

The Fundamental Theory of Happiness, Part I

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What does it really mean to be happy? My name is Dominick Albano, I'm super excited to be with you guys for this retreat. And I'm going to talk to you about a topic that's near and dear to my heart, happiness. Okay, I wrote this book. It's called "The Fundamental Theory of Happiness". I think happiness is an incredibly important topic, Why? -Because everybody wants to be happy. I don't know much about you, you don't know a bunch about me, but there's one thing we can say about ourselves that we know for certain. It's that we all want to be happy.

There's nobody walking around, "Like yeah, you know, I'm really going for misery, that's really, what I was hoping for I was really open to be unhappy today." It doesn't matter your background, where you grew up, your faith, your beliefs, your nationality, like every single person wants to be happy. And everything we do is driven by this deep desire for happiness. And God placed that desire onto our hearts. God made us to want to be happy. Yet most of us are walking around with a sense that we're not as happy as we should be or that happiness is difficult to attain, or we don't really understand it. We ask all these questions about, what does it actually even mean to be happy? It's something we all want and yet we have no understanding around it.

You know for me in my life, I often find myself either, struggling to do things that I know will make me happy, yet still I find it hard to do them or doing things that I think will make me happy, except they ended up not making me happy or most absurd of all, I do things that I know absolutely will not make me happy. And so happiness is a topic that we needed to dive into. I needed to dive into it. And so I wrote this book, "The Fundamental Theory of Happiness" with this idea of let's figure out this thing that we call happiness and this desire that's on all of our hearts.

I called the book, "The theory of happiness". There's two ways to understand theory. The first is like theory of relativity, like E equals MC squared. This idea that like, $A + B = C$. Like if I just do this, I will be happy. And that's where a lot of us get caught up in happiness is we're looking for this silver bullet. We're looking for this one idea that's going to lead us to happiness. But the truth is there's another way to understand theory, there's another way to understand this idea of theory and that's that like art theory or music theory. -That there are rules or guidelines that if you follow them, they will help you practice an art. And happiness is far more of

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an art than it is a science. There is no, "Hey follow this $A + B = C$ formula, and you're going to be happy. It doesn't work like that, but there are principles and guidelines that if you follow them, they will help you discover the happiness that God created you for that's, that's written deep into your heart into your soul.

And so over these next two talks, we're going to talk about four principles from "The fundamental theory of happiness", four ideas or principles, rules, guidelines, whatever word you want to use. I like to use the word principles. That if you follow these, they will help you discover the happiness that God created you for. So in the first talk, we're going to cover the first two and then the second talk we're going to cover the second two, okay. And we might even have some time to talk a little bit about the enemies of our happiness and how they kind of get in our way.

So we'll see if we have time for that as well. And with each one of the principles, there's also going to be an action item. So we going to talk about the principle and then we're going to talk about how we activate that principle in our daily lives, by taking daily steps, daily actions to live out those principles. We're going to dive right in; we don't have a ton of time together. The first principle is to become dissatisfied, to become dissatisfied. Now here's the truth, we all have rules or ideas that are unspoken. We don't often talk about them, but the rules that we live by that we think that if we live by these rules, they will make us happy. Oftentimes these aren't rules that are taught to us in a systematic way. They're just kind of things that we pick up along the way and ideas about what happiness is and what's going to lead us to happiness.

Here's the problem, those rules are lies, those rules are 100% lies. So what are these rules look like? Well, if I just lost this 10 pounds then I'd finally be happy, if I just made this much money, I'd finally be happy. If I just got this promotion at work, I'm finally going to be happy. If I just drove this kind of car, I'd finally be happy. Those are the most basic ideas, but they're there. You might want to say like, "Oh, I don't have stuff like that." But we all do, ? If I just had this accomplishment or this achievement, If this just happened or that just happened, I'd finally be happy. And why don't we know these are lies because these rules are not from God. Jesus said, "***I am the way and the truth and the life.***" And these lies come from someone else. We have a title for him too. It's called the father of lies, the devil. He is the one who speaks these ideas to us that if we just had these material things, that then we would finally be happy. That speaks into this idea that we're looking for this silver bullet. And the devil he's very crafty with how he speaks these rules into our lives. He's very crafty with how he does it.

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I've worked for the church for a long time, I've spent a lot of time in ministry. I've seen people in their own spiritual lives, living according to these lies, "Well, if I just prayed more, I'd finally be happy and God would finally love me." Or "If I just could, get over this one sin and never do this one sin again, then God would finally love me, I'd finally be happy." "If I just prayed enough rosaries then I'd finally be happy, God would finally love me." These are all lies from the devil around. What is finally going to make us happy. What it actually means to be happy. We have these in the most basic of ways. If I just found my spouse or if I just had this job and we have them in deep seated ways. That have to do with who we are and how we are loved and how we think about ourselves.

C.S. Lewis has this great quote about this very idea. And I'm just going to paraphrase it. He basically says *"At the end of our lives most people find that it's not that they ever wanted too much, they actually wanted far too little. They're like a child who was playing in the mud and says no to an invitation to a holiday at sea cause he just can't imagine what that would be like."* We're like children playing in the mud content to play in the mud when we're being invited to something far greater. And because we just can't even understand what that is, we say no to it.

See, God has created us for a happiness that is far greater than most of us get preoccupied with. We find ourselves desiring or wishing for things that are actually far beneath us and far beneath the happiness that God created us for. And so that first principle is to become dissatisfied. And our action item is a daily act of self-sacrifice. Daily act of self-sacrifice, really small stuff. We need to remind ourselves every day that we were made for more than the comfort around us. Pope Benedict the 16th, he said, *"The world promises you comfort, but you were not made for comfort, you were made for greatness."*

So the first idea, and that's what this idea is all about is just a daily reminder, a daily act of sacrifice that reminds us, that we were made for more than comfort. So that means we take the stairs when we get to work, instead of taking the elevator or we drink the water at lunch, instead of drinking the soda or instead of bingeing Netflix at night, you read a good book for a little bit. Or instead of staying up, you go to bed early. Or set of sleeping in, you get up a little early. Like some small thing that just reminds you, that you were made for more than comfort. So the first principle is to become dissatisfied. Our first action item, first way we take action every single day is a daily act of self-sacrifice.

So principle number two, we're diving through these, we're going real quick. Principle number two is to deepen your perception. Now this, this is a big idea, it's a big concept. But it basically I can simplify it like this, if you're driving home on

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the highway and a car cuts you off, zooms into your lane, cuts you off, you maybe have to swerve a little bit slam on your brakes. They zoom off to this exit. How do you react to that? A lot of us, like if you're like most people, you're probably pretty angry about it, Maybe I have a little bit of road rage, maybe some choice words for that person. Hopefully not hand gestures included, but you never know. I'm not here to judge. We all get that way sometimes.

Now, what if you knew that in that car was young couple, they've only been married, let's say maybe a year and the wife's pregnant and the husband's driving and he's actually driving her to the hospital because she's in labor and they're 12 weeks premature. Well then if you know that it changes the entire situation. Well now you're not mad, you're not angry at them, you're not having choice words and bad hand gestures. You're getting out of the way. You're maybe saying a prayer for them. You're praying for that couple that they get there safely and everything turns out okay. The way we perceive a situation, our perception of the circumstances, the situations of our lives, they change everything. That's the reality. When we see things, how we see things, changes how we react to them. Now, I break this down in great detail in the book, but I'm going to do it really quickly here. You can get the book if you want to dive more into the topic.

But essentially there's five levels of perception. There's effect, there's cause, there's circumstance and then there's intention and purpose. So effect is just what's going on around us. What can we see? Sense, taste, touch. What's just on this very surface level. The cause is one step deeper, there's a cause to an effect. That's what got us in this situation. The circumstances is all the extra stuff. So the effect might be my wife's mad at me. The effect is I showed up late from work, the circumstances is, "My boss is a jerk, he made me stay late and by the time I got in the highway, there's a bad accident, there's bad traffic." That sort of thing. Those are the circumstances. The fourth level is intention. It's a first level, we're getting deeper now, we're getting into some areas of empathy. We're not being so selfish, we're starting to like living and see the world in a deeper way. Intention is an arrow. I always say, "Well, hun I didn't mean to be home late." We usually apologize with our intentions, that's the way we do it.

And I want to stop here just for a second, because it's a really important part. This level alone, if we can live at this level can change everything. There used to be, we used to teach this as a Christian principle. I used to be considered our Christian duty to assume good intentions of the people around us. We actually used to teach that. It's not kind of in vogue anymore, we don't teach that in Sunday school. I think we should cause we do that not for the other person, but really for ourselves.

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Go back to our example, you're driving home on the highway, that person cuts you off. You can never know what's going on in that car, you can never know. So you've got two reactions, you can assume bad intentions, "That person's a jerk, why are they cutting me off? It's unsafe. I'm mad, I'm cursing at them, I get home, I'm cranky with my kids, I got no patience, I'm short with my wife, ruins my whole night." Or I can assume good intentions. That person cuts me off, and I just say a quick prayer, "Gosh they obviously are in a hurry, something serious is going on. God you know all things, I hope they're okay, please protect them, protect the other cars on the road around them. I hope everything's okay in their lives." And then you finish your prayer and you go about your day. You've got peace, you've got your calm, you go home, you're going to have way better interactions with your family. That situation of your life has not stolen away your entire night, simply because you assumed good intentions of the other person. That fourth level we're getting that deeper level is intention.

The fifth level is purpose. God, this is the deepest level of perception. When we can live at this level, we're seeing the world around us as God sees it. Why? Because our God is a God of purpose. Nothing happens with God on accident. God has an intention has a purpose behind everything. And when we can start to see the world at that level of purpose, we're starting to see the world as God sees it. Now it's a very difficult level to live at, it absolutely is. It's not easy to be at that place. But that's where it leads us to happiness. We certainly are happier when we're seeing the world, as God sees it. Now, how do we do that?

We have to be able to hear the voice of God. We have to be able to step back from our emotions and the immediacy of the cause and effect that we're all living in, in the circumstances. We have to get this level. And there's one way to do it, it's silence and solitude. Why? Two reasons. So why do we need silence and solitude? It's very simple, it's very basic. It's not high philosophy, it's very simple. One, if you don't have silence, you can't hear God. It's very simple, if you don't have silence, you cannot hear what God is doing in your life. Plain and simple, you need silence to be able to hear. Second, you need silence to be able to think. We actually need to be able to step back from the noise of the world, step back to the business of the world, step back to the social media driven culture and all that, the clicking and the buzzing and the noise and just think and listen. When we think and listen, we can start to see the world as God sees it. And when we see the world as God sees it, we are naturally happier in every circumstance and every situation that we face.

So principle number one was to become dissatisfied. Action item number one is a daily act of self-sacrifice, daily act of self-sacrifice. Principle number two is to

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deepen your perception. Action step number two, is a daily time of silence and solitude. A time where you step back from the world, you find that quiet space. Again, you don't have to overthink. This can be as simple as on your commute to work, you turn off the radio and you just drive in silence for a little bit. Find that silence and solitude wherever you can. Maybe it is driving to the adoration chapel and spending a Holy Hour in silence and solitude. But maybe it's not that maybe it's just the 10 minutes after you finally get your kids to bed at night and you go into your bedroom and you shut the door and you just sit on your bed or kneel next to your bed for 10 minutes and just have some peace and quiet. Wherever you find it, you find that daily time of silence and solitude.

Principle number one, become dissatisfied. You were made for more than what the world tells you is going to make you happy. You were made for more than comfort action. Number one is a daily act of self-sacrifice. That you were made for more than the comfort of the, that the world promises you. Have that water instead of the soda, take those stairs instead of the elevator, get up early instead of sleeping in.

Principle number two, is to deepen your perception. Action item number two is that daily time of silence and solitude. To step back from the world to hear and to listen. If you live and you are not satisfied with everything the world tells you is going to make you happy and you try to see the world around you as God sees it, and to respond to the situations and circumstances your life as God intended them to be, you're going to be happy. Like those are going to lead you to a happier life. So those are our first two principles, in the second talk we're going to go through our last two principles of "The Fundamental Theory of Happiness". I can't wait to join you.