many modern parents, we also had our share of marital difficulties once we had our baby. What had started out as a completely egalitarian domestic arrangement ended up transforming into a more traditional division of labor. I was unhappy about this. Meanwhile, my husband believed that he needed to work harder than ever outside the home to support us, and he continuously felt unappreciated. On top of all this, we had little time for intimacy and our sex life was nearly nonexistent. We were poster children for the moderate decline in marital satisfaction that many researchers were finding in couples who had just become parents.

Unlike the research which stopped after 18 months, however, our life together

did not stop when our baby turned 18 months.

Here's the thing. The point of most long-term studies has been to figure out how to help people adjust to becoming parents. Because of this, researchers have focused primarily on the first year and a half of parenthood when conducting their research. This makes sense, but it practically guarantees that the results of such research will skew toward the negative. Not only that, but more general research shows that marital satisfaction goes down for all couples as time goes on, and is not necessarily related to having children. Also, while 38 percent of couples show a moderate decline in marital satisfaction during the first year and a half of parenthood, 30 percent of couples show no change, and 19 percent actually improve. Does "Happy And Married" Equal "Happily Married"?

But what of that 38 percent? Well, most parents are sleep-deprived during their first year and a half of parenthood, so they're ready to fight. Meanwhile, intimacy and sex normally decrease for new parents. While most couples spend the same amount of time together after having children, that time is spent on chores, not romance. I remember feeling lonely and distant from my husband when we first became parents. If researchers had asked us questions about our intimacy then, our relationship would have failed on the spot.

Things got better for us later on. We worked out our new roles as parents. In our early years, I had fought with my husband for using nonsense words with our baby, as I was convinced this was going to delay our son's language development. We also fought over how to pack the diaper bag, and whether or

not calling our son "The Poopster" would scar him for life. Over the years, I calmed down and came to admire my husband's parenting skills: the way that Marc taught our children to pick up salamanders and worms, and how he coaxed our daughter into cleaning her room when she and I were butting heads.

I also learned that I needed his differences. When I mysteriously gave birth to shy children, Marc explained what it felt like to be shy. When my daughter announced that she wanted pierced ears and green nail polish, Marc calmed me down and reminded me to listen.

As our children grew older and more expressive, I could see their love for my husband. Marc made my precious children laugh, and chased away the monsters under their beds. Watching them together now, I feel a strange mixture of joy, gratitude and love.

When It Comes To Parenting, Give Dad A Chance

Despite the difficulties of those first years of parenting, my husband and I eventually found ourselves growing together, in ways that researchers don't usually measure. We had discovered the shared miracle of our baby. Who else wanted to watch our baby breathe? Who else was amazed when he said "mama"? We had also discovered a shared goal: raising our children to end up as happy, good people with fulfilling lives.

Raising our kids is now one of the most important things we do, and it influences most of our decisions. We live in an expensive suburb and my husband commutes an hour every day so that our kids can play in a backyard and go to

good schools. We do family activities in our leisure time. We skip Christmas presents ourselves if the money gets low. We get up in the middle of the night to clean up vomit.

We love our children, and we want the best for them.

Eventually, we became Team Grownup, united to keep children everywhere from eating candy before breakfast and driving their parents insane. And we developed a strong family culture. We have our family rules — you can read at breakfast, but not dinner — and our family traditions — Dunkin' Donuts on Saturday morning.

This is what the research misses about parents and marital satisfaction. Parenting takes a couple of lovers and turns them into partners building a family. The benefits? Trust, respect, joy, pride, a shared purpose, a family culture and a place in a wider community. The process takes longer than those first few years. It starts with a time of increased conflict and decreased intimacy, and couples must work their way through this to become close again. And this transformation from lovers to family can make love and romance deeper and richer than it ever was before.

Compliments of the District 1 Marriage and Family Ministry, FFWPU

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