

Because I'm happy
Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof
Because I'm happy
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth
Because I'm happy
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you
Because I'm happy
Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do (Pharrell Williams, "Happy")¹

Pharrell Williams struck a nerve, and his song became more than a hit; it became a phenomenon. Happiness is an American priority; happiness continues to be a primary motivation in our society. "We [still] hold these truths to be self-evident, that men [and women] are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." (Declaration of Independence).

We work hard at being happy, but for all of our effort, we are happy one moment and unhappy the next; happiness slips through our fingers like soap in the shower. No wonder a French philosopher advised: "Now and then it is good to pause in our pursuit of happiness and just be happy." (Guillaume Apollinaire)

Psalm 84 invites us reimagine our pursuit of happiness; rather than happiness being a destination at which we hope to arrive; happiness is a process by which we make our way through all that life has in store for us: *Psalm 84:4 (NRSV) Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise. Psalm 84:5 (NRSV) Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. Psalm 84:12 (NRSV) O LORD of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.*

The goal of this sermon is deceptively simple; that you and I will be happy. We know that is easier said than done, so we will journey through the Valley of Tears and develop the way of life that allows us to sing, "Because I'm happy."

1. The Valley of Tears

Are you happy this morning? Are you happy?

We want to be happy; we pursue being happy, even as we struggle to define what "being happy" is. We want to be happy, but so long as we are pursuing happiness, we describe ourselves as unhappy. We are unhappy because of this. We are unhappy as a result of that.

¹ <http://www.songlyrics.com/pharrell-williams/happy-lyrics>

Our happiness (or lack thereof) is determined for us rather than being accepted by us. Groucho Marx put it this way: I, not events, have the power to make me happy or unhappy today. I can choose which it shall be. Yesterday is dead, tomorrow hasn't arrived yet. I have just one day, today, and I'm going to be happy in it. **(Groucho Marx)**

Psalm 84:5–7 (NRSV) Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

No one knows where the Valley of Baca is; it could be one of the valleys near Jerusalem that pilgrims had to go through to get to the Holy City. Perhaps this valley was full of balsam trees that would weep sap so that the valley came to be known as the valley of Baca (which could mean, “weeping”).

That is a literal approach, but the Psalms often speak in metaphor, and journeying through “the valley of weeping” calls to mind “the valley of the shadow of death.”

We know these valleys. We’ve been through them. Some of us are in them. How could we be happy in the valley of tears?

We can’t do it alone, but that is the message of the Psalm; that is the message that is repeated throughout the Bible. We can’t do it alone, and we don’t have to, because we are not alone! We are loved, and when we accept that as the central reality of our lives, *Psalm 84:5–7 (NRSV) Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion.*

Happiness is a choice; a choice to live by faith; a choice to believe that there is more to life and to our lives than simply our circumstances.

Martha Washington put it this way: I am determined to be cheerful and happy in whatever situation I may find myself. For I have learned that the greater part of our misery or unhappiness is determined not by our circumstance but by our disposition. **(Martha Washington)**

Are you happy? Would you like to be? God loves you, and when you accept that and choose to center your life in God’s love, you can be happy, even in the valley of tears.

2. Happiness – A Way of Life for Life through Life

Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace, and gratitude.
(Denis Waitley)

Happiness is a way of life for life through life; it's a choice we make, an opportunity we take as an act of faith in every moment of every day.

I once heard a story from the 1849 Gold Rush that teaches an important lesson about our search for happiness:

“Oftentimes we are like the young merchant from Boston, who in 1849, as the story goes, was caught up in the fervor of the California gold rush. He sold all of his possessions to seek his fortune in the California rivers, which he was told were filled with gold nuggets so big that one could hardly carry them. Day after endless day, the young man dipped his pan into the river and came up empty. His only reward was a growing pile of rocks.

Discouraged and broke, he was ready to quit until one day an old, experienced prospector said to him, “That’s quite a pile of rocks you are getting there, my boy.” The young man replied, “There’s no gold here. I’m going back home.” Walking over to the pile of rocks, the old prospector said, “Oh, there is gold all right. You just have to know where to find it.” He picked two rocks up in his hands and crashed them together. One of the rocks split open, revealing several flecks of gold sparkling in the sunlight. Noticing a bulging leather pouch fastened to the prospector’s waist, the young man said, “I’m looking for nuggets like the ones in your pouch, not just tiny flecks.”

The old prospector extended his pouch toward the young man, who looked inside, expecting to see several large nuggets. He was stunned to see that the pouch was filled with thousands of flecks of gold. The old prospector said, “Son, it seems to me you are so busy looking for large nuggets that you’re missing filling your pouch with these precious flecks of gold. The patient accumulation of these little flecks has brought me great wealth.”

So many people in life are like the young merchant, always after that great big elusive goal of “true happiness”? They search and search to find those things that will make them happy but always end up frustrated. They change jobs, change cars, or change spouses looking for that big gold nugget.

The truth is that happiness is found in small flecks all throughout our every day lives. Sometimes they are out in the open and sometimes they are buried within the mundane and boring rocks but they are there, all around us, if we only look for them. When we find them, it is important that we take time to savor each one.

Stop and enjoy the small and wonderful moments of life like playing with children, spending time with a loved one, enjoying a hobby or just taking a walk outside. As you do, you will begin to collect a bag full of joyful experiences that will add up to a happy life.

Happiness is an act of faith. Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace, and gratitude. **(Denis Waitley)**

Psalm 84:12 (NRSV) O LORD of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

God loves you, and when you accept that, trust that and choose to center your life in God's love, you can be truly happy. Amen.