



Harvard University conducted the world's longest scientific study of happiness. They started in the 1930's with 724 participants in the Boston area and they've tracked this same group (and their descendants) in what they call their "happiness study".

Here's how the book opens...

"If you had to make one life choice, right now, to set yourself on the path to future health and happiness, what would it be?"

Then they summarize their answer this way...

"...if we had to take all 84 years of the Harvard study and boil it down to a single principle for living... it would be this: *Good relationships keep us healthier and happier. Period.*"

Long before happiness studies, happiness academies and happiness journals—Jesus stepped into humanity and brought with him an essential resource to flourish and thrive as a human being over the long arc of life, he called it JOY.

INEVITABLE

John 15:11

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

John 16:22

Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

Romans 14 – *the Kingdom of God is joy in the Holy Spirit*

Galatians 5 – *fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...*

1 Peter 1 – *in Christ we are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy*

Christian joy goes down into the deepest recesses of the heart, it can't be extinguished.

Even when your life is fully immersed in heartache, pain, grief, loss—there is a kind of joy that will not be swallowed up, that rises out of the suffering, that cannot be held down.

NOT CIRCUMSTANTIAL

John 16:21

A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.

Christian joy co-exists with sorrow. It doesn't banish the pain, it enables you to get through the pain.

The world's joy is based on circumstances—when your relationships are going well, when your job is fulfilling, when your body feels good, when the finances are looking good—the world's joy is tied to specific circumstances...but what happens when the circumstances change? The joy evaporates.

Sorrow eats up the world's joy, but the joy that Jesus offers takes the sufferings of this life and drives us deeper into our joy.

For the Christian, suffering pushes you more into your joy (by drawing you deeper into Jesus), and the joy enables you to walk through the sorrow without becoming bitter.

PRAYERFUL

John 16:23-24

23 In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 24 Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

"You must have this confidence when you pray: that God will give you whatever you would have asked for if you knew everything He knows." – Tim Keller

Which means if He's delaying or if He's not answering in the way you expected, it's not that He's inattentive, it's not that He doesn't love you, it's not that He doesn't want what's best for you—it's that He's our Heavenly Father who sees more than we're able to see, whose ways are much higher than our ways—and we're like that little child who can't understand why mom or dad won't let us play where we want to play.

Jesus says this is part of the joy that He offers—this infinite confidence that God is with me, that God is for me and that God is always at work with my best in mind, when I understand it and when I don't.

**"So, when my eyesight fades and my mind begins to wander,
when my children take me by the hand and have hushed
conversations behind my back. I hope to be an old woman
whose joy is undiminished, who babbles on about beauty
and goodness and life. Who, though I lose my thoughts,
never lose my songs, and whose quavering voice continues
to herald the good news until her final breath."**

– Hannah Anderson

