

happiness **an ekerk trend report**

eKERK
Jesus - sigbaar, voelbaar, verstaanbaar

The art of **being happy** lies in
the power of extracting
happiness from common
things.

~ H Beecher

Happiness myths – lies about our emotional state

In his new book, *The Antidote: Happiness for people who can't stand positive thinking*¹ Oliver Burkeman describes five myths that we believe about our own happiness and positive frame of mind.

Many of these myths are settled in our minds by modernistic movements of 'mind over matter' and 'positive thinking'. New research proves that these approaches have no influence on our basic level of happiness at work or at home. On the contrary, these thoughts just place additional stress on an already stressful situation, and actually reduces our chance of attaining happiness!

Burkeman summarises the five main myths and lies about how we can improve our happiness as follows:

1. It is important to maintain a positive attitude.
2. Pursue ambitious goals with zeal.
3. The key to happiness at work is to make work more fun.
4. Increasing happiness is directly proportional to a high self-esteem.
5. Be happier by avoiding pessimists and any negativity.

Even though the world has taught you that you can raise your own personal happiness through the above-mentioned principles, Burkeman writes that these forced methods merely add tension and create an unrealistic expectation.

We need new measuring tools for happiness.

1. <http://www.fastcompany.com/3021264/work-smart/5-big-happiness-myths-debunked>

Happiness at work — is it possible?

In contrast to Oliver Burkeman, Kevin Kruse writes that happiness at work is highly dependent on the candidate's ability to approach and engage their work environment intentionally.

In his book *Employee Engagement for Everyone: 4 Keys to Happiness and Fulfillment at Work²*, Kruse claims that any employee can experience happiness and fulfilment at work by nurturing the right attitude, especially toward negative colleagues and managers.

In his opinion, our happiness depends on ourselves, and we can raise our levels of happiness by merely taking full responsibility for our own attitudes, behaviours and opinions about our environment.

Locally, FNB recently asked the following on their Twitter page:³

Tweet us a tip using #FNBHappy on how to achieve Happiness@Work & you could win tickets to the Happiness@Work Conference from FNB.

The question got 25 responses, and many people retweeted it.

Answers to FNB's question included things like avoiding negativity, cultivating considerate behaviour, sharing compliments, resonating with company values, and a positive personal work ethic.

This serves as proof that the search for happiness is also an emerging issue on the local front.



The image shows a screenshot of a tweet from a user named RbJacobs (FNB Guy) with the handle @Rbjacobs. The tweet text reads: "Tweet us a tip using #FNBHappy on how to achieve Happiness@Work & you could win tickets to the Happiness@Work Conference from #FNB". Below the text are icons for Reply, Retweet, Favorite, and Buffer. The tweet has 12 retweets and 7 favorites. A row of profile pictures of users who interacted with the tweet is visible below the statistics. The timestamp at the bottom of the tweet is "1:37 PM - 4 Sep 13".

2. http://www.amazon.com/Employee-Engagement-Everyone-Happiness-Fulfillment-ebook/dp/B00CRTRNNY/ref=pd_sim_b_1

3. <https://twitter.com/rbjacobs/status/375221024691728384>



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Cycle your way to happiness

The *World Happiness Report* rated the residents of Denmark as the happiest people on earth⁴.

The report was compiled by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, and takes into consideration factors like income, freedom, social support and generosity.

It is interesting to note that more than half of the Danish population cycle to their daily destinations, including school, office and shops. It is the opinion of the report that the resulting saving of \$34 million per annum, as well as the positive effect on pollution, traffic, fitness and health, make a significant impact on the overall happiness of the residents of Denmark.

4. <http://blogs.bicycling.com/blogs/thehub/2013/11/07/bikes-happiness/>

More about the World Happiness Report

The second annual *World Happiness Report*⁵ was just released, and it lists the 'happiest' nations in the world, as well as the factors that contribute to or detract from the general levels of happiness in a specific country.

The first thing to note is that financial well-being plays almost no role in the happiness of a group or country. Although money exerts a smaller influence on the happiness of an individual, that influence is negligible when the income of a country is being considered.

The the 2013 report, the Nordic countries won by a country mile, with Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Sweden respectively the five happiest countries in the world. The report considers six main categories, namely:

1. Income per individual
2. Life expectancy
3. Do you have someone to count on?
4. Freedom to make own life choices
5. Freedom from corruption
6. Tendency to generosity

The report also compares happiness in the included countries for the period 2005-2012, and notes that 60 countries increased in general happiness, and 40 countries decreased. The highest increases happened in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

The report reckons general happiness not as an economic result, but rather as a potential cause for economic wellbeing. Residents of happier nations produce better, spend more carefully and, in general, make better personal decisions.

5. <http://www.fastcoexist.com/3017037/the-10-happiest-countries-in-the-world-and-why-were-not-one-of-them>

What does your brain have to do with happiness?

Naturally, the domains of neuro-science and brain study offer us alternative ways to investigate the how and why of happiness.

Many experts claim that happiness is a function of the brain, and that we can exercise our brains to experience happiness, despite our present circumstances or reality.

In an interview with Dr Rick Hanson of the University of Berkeley, Julie Beck asked him about this and other findings that he published in his book *Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence*.⁶

Unlike 'positive thinking,' Dr Hanson describes a process that he calls 'taking in the good' where we daily put time aside to capture the good and favorable circumstances in our life in our minds. The brain processes pain and negativity at a speed more than double the speed at which it processes positive experiences, and that's why it's important to intentionally focus on what is good in

our lives. If we don't, our brains might just be overwhelmed by all the negative aspects we experience.

Hanson goes on to explain that the three predominant factors for happiness in life, namely safety, fulfilment and relationship, can be coloured as either positive or negative, depending on what emotions and experiences we choose to focus on.

It's interesting to note that his definition of happiness, as well as the route thereto, is merely considered as a biological function fo the brain, which can be strengthened and embedded by ongoing neuro-practices.

6. <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/10/how-to-build-a-happier-brain/280752/>

Ordinary things that scientifically make you more happy

It is surprising to note the everyday practices that has an influence on our perception of happiness.

In the book *"The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want"*, Sonja Lyubomirsky writes that any personal happiness is determined 50% by genetic trends, 10% circumstances and 40% by our own actions and attitudes.

She suggests twenty five practices scientifically proven to positively influence our emotions and thoughts in neurological ways, and thus to makes us more happy. Most of these practices has to do with the basic building blocks of happiness, and include, among others:

1. Focus on healthy food
2. Be aware of your thoughts and keep them positive
3. Surround yourself with positive and happy people
4. Be busy daily with ground, plants and nature
5. Spend your money on more small luxuries instead of one or two expensive ones
6. Be neat, clean and in control of your personal spaces

7. Exercise regularly

8. Be in a sexual relationship with only one other committed person

9. Take trouble to have more free time and experience less traffic

10. Be generous with your time and money.

Can your city make you happy?

Bogota, Columbia is historically one of the most crime-ridden cities in the world. Residents could not risk it in on the streets — to be outside was a certain way to become a victim of crime.

Then the mayor, Enrique Peñalosa, decided that there is an inextricable connection between city planning and design, and the general levels of happiness of the city's residents.⁸

Through careful redesign, a comprehensive crime-prevention plan, and changes to make the city more user-friendly for nature and sport lovers, the city atmosphere started improving, and the happiness of Bogotans drastically improved.

This city transformation, and the principles underpinning it, was captured in Charles Montgomery's book *Happy City: transforming our lives through urban design*⁹, in which he writes the following:

There is increasing claims that the secret to successful city living lies in the intersection between urban design and the emerging science of happiness. From how saying hello to neighbours is

just as important to your mental health as contact with close friends and family, to how gardens make us kinder, and how simple changes in road design can alter the hormonal state of commuters, this movement shows that simple changes can make all the difference.

8. <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/nov/01/secrets-worlds-happiest-cities-commute-property-prices>

9. <http://www.guardianbookshop.co.uk/BerteShopWeb/viewProduct.do?ISBN=9781846143205>

Happiness and the TED Conference

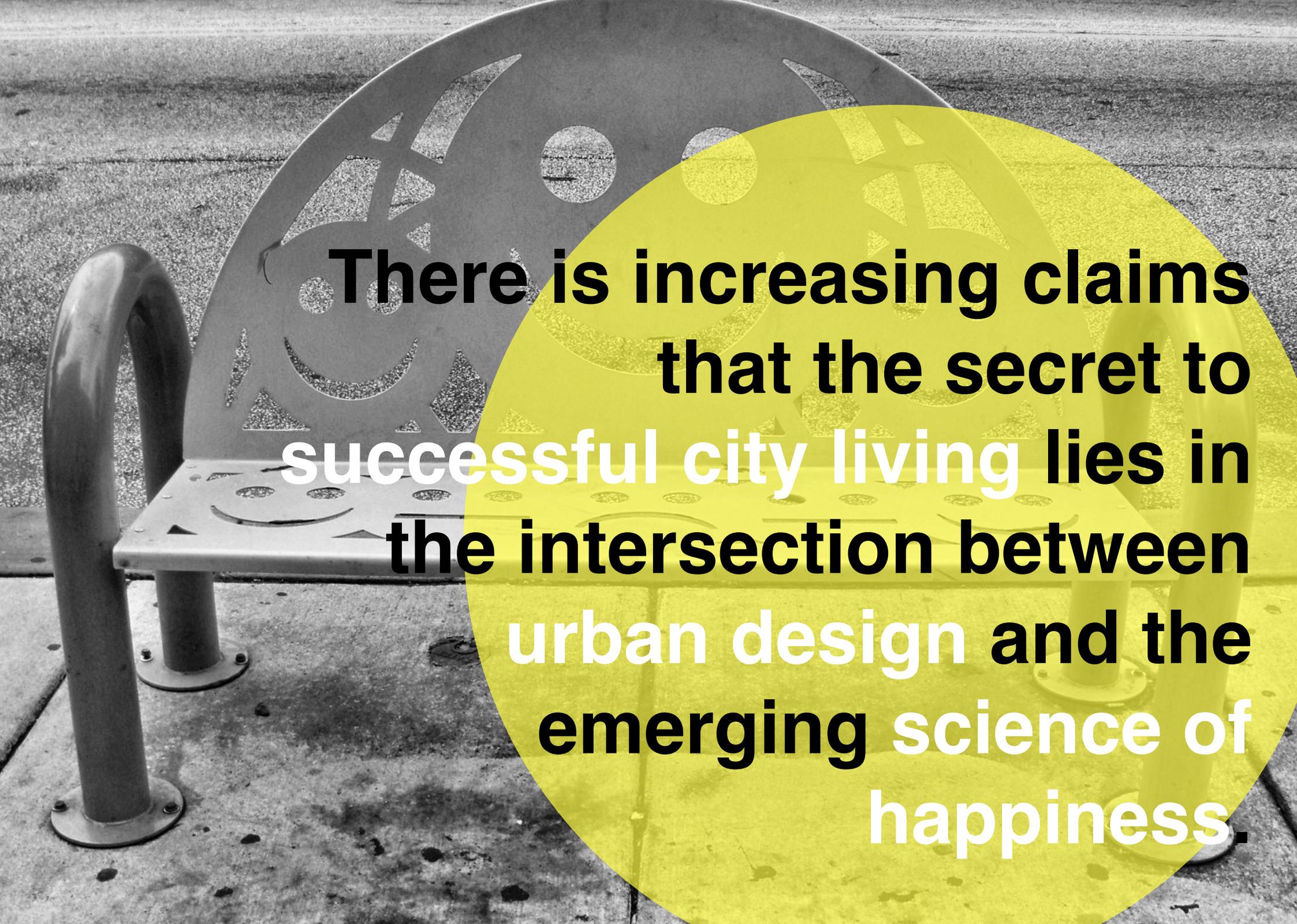
Annually, the world's best thinkers come together to discuss global issues and solutions.

Most recently, the theme of happiness and how to nurture it was one of the most dynamic conversations. So much so, that the organisers of the conference compiled a thematic video album that outlines all the experts' wisdom and advice about modern happiness.¹⁰

Speakers like Malcolm Gladwell, Dan Gilbert, Michael Norton and Barry Schwartz express themselves about the role of things like choice, money, relationships and possessions in our everyday perceptions of happiness.

Speeches entitled *The Paradox of Choice*, *How to Buy Happiness*, *Less Stuff More Happiness*, and *The Surprising Science of Happiness* endorses everything that we have read thus far about happiness and how one brings it about.

10. http://www.ted.com/playlists/4/what_makes_us_happy.html



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IMPLICATION AND APPLICATION

If we now consider possible implications and factors that could lead to this trend of pursuing happiness, then it will first be wise to look at the Webster Dictionary's description of happiness:

Good luck; good fortune; prosperity. An agreeable feeling or condition of the soul arising from good fortune or propitious happening of any kind; the possession of those circumstances or that state of being which is attended with enjoyment; the state of being happy; contentment; joyful satisfaction; felicity; blessedness.

If we look up the phrases prosperity and good fortune, we find the following descriptions:

The state of being prosperous; advance or gain in anything good or desirable; successful progress in any business or enterprise; attainment of the object desired; good fortune; success; as, commercial prosperity; national prosperity. Good fortune "an auspicious state resulting from favorable outcomes."

In this explanation of happiness, we see that happiness is situation-bound. It gets determined by favorable conditions.

The previous trends, internationally and locally, showed us that our source of happiness can basically be divided into four categories, namely economy, relationships, freedom and generosity.

The economy category includes the World Happiness Report that measures income per individual, as well as work security. Yes, happiness is found through these aspects, but this measure of happiness is fluctuating and depends on other situations and people. Therefore it is situation-bound. If we measure happiness with this instrument, we will soon be victims of our fluctuating circumstances that will directly influence our happiness.

However, if we look at a further description of happiness, then it is a feeling, a lifestyle of contentment.

"Contentment" via Webster Dictionary:

1. The state of being contented or satisfied; content.
2. The act or process of contenting or satisfying; as, the contentment of avarice is impossible.
3. Gratification; pleasure; satisfaction.

Is relationships, freedom and generosity not maybe a better source of happiness?

IS HAPPINESS NOT DIRECTLY PROPORTIONAL TO YOUR RELATIONSHIPS?

There's a difference between happiness and joy. First-mentioned is mostly situation-bound like mentioned above. Joy is brought by relationships. Happiness is not only emotional, lest we soon be the victims of our fluctuating emotions.

This is the view of the Global Happiness Organisation as well:

“Social relations play an important role in our happiness. In a study of very happy people, researchers Seligman and Diener found that good social relations was the most important thing to them. Our wellbeing increases when we spend time with friends — both introverted and extroverted people gain equal amounts of wellbeing from social activities. Loving relations are also important. For example, married and common-law spouses tend to be happier than single people.”¹¹

FREEDOM VS. HAPPINESS

The World Happiness Report sees freedom as of cardinal importance in their measure of happiness. Victor Frankl affirms this in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* when he writes about his experiences in Auschwitz. In his book he writes that “*everything can be taken from a man but one thing, the last of human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances.*”

Martin Seligman helps us with this when he suggests that deep happiness is always a byproduct of a life well-lived before God and between other people. So, it's necessary to make peace with who you are and to find that life-music that the Lord wants you to play in your own little piece of play time here on earth.

11. <http://www.globalhappiness.com/en/about-happiness/how-can-we-become-happier>

GENEROSITY BRINGS HAPPINESS

Stephan Joubert helps by suggesting that a shift is necessary from success to significance to service [see article below]. Therefore, your happiness needs to take you to servanthood and generosity. Only when we learn the goal of our life, does giving ourselves and serving others become a catalyser of inner happiness. Jesus' total earthly existence was one of sacrifice and service. He wired all his followers to live like Him. Therefore, it's part of our DNA to trade in our selfishness and serve others. To find such happiness-routes we need to surround ourselves with people who see the beauty in others. This way, happiness is dependent on how you stand in relationship to other people, as well as how you consider and observe this. People are much happier if they feel they live in a friendly and harmonious world.

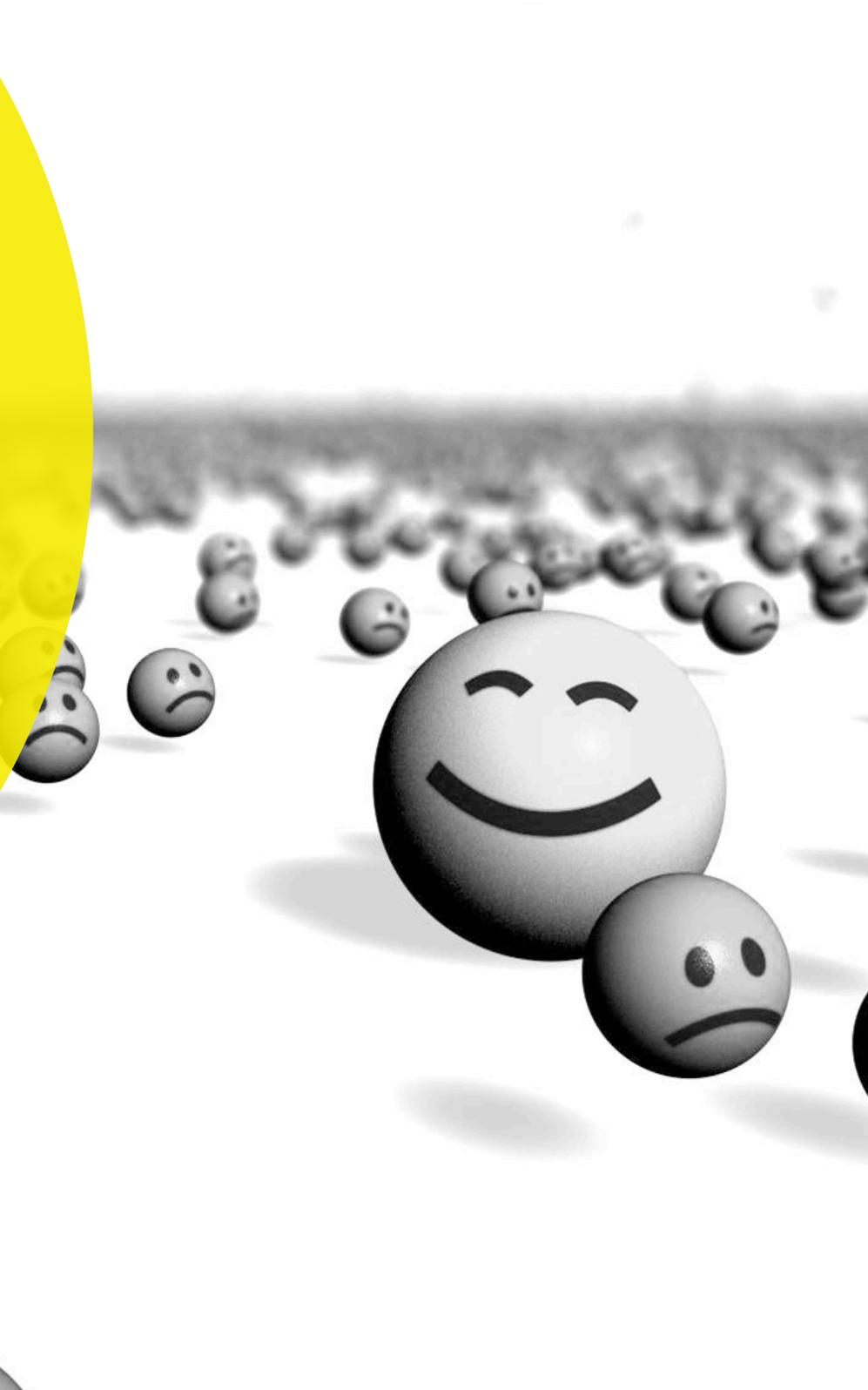
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND HAPPINESS

Our faith invites us to stand in a direct relationship with the living God, as well as our neighbours. Our faith is based on and built upon how we live in relation to the people with who we come into contact every day. Thus, believers have the front seats when it comes to a life of happiness. We only need to give ourselves to these relationships every day. Happiness is created by service, intentional choices toward joy with others, and the choice to share life with uplifting people.

CAN CHURCH MAKE SOMEONE HAPPY?

The factors and consequences of happiness can and must be mined, learned and lived by the church. The church's primary role is to play into the lives of believers in such a way that they flourish in relationships with God, each other and the environment that they live in. The local congregation need to be the carrier of this happiness in the environment through believers' deep contentment with themselves and God. This needs to be accomplished through helping believers have a friendly relationship with people in the local community. This will raise happiness in the community.

Then we have not even spoken about the role believers need to play through generosity. Here, we're not necessarily referring to tithing. The believer needs to give themselves in such a way to each other, and the kingdom of God, that generosity becomes the catalyser that transforms the community through the body of Christ.



HAPPINESS IS RELATIONAL

by Stephan Joubert

I think happiness is relational. There's a difference between happiness and joy. The former is mostly situation-bound; it gets determined by favorable circumstances. The latter is relationship-dependent. Happiness isn't only emotional, lest we soon be the victims of our fluctuating emotions. Indeed, many Christians step into this pitfall. They equate their Christian feelings and experiences to God's closeness, but experience their own emotional downs as God's absence.

Deep feelings of happiness come hand in hand with contentment with who and what I am and peace before God with my humanity. Happiness grows when I start taking distance from my self-centered needs, the pursuit of measurable symbols of outward success and the satisfaction of consumerist wants. We need a shift from success to significance to service.

Significance happens when I make peace with who and what I am. Then a blaming attitude disappears from my inner realm where I live with a finger pointed toward others as the reason for my own bad circumstances. Setbacks and opposition is then only temporary and man-made. But they aren't character flaws in myself or others.

Happiness doesn't happen when we deliberately pursue it. This is the finding of great researchers like Martin Seligman: Deep happiness is always a byproduct of a life well-lived before God and among other people. Therefore, it's necessary to make

peace with who we are and to find that life-music that the Lord wants us to play in our own little piece of play time here on earth.

A further shift is necessary for believers, and that is from significance to service. Only when we learn that the goal of our lives is the giving-away of ourselves and serving others does great happiness break through. Jesus' total earthly existence was one of sacrifice and service. He wired all his followers to live like Him. Therefore, it's part of our new DNA to trade in our selfishness, and to serve and to share. To find such happiness avenues, we need to surround ourselves with people and connoisseurs who see the beauty in others, who see light when everyone else is stumbling around in darkness, who tell stories of hope while the rest circulate newspaper headlines, and who believe when all the rest have lost faith...

Happiness asks for perseverance... resilience. It asks for deliberate actions, like celebrating "a very merry unbirthday party" with Alice in Wonderland and the Mad Hatter every day. Indeed, this can be celebrated 365 days of the year. When the Mad Hatter heard from Alice that it was her "unbirthday", he responded immediately: "What a small world." It is his too! And then they celebrated.

Happiness is created through service, deliberate choices for joy with others, the choice to share life with uplifting people, resilience, regular laugh sessions — because research shows that people who choose to laugh are happier and continually serve and give like Jesus. Happiness is relationships with Him and others. It's a lifestyle, a knowing and an ongoing choice.

MORE ABOUT EKERK RESEARCH

Echurch prioritises the development and support of the leaders of the local church by means of training, resources and relevant research. With research reports, trend briefings and other material, we look at the world through the lens of Scripture. All the echurch research and trend publications are available for download from www.ekerk.org, free of charge.

You can also subscribe to the monthly echurch Learning Community newsletter for updates on the latest publications, conferences and resources.

If you want to become more involved, or if you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact Mynhardt at mynhardt@ekerk.org, or at 082.853.6483

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Thanks for reading!

