

How to Collect Moments of Happiness

America is the land of opportunity, and as such it has also been called the wealthiest nation on earth. Wealth certainly has its benefits, as it makes a lot of things in life easier, but does it guarantee happiness? I contend that the ability to be happy is independent of one's wealth. Instead, happiness requires an intentional perspective to see and appreciate the simple joys of life.

In "If We Are So Rich, Why Aren't We Happy" (2016), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi points out that, "As more psychic energy is invested in material goals, less of it is left to pursue other goals that are also necessary for a life in which one aspires to happiness" (pp. 146-147). For example, parents who spends most of their energy at work, chasing a promotion or pay raise, will often later regret missing out on much of their children's lives. They squandered the simple joys of life because of their pursuit of material success.

Material success is a poor measurement of happiness because, as we accumulate things, we become less and less content with what we have. Material success becomes a singular focus and a barometer by which we measure our happiness. As Csikszentmihalyi also notes, when our energy is devoted to material things, our sensitivity to other rewards atrophies as our material goals are met. Soon, we implicitly believe that having more things will bring us happiness. In fact, any singular focus, whether or not it is wealth, can lead us to miss other simple joys in life, those things that truly lead to feelings of happiness.

If we are to experience a greater sense of happiness in our lives, we must choose to expand our expectations. Rather than believing we would be happy if we were wealthy (or any other fulfilled desire), we can become aware of many sources of happiness. Simple joys, like a beautiful sunrise or sunset, a kind word or gesture, or one's favorite song on the radio can lead to a moment of happiness. But in order to benefit from these blissful moments, we must note them, consciously collect them, and draw from them when life gets tough. The more contentment we find in these small moments of happiness, the greater satisfaction we will feel in life.

Happiness researchers claim that contentment is a significant key to happiness. Contentment, though, is not a simple resignation to the way things are, but it is a practice of gratitude for the good things in life and a determination to see and focus on those things. This does not mean pretending that life is not tough, or that bad things do not happen to us. Rather, it is a resolve that the tough things in life will not determine our ability to be happy. Happiness is not defined by our circumstances, but it is possible despite our circumstances.

Life is not guaranteed to be sorrow-free, but sorrow and hardship does not have to rob us of our ability to be happy. When we choose to see the small moments of joy, to collect them and draw from them, especially in the tough times, we *can* be happy.

Sources

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. "If We Are So Rich, Why Aren't We Happy?" *Pursuing Happiness*. Ed. Matthew Parfitt and Dawn Skorczewski. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016. 141-154. Print.