



happiness 101

study guide for group or individual use

developed by Eternal Perspective Ministries

BASED ON THE DVD CLASS TAUGHT BY
RANDY ALCORN

contents

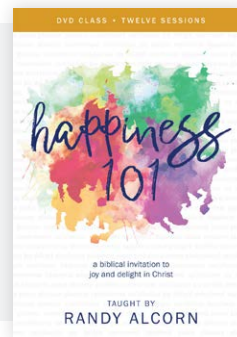
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NOTE FOR LEADERS

We recommend group members read the questions before viewing each session, as it may be helpful for them to write in their answers as they watch.

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For more resources related to Happiness 101, and to purchase additional DVDs and/or the digital download of the class, go to www.epm.org/happiness101.



eternal perspective ministries

with author Randy Alcorn

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pre-questions

Take this short quiz before you watch Randy's teaching. (You may find it interesting to compare these answers with the answers you'll provide to the same questions later, after completing the course.)

1. True or false: God wants us to be happy.
2. True or false: Happiness and joy are two different things.
3. True or false: God is more concerned about our holiness than He is about our happiness.
4. True or false: God is a happy God.
5. What does the term "blessed" bring to mind?

session one

1. Amy Carmichael, a missionary to India who experienced a great deal of hardship in her life, wrote, “There is nothing dreary or doubtful about this life. It is meant to be continually joyful...We are called to a settled happiness in the Lord whose joy is our strength.” Expand that phrase “settled happiness” in your own words. Give an example of a time you felt a *settled happiness*.
2. For some people, *happiness* has become a tarnished word because of how the world defines it and seeks it in sinful ways. Randy makes a distinction between “seeking” happiness in the world and “finding” happiness in the world. Why do you think he sees those as two different things?
3. Based on J. I. Packer’s statement that “Every Christian is a theologian,” Randy states we all have a “theology of happiness.” Write down your current *theology of happiness* in a few concise sentences.

4. Randy says, “Every person, all the time, is seeking to be happy.” If this assertion is true, list some of the implications. If you don’t agree, why not?

5. Some people say seeking or pursuing happiness is a problem. What does Randy say is the *real* problem? Why?

6. “It’s not that we talk too much about holiness. It’s that we don’t talk nearly enough about happiness.” Do you agree or disagree with Randy’s words? Explain.

7. What is your main take-away from Session 1?

One of the things Randy hopes will come out of these sessions is that seeing God at work in our lives and in His creation around us—being thankful moment by moment for His gifts to us—will give us reasons for happiness.

session two

1. What stood out to you about the parallelism between “joy” and “happiness” that Randy shares in the various English Bible translations?
2. “We’re sinners who sense we shouldn’t be sinners...we know something is profoundly wrong,” Randy says. Imagine the life Adam and Eve had in the Garden before they sinned. Describe that life in your own words. Do you think their life before the Fall was characterized by happiness? Why or why not?
3. Randy discusses “dead ends” we go down seeking happiness. What are some of the dead ends you or others you know have tried? Did you recognize them as dead ends when you first tried them? Why didn’t they satisfy?
4. Happiness can be used as a bridge to share Christ with unbelievers. Think of a non-believer you know and how you could use the concepts you’re learning about happiness to share the Good News with them. Write down your ideas, and make a specific plan to connect and share with that person soon.

5. “God is always calling us to what’s in our own best self-interest.” Do you agree or disagree with Randy’s statement? What Bible passages can you think of to back up your position?
6. Randy talks about the importance of having both *grace and truth* present in order for the church to be a happy and biblical place. In your experience, which one of those is more often left out of the picture? What can be done to keep them in balance?
7. What is your main take-away from Session 2?

Randy hopes one of the things that will come out of this series is that when we go to Scripture, we won’t make artificial distinctions between joy and happiness. Keep this in mind as you go through this course.

session three

1. Has your idea about rewards in Heaven changed after listening to Randy's thoughts on the subject? If so, in what way?
2. Randy shares the analogy of different size jars having varying capacities to help us understand the concept of people having more or less reward in Heaven. All are 100% saved and 100% happy. Some just have more capacity for rewards and happiness because of how they lived their lives on Earth. Is this analogy helpful to you? Why or why not?
3. Do you think joy is an emotion? Why or why not?
4. As he read secular books about happiness, Randy was often reminded of biblical principles and found himself writing Bible verses in the margins. What is one verse as biblical evidence for each of the eight factors in the Duke University study he cites?
 - a. Don't nurse a grudge:

b. Don't live in the past:

c. Cooperate with life instead of trying to run from it:

d. Stay involved with the living world; don't become a recluse in stressful times:

e. Don't indulge in self-pity:

f. Cultivate love, humor, compassion and loyalty:

g. Have realistic expectations:

h. Find something bigger to believe in; don't be self-centered or egotistical:

5. How can the temptation to sin derail you from finding your true happiness in God?

6. What is your main take-away from Session 3?

session four

1. How does Randy distinguish between “good news” and “good advice”? What significance does the distinction have?
2. Jerry Bridges wrote: “Preach the Gospel to yourself daily,” What is the purpose or benefit in doing that?
3. Charles Spurgeon said we’re to “adorn the Gospel by being happy.” What could that actually look like in your daily life?
4. Why is it so important to understand the balance between God’s displeasure (or unhappiness) towards sin, and His intrinsically happy nature?

5. A. W. Tozer wrote: "There is an enthusiasm in the Godhead" as He is "running the universe." Have you ever pictured God as "enthusiastic" before? What kinds of things can you imagine an enthusiastic God doing?
6. Randy says, "God is happy without being insensitive to our needs." How can you have that same balance with others you know who are experiencing difficulties? What does that look like?
7. There is evidence given throughout this session that God is happy. Do you agree with Randy? If so, how would you explain that to a friend?
8. What is your main take-away from Session 4?

session five

1. How does the doctrine of the Trinity contribute to your understanding of God's happiness and love?
2. What do you think it means to enter into our Master's happiness?
3. Charles Spurgeon said, "Man cannot please God without bringing himself a great deal of happiness." Does that sound a little self-serving to you? Why or why not?
4. Randy talks about taking delight in things that God delights in. List some of those things, with biblical evidence if possible. How can you cultivate your delight in those things?

5. Why does Randy consider it reassuring to realize God doesn't need us?

6. There's discussion in the church about whether Old Testament passages apply to us today. We must be careful to never take things out of context or claim promises to specific people in the Old Testament. However, Randy says we, as children of God, have things in common with the Israelites and the Old Testament was written for our benefit, too.

- Name an Old Testament promise that does *not* apply to you:

- Name several Old Testament promises that you're free to claim and enjoy:

7. What is your main take-away from Session 5?

session six

1. When we know a great deal about something, like a sport or hobby, we'll delight in it and long to spend time doing it. Randy used the example of his wife Nanci's knowledge of and delight in watching pro football. What specific things can you do to cultivate your *delight* and *excitement* in God?
2. The case is made that Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is the personification of the pre-incarnate Christ. What are your thoughts about this idea?
3. What should our answer be to "Who is the gladdest, happiest, most joyful human being who has ever lived?" How does Randy prove this from Scripture?

session seven

1. “We should not be unhappy people who are happy only occasionally, once in a while on our best days. We should be happy people—in God—who have setbacks, and disappointments, and face suffering and difficulty, yet even in them, who come to find a great joy and happiness in God.” What is your reaction to Randy’s statements?
2. Author William Morrice said, “Joy is more conspicuous in Christianity than in any other religion and in the Bible than in any other literature.” Think over what you know of other religions and other literature. Does Morrice’s statement surprise you? Why or why not?
3. What is a semantic domain? What is the importance of understanding them related to studying the Bible?
4. Regarding the various translations of the Bible, Randy says, “Different is not equivalent to contradictory.” Explain the significance of this statement.

session eight

1. In discussing the translation of the Beatitudes in English versions, Randy explains the best word to use for today's readers is "happy," not "blessed." Baptist Pastor John Broadus wrote that Jesus intended to shock His hearers. He asserted that the paradox of saying, "Happy are the mourners" is "really part of the meaning." If you insert the word "happy" instead of "blessed" into the Beatitudes, do you get more of a sense of shock from the passage? Why or why not?

2. Isaiah 25:6 says, "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined." Luke 12:37-38 also mentions the master of the house who seats his guests and serves them a meal. Randy says this kind of picture—God serving us—may be unthinkable to us, and yet it's true! Spend a few moments contemplating this meal, and God serving it to you. How does that make you feel?

In anticipation of the fulfillment of this promise, write a prayer of thanksgiving to God.

3. Jesus said those who hear God's Word and put it into practice are happy (Luke 11:28 CEB). Recount a time when you put God's Word into practice and were happy doing so.

session nine

1. Do you agree with Randy's statement: "The atheist cannot be happy without God"? Why or why not? How do you account for non-Christians who appear to live very happy lives?
2. Randy says, "Make Jesus your reference point, the lens through which you see all of life." What does that mean practically in your day-to-day living?
3. How would you explain the paradox that John the Baptist did not deny himself joy by putting Jesus first, but rather found joy by doing so?
4. a. What is the danger in telling people the Christian life is all ease and they'll never have trials if they accept Christ?

b. Where do you find the balance between that and the opposite danger of robbing people of the expectation of being happy when they come to know Christ?

5. What keeps you from experiencing joy in Christ and celebrating His work of redemption in your life? What could you do to change that?

6. Randy says something is wrong if we don't experience the joy of the indwelling Christ. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

7. What is your main take-away from Session 9?

session ten

1. Randy says we shouldn't sit back and wait for God to change us. Rather we should ask for His help to be more grateful, to be happier, etc. Have you experienced this to be an effective strategy in your own life? Jot down a few areas of your life you plan to ask God's help in to see more consistent growth.
2. "When you say 'thank you' more often, you become a more grateful person...Our words don't just express thoughts. Our words are capable of taking us further in a way of thinking." How would you apply what Randy said to the area of happiness?
3. Missionary David Brainerd said, "If you hope for happiness in the world, hope for it from God, and not from the world." What does it mean to you to hope for happiness in God?
4. Researcher Arthur Brooks said, "The key to happiness is to labor for the happiness of others." Name some acts of service you've done which brought you true happiness. How could you pursue godly happiness through future service?

5. Randy contrasts intrinsic and extrinsic goals. List some healthy intrinsic goals related to choosing happiness for yourself.
6. Give a personal example of what Randy calls the “contagiousness of happiness.”
7. Try the exercise Randy recommends. Write down the worst things and then the best things that have ever happened to you. Then look at the best list and consider, “How many of these things happened as a result of the worst things on the list?”
8. What is your main take-away from Session 10?

session eleven

1. Evangelist George Müller wrote that happiness is attained through the study of the Holy Scriptures. When you are prone to studying God's Word out of duty or have difficulty in maintaining the practice at all, what steps can you take to move towards Müller's perspective?
2. Some have argued church should be a positive place, and that confronting sin in church may make people feel uncomfortable or spoil their happiness. How does Randy counter that line of thinking?
3. Randy encourages us to find our happiness in the only place it can be found—in God. After that, happiness can be found in thousands of secondary places, all of which point back to God. Who is it that wants you to separate the happiness in these secondary things from their Source? What kinds of problems arise when you do?
4. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "It is sin to allow the past, which God has dealt with, to rob us of our joy." Do you struggle with hanging onto guilt from sins in your past? What steps can you take to think differently, and experience the happiness of forgiveness?

5. Pastor A. T. Pierson wrote, “The roads of duty and delight never are at odds with each other.” How would you clearly explain that to a child or teenager?
6. Randy spends time making the case that we don’t need to choose between holiness and happiness. For the Christian, they’re wedded together. Respond below to one or more of the quotes that stand out to you.
- a. Octavius Winslow said, “It is [God’s] aim...to increase our happiness by making us more holy... holiness is the root of all happiness.”
 - b. Anselm said, “Man...was made holy for this end, that he might be happy in enjoying God.”
 - c. Jonathan Edwards said, “...Those that are highest in holiness [are] necessarily highest in happiness (for holiness and happiness are all one in heaven).”
 - d. Charles Spurgeon said, “Holiness is the royal road to happiness.”

7. Have you ever witnessed—in yourself or someone else—a spirit of entitlement? Have you seen evidence that such a spirit will rob you of happiness, and God of glory? Explain.

8. What is your main take-away from Session 11?

session twelve

1. Randy discusses the idea that a “bucket list”—a list of experiences we hope to enjoy before we die—is unnecessary for Christians. On the New Earth, we’ll be able to delight in even better things than we can now imagine. Does this idea resonate with you?
 - If yes, create your own “post-bucket list”—things you want to do on the New Earth.

 - If not, why?
2. Randy submits that failing to meditate on Heaven’s happiness makes the gospel less attractive. What are some things that intrigue you about the happiness of Heaven? How could you capitalize on those things to become bolder in sharing your beliefs with unbelievers?
3. Physicist Stephen Hawking has written that Heaven is “a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.” How would you respond to him?

4. Reformer and martyr John Bradford wrote about death: “Therefore let us prepare ourselves accordingly, and, in misery and sorrow, be glad through hope.” Does thinking about your death depress you? How can you change your perspective to one of joyfully preparing for eternity?

5. Randy states that sin is the father of all misery. How have you seen that play out in your own life or in the world around you?

6. Theologian Paul Helm has said the believer in Heaven will be “reconstituted that he cannot sin. He doesn’t want to sin, and he does not want to want to sin.” Do you agree with Randy’s statement that he finds that idea “unbelievably liberating”? Why or why not?

7. Considering the example of Nanci’s grandparents who faced grave illness which necessitated adopting out several of their children, Randy speculates there may be great rewards for the hard things we experience in this life. How does that encourage you regarding difficulties in your own life?

8. What is your main take-away from Session 12?

post-questions

1. True or false: God wants us to be happy.
2. True or false: Happiness and joy are two different things.
3. True or false: God is more concerned about our holiness than He is about our happiness.
4. True or false: God is a happy God.
5. What does the term “blessed” bring to mind?

How do your answers now compare with your pre-question answers on page 3?

drawing things to a close

In the first session of this course Randy said, “Everyone has a theology of happiness. Is yours accurate, biblical, and consistent with church history?”

Write a paragraph or two explaining your theology of happiness based on what you’ve learned in this course.

going deeper

Here are additional questions from the original course syllabus. Use them to continue your study and discussion of happiness:

- What is happiness? Is it experiential or cognitive? Is happiness necessarily emotional? Why do we seek it? Where can it be found?

- Why is whether or not God is happy an important question? How would you persuade someone who disagrees with you?

- Is it “worldly” for a Christian to seek happiness? Is it a sinful desire or is it God-given? What causes evangelicals to frequently dismiss happiness-seeking as shallow, superficial and even ungodly?

- Do you believe Christians and non-Christians experience happiness differently? Why or why not? If so, in what ways is it different? (You may wish to develop the concepts of common and special or saving grace.)

- Is it appropriate for Christians to counsel one another to seek happiness? How should we encourage one another when it comes to seeking happiness in Christ?

- How would you help a suffering believer rejoice in Christ? Is it possible to be happy while in pain?

- Is holiness compatible with happiness? Why or why not?

- What is the most surprising thing you've learned about happiness? How has that affected you?

- How does a biblical understanding of happiness change a believer's walk with Christ?

- How can we obey the Bible’s command to delight ourselves in the Lord and rejoice in the Lord always?
- What are our biggest obstacles when it comes to finding happiness in God?
- How has the meaning of the English word “blessed” changed in the last 400 years? Do you think our popular Bible translations today accurately reflect the intent of the text by often translating *asher* and *makarios* as “blessed”?
- For the Christian, is happiness *always* a voluntary choice, *sometimes* a voluntary choice, or *never* a voluntary choice? Explain.
- Respond to three or more of the following statements:
 - *The people of God ought to be the happiest people in all the wide world! People should be coming to us constantly and asking the source of our joy and delight. — A. W. Tozer*

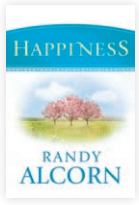
- *God made human beings, as He made His other creatures, to be happy...They are in their right element when they are happy. — Charles Spurgeon*
- *The beholding of God's happiness will increase the joy...to consider that he is so happy...those who shall see God, will...exceedingly rejoice in the happiness of God. — Jonathan Edwards*
- *My dear brothers and sisters, if anybody in the world ought to be happy, we are the people. ...How boundless our privileges! How brilliant our hopes! — Charles Spurgeon*
- *There is no use trying to be more spiritual than God. God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature...He likes matter. He invented it. — C. S. Lewis*
- *The God of salvation, the God of the covenant, is to be worshipped with joy. He is the happy God, and he loves happy worshippers. — Charles Spurgeon*
- *I wish we were brave enough to write in our Bibles, 'Happy,' instead of 'Blessed,' for that is the right translation. — G. Campbell Morgan*

- *If the solemnity and feasting of such a day as this should be the greatest matter of your joy, the day will have a night, and the feast an end, and so will your joy. But if heaven be the matter of your joy, you may go on in your rejoicing, and every day may be your festival. — Richard Baxter*
- *Where others see but the dawn coming over the hill, I see the soul of God shouting for joy. — William Blake*
- *There is a concurrence of all the persons of the Holy Trinity in the happiness of heaven: the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are equally the fountain of that eternal blessedness the saints enjoy. — William Bates*
- *True religion was never meant to make men melancholy. On the contrary, it was intended to increase real joy and happiness among men. — J. C. Ryle*
- *As long as that word [holiday] remains, it will always answer the ignorant slander which asserts that religion was opposed to human cheerfulness; that word will always assert that when a day is holy it should also be happy. — G. K. Chesterton*
- *When someone continually talks about how happy they are, I tend to doubt them; but when they talk about how grateful they are, I know they have found happiness. — Rob Hawkins*

- *Christian, meditate much on heaven, it will help thee to press on...This vale of tears is but the pathway to the better country: this world of woe is but the stepping-stone to a world of bliss. And, after death, what cometh? What wonder-world will open upon our astonished sight? – Charles Spurgeon*

list of additional resources

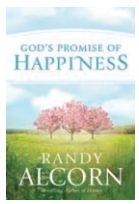
BOOKS AND PRODUCTS FROM RANDY ALCORN



Happiness

Randy Alcorn dispels centuries of misconceptions about happiness. The most definitive study on the subject of happiness to date, this book is a paradigm-shifting wake-up call for the church and Christians everywhere. *Also available on audio CDs.*

Learn more and read an excerpt at www.epm.org/happiness.



God's Promise of Happiness

This substantial little book is a 13,000 word sampling of the major topics covered in the larger *Happiness* book. Its pocket size and the question and answer format will make it a helpful tool in sharing the Gospel of Christ.

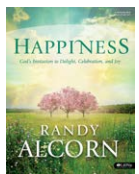
Learn more and read an excerpt at www.epm.org/promisehappiness



60 Days of Happiness

Randy Alcorn shares sixty timeless devotions demonstrating that God not only wants us to be happy in Him and enjoy His gifts, He commands and empowers us to do so.

Learn more and read an excerpt at www.epm.org/60days



Happiness Leader Kit

This kit includes a Bible Study Book, a copy of Randy's *Happiness* book, and 2 DVD-ROMs containing six 15- to 20-minute teaching sessions from Randy Alcorn introducing each session. (Additional Bible Study Books are available from EPM.)

Learn more and watch excerpts at www.epm.org/happineskit

See a complete list of Randy's books at www.epm.org/books.

RESOURCES ON THE EPM WEBSITE

Church leaders can find more resources on the topic of happiness at www.epm.org/happinesspastors.

There are many supplementary articles and audio and video resources related to happiness on EPM's website at www.epm.org/browse/happiness.



Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) is a Bible-believing, Christ-centered nonprofit organization, founded and directed by author Randy Alcorn, with two goals:

- to teach the principles of God’s Word, emphasizing an eternal viewpoint;
- to reach the needy in Christ’s name, calling attention to the needs of the unreached, unfed, unsupported, unborn, unreconciled, and untrained.

EPM is the recipient of the author royalties from Randy Alcorn’s books, and 100% are given away for ministry purposes: 90% to other worthy Christian organizations and 10% to EPM to help offset the costs related to the writing/researching/editing of the books, as well as to help facilitate the giving away of our books to people all over the world. We love the fact that God uses Randy’s books to change people’s lives in two ways: through the reading of his words and through the giving away of his royalties.


You can order all of Randy’s books and products through EPM’s online store at www.epm.org/store. (The EPM website also has many free resources, including articles, audio, video, pastors’ kits, and more.) When you purchase Randy’s books from EPM, the profits go directly to support the work of the ministry and fund our operating expenses.


Twice a year, EPM produces *Eternal Perspectives*, a full-color magazine. EPM also sends a periodic email newsletter with the latest news about Randy’s books, projects, and speaking events, as well as special promotions from EPM. You can subscribe at www.epm.org/subscribe.

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*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.
For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

– 2 Corinthians 4:18