WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU'D EXPECT

ANDY STANLEY
SESSION ONE

NOTHING

If only I had . . . if only I drove . . . if only I wore . . . if only I knew . . . if only I won . . . then I would feel better about myself. Then I would be happy.

You’ve had thoughts like that, right? We all have. You spend a lot of time and money chasing after happiness, but it always feels just out of reach. No matter what you do, no matter what you achieve, no matter how much you acquire, you’re still not happy.

Here’s what you need to understand: happiness is more about who than what. We learn this lesson early in life, but we tend to forget it as we grow older. We learned it in the backyard when we were playing with a bunch of “whos.” It didn’t matter what we had. It didn’t matter what we didn’t have. It mattered who we were with. When we were in elementary school, middle school, and high school, it didn’t matter what we had as long as we were with the right bunch of “whos.” Isn’t that true?
Happiness is always associated with a who or two.

If happiness were about a what, we could just go out and get our happy “what”s and we’d be happy all the time. It wouldn’t matter how people treated us.

The problem is that happy “what” always leads to happy “what else.” That’s because happy “what” is like caffeine. It wears off over time. You were as excited about your old phone when you first bought it as you are about your new phone. Soon, your new phone won’t be new anymore and you won’t be excited about it. You’ll need a new one. Same with your car. Same with your job.

If an aging “what” deflates your happiness, you weren’t happy to begin with. You were just on the receiving end of good marketing.

Happiness is about “who.” At the end of their lives, people don’t have possessional regrets. They have relational regrets. They don’t long for more stuff. They long for better, healthier connections with others.

Happy people are at peace. They have peace with themselves,
others, and God. Any thing or behavior that undermines peace in any of those relationships undermines their happiness.

**WHO, NOT WHAT**

Every so often you’ll hear someone say, “I don’t need anyone to be happy.” But people who say that fall into one of two categories. Either they have so many relational options, they don’t know what it’s like to be isolated, or they don’t know how to fix their isolation so they tell themselves they’re fine. Again, relationally disconnected people aren’t happy. God made us for other people. And connection to God is the foundation of happiness.

One thing Jesus followers have discovered is that peace with God paves the way to peace with ourselves and equips us to make peace with others. When you begin to view yourself in a right relationship with your Creator, something happens on the inside. That peace with God frees us to find peace with ourselves and equips us to make peace with others. In fact, most of the New Testament is about how to be at peace with other people.

Jesus was asked a lot of silly questions in the New Testament because the religious leaders of his day were always trying to trick him into
saying something offensive or controversial that would turn the crowd against him. One time a legal expert asked him what he thought God's favorite law was. Jesus’ answer influences how his followers understand and prioritize relationships.

Jewish people in first-century Palestine lived by over 600 religious laws. Keeping the law was a significant part of their daily lives. There was a generally accepted answer to the question of which law was most important to God, but the lawyer wanted Jesus to weigh in. Here’s what happened:

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Matthew 22: 35–40
Jesus’ answer is simple, direct, and relational. What’s the most important law? Love God. What’s almost as important as loving God? Loving other people. In fact, those two laws are so significant, Jesus said that if you obeyed them, you wouldn’t have to pay attention to the other 598 laws. You’d already be keeping all of God’s laws if you did those two things.

Jesus’ answer is profound because he said that the most important things in life are peace with God, peace with others, and peace with ourselves. That’s the definition of happiness, which means that Jesus wants us to be happy. God created us with the capacity for happiness, and then told us in no uncertain terms how to be happy. This pursuit of happiness—of peace—isn’t a secondary concern. It’s core to who we are.

We tend to assume that God gets in the way of our happiness. We believe we can either be good religious people, or we can be happy. We can’t be both. We won’t stay in unhappy circumstances for long, so we leave church. We drift away from our heavenly Father. That’s tragic. The truth is, when we resist God, we resist happiness. God provides the way to happiness. If you talk to people about their greatest regrets, you’ll find more often than not that those regrets
were the results of unhealthy pursuits of happiness in isolation from God. We create regrets when we abandon peace with ourselves, others, and God.

That separation is called “sin.” When you experience relational conflict, it’s because somebody sinned. Sin also separates us from God. That’s because when you sin against another person, you sin against someone God loves. You can’t be okay with God and wrong with someone God loves. You can’t mistreat his children and expect to be on good relational terms with him. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” So, when you mistreat another person, you are out of sorts with God, not just that other person.
Watch the video segment for Session One, using the space provided below to take notes on anything that stands out to you.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What’s the first thing that comes to mind when you think about what makes you happy? Why do you think that comes to mind?

2. How would you define the word “happiness?” How do you think your definition has influenced the ways you’ve chosen to pursue happiness?

4. During the message, Andy said that sin separates us from ourselves, others, and God by enticing us to substitute things for relationships. Do you believe this to be true? Why or why not?

5. Are you at peace with yourself, others, and God? If not, what’s getting in the way of your peace in those relationships?

6. In what are you currently seeking happiness? What is one thing you can do this week to turn your attention to Jesus as your source of happiness? What can this group do to support you?
Happiness is about “who,” not “what.” Happy people are at peace with God, others, and themselves. Sin undermines peace because it separates you from God, others, and yourself by substituting things for people. Sin makes a happy promise it can’t keep. Sin isn’t your friend. Sin kills relationships.

James, the brother of Jesus, wrote: Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death (James 1:15).

When we opt for sin, we undermine our happiness and the happiness of those closest to us. This stands in stark contrast to what we are all tempted to believe: that God keeps us from happiness. But ask yourself these questions:

- Has sin made my life better or worse?
- Has sin contributed to my relationships or undermined them?
BEFORE THE NEXT SESSION

Read pages 23–29 for an overview of next session's content.