

**Happiness is a Gift rather than a Goal
(You'll never get it by pursuing it)**

Matthew 25:14-30 A pastor took his kids to San Juan Capistrano on the southern California coast. There were many white doves there. He noticed that his children chased the doves, trying to catch one of them. They would slowly move up behind the doves, but just as soon as they reached out after one of them, it would fly away. He called his kids and said, "There's only one way to catch a dove. You must hold out your hand and wait. If you'll do that, the dove will come to you and sit in your hand." In a similar vein, many people today are chasing after happiness. Do they get it by chasing it? Is happiness something that is gained by making it a goal? There's much misunderstanding about what constitutes real happiness in life. According to the Bible, happiness is not so much something that is to be sought as caught, or received as a gift. It is the by-product of seeking something else. It is a fruit more than a root. If we seek to grow a tree of happiness, we'll probably end up with nothing but barren branches. However, if we plant the tree of God's will, we'll find fruit on each branch. Let's look at a Scripture that's not normally used as a guide to happiness. As we examine this text we have to ask, "Do we *get* it or is it *given*?" Jesus suggested four essentials for happiness in the parable of the talents. In this parable Jesus described a wealthy master who gave various amounts of money to servants to invest for him. Now here's the major point for discussion. What was the "pay" these men received for their work? Have you ever noticed it before? According to verses 19-23 their reward was "happiness." What does this parable suggest to us about happiness?

- **Happiness is willingness to go where we've not been before [Happiness is an adventure (Matt. 25:14-27)]**

 - Receiving happiness requires taking the risks necessary for growth [Fear of losing rarely leads to winning (Matt. 25:25)]
 - Happiness isn't found in just doing what we've always done [Going the same direction over and over creates a rut leading nowhere (Num. 14:26-35)]
 - *Why do we call Columbus' voyage an adventure rather a cruise?*
 - Happiness is willingness to go into the unexplored [There is always more about God and his will than we've already discovered (Gen. 12:1; Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; 20:22-24; Eph. 3:20-21)]

- **We find happiness by giving it to others [Happiness is healthy ambition (Matt. 25:16-17)]**

 - Happiness requires replacing greed with God and selfishness with service (Eccles. 5:10-11; 6:2; Prov. 16:18; Luke 12:15; Col. 3:5; Rev. 12:7-9)
 - The way to feel better about yourself is to serve everyone else [We don't get a better self image by always looking in the mirror (Matt. 6:19-24)]
 - The best prescription for health and happiness is helpfulness [Selfishness and happiness rarely co-exist in the same person (Matt. 16:25; Acts 20:35)]

- **We receive happiness by honoring our accountability to others [Happiness is accountability (Matt. 25:26-30)]**

 - The difference between laughing and crying is the distance between diligence and negligence (Matt. 25:21, 23, 30)
 - Love is caring enough for someone to hold them accountable for their decisions (Prov. 3:11-12; Amos 3:2; Rom. 14:8, 12; Heb. 12:5-11)

- **Happiness requires faithful obedience rather than successful "results" [Happiness is hearing God's affirmation (Ezek. 33:8-9; Matt. 25:25; 1 Cor. 4:2; Heb. 12:2)]**

 - God determines success by the willing effort rather than apparent effectiveness [The condition of the heart is more important than the accomplishments of the hand (2 Chron. 6:7-8)]
 - Happiness is doing God's will even when it hurts [Joy is not based on freedom from pain (Heb. 12:2)]
 - The only achievement we can promise to God is our faithfulness [The final audit examines our loyalty rather than our losses (2 Cor. 4:2)]