

True Happiness

Man is always seeking after happiness. What is happiness? Webster defines happiness as, "The state of a being in which his desires are gratified." We use the word happiness in many ways. We wish it to one another on weddings and birthdays. Popular songs inform us that romantic love will make us happy. The advertising industry daily seeks to convince us that certain acquisitions will make us happy.

Josef Pieper suggests that by cleverness, energy, and diligence one can acquire many of the things which are generally considered adjuncts of the happy life: food and drink, house, garden, books, music, art. But none of these things can quench the deepest longing of our hearts for "something more." This led Thomas Aquinas to say, "Man's whole existence is determined precisely by the non-possession of ultimate gratification." What does Aquinas mean? He means that to be human is to be a person "on the way" to true, eternal happiness. Man is, by nature, "thirsty" for someone to complete him, fulfill him, delight him and satisfy his soul. That Someone is God Himself.



Therefore, true happiness is found in contemplating God. To contemplate God is to love Him, know Him, think about Him, and reflect upon His mercy towards us. Contemplation takes real effort. It requires alertness and intention to turn our thoughts and affections away from daily distractions that we might know and love God with all our heart and mind.

Webster defines contemplation as, "The act of the mind in considering with attention; meditation and attention of the mind to a particular subject." In other words, to contemplate God is to consider Him with attention. How do we do this? Colossians 3:2 says, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." To set our minds means to contemplate—to pursue God with intention and devotion. Marcus Aurelius said that "the happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts." Humans have as many as 50,000 thoughts each day. Of those 50,000 thoughts, how many do we intentionally give to the contemplation and love of God?

Jesus underscored the importance of knowing [contemplating] God in the wonderful truth of John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." What a tremendous promise! Eternal life—true and lasting happiness—is to know God! To know God is to grasp Him with an intense longing, desiring and thirsting of our entire heart and mind [our whole being]. The result is an abiding sense of inward joy—rapture, delight, bliss—which runs deeper than the outward circumstances of life.

Contemplating God is knowing inspired by love. We don't know God the same way we know scientific facts. We can know that $2+2=4$ without fully engaging our will and emotions. Our minds grasp bare facts without passionate engagement. But to know God [to contemplate Him] first requires love and devotion for Him. The more we love God, the more we desire to contemplate Him and fill our minds with thoughts of Him.

We can begin to learn contemplation by the way we look at creation. G. K. Chesterton said that he always had the conviction of the miracle in all that exists. What he means is that everything holds within itself the stamp of its divine origin. The next time you are outside, look intently at a buttercup, rose, or orchid and you will see the glory of God hidden within it. To "see" God in the created order here and now points us beyond to the final "seeing" which we will experience when we behold God face to face in heaven.