

Feelings: Happiness and Sorrow

“There is nothing better for a man than that he should . . . find enjoyment in his toil” (Ecclesiastes 2:24; RSV).

INTRODUCTION

Joy and pleasure, sorrow and pain are opposite feelings related to the state of the body and the spirit. Solomon mentioned many honorable sources of joy and pleasure. Most important is the happiness obtained through acquiring wisdom.

I. HAPPINESS AND THE EVERYDAY JOYS OF LIFE

Remember our common everyday sources of comfort. Of course they do not comprise the whole of life, but the Lord has provided them for us all to help compensate for the sorrows of existence in this world. These include: the satisfaction of our daily needs (see Ecclesiastes 3:12, 13; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7),

There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink. . . . (Ecclesiastes 2:24; KJV).

our work (see Ecclesiastes 3:13, 22; 5:18),

There is nothing better for a man than that he should . . . find enjoyment in his toil (Ecclesiastes 2:24; RSV).

our possessions (see Ecclesiastes 9:8),

Any man to whom God gives riches and property, and grants power to partake of them, so that he receives his lot and finds joy in the fruits of his toil, has a gift from God. For he will hardly dwell on the shortness of his life, because God lets him busy himself with the joy of his heart (Ecclesiastes 5:19, 20; NAB).

and our wives.

Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life, which he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun (Ecclesiastes 9:9; RSV).

Other sources of joy that Solomon mentions (which I quote under separate headings) include good words, wise children, successful achievement, various other physical comforts—indeed, all the fruits of righteousness are designed to bring us the kind of joy and happiness that the pleasure-seeking sinner cannot experience (see Ecclesiastes 2:26).

The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh (Proverbs 11:17; KJV).

II. SORROW AND THE COMMON STRUGGLES OF LIFE

There are senseless, wasteful forms of pleasure.

For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity (Ecclesiastes 7:6; KJV).

There are pleasures that eventually cause sorrow and lead to grief. These are the many different vices practiced by fools—those immediate pleasures which eventually add to the sorrows of the world and bring grief to those who indulge in them.

There are many sources of sorrow and pain. Indeed, this whole existence is a perpetual state of sorrow mixed with joy. Even the greatest of our pleasures are inevitably accompanied with some degree of discomfort.

Even in laughter the heart is sad, and the end of joy is grief (Proverbs 14:13; RSV).

And the more we “expand our consciousness” of reality, the more we experience sorrow. Remember these words:

For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow (Ecclesiastes 1:18; KJV).

Yet there is value in sorrow. It tends to make us more serious, and life is best taken seriously.

The wise do not let themselves forget that sorrow is a natural part of this life, and every man's earthly happiness ends in the tragedy of death.

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4; KJV).

CONCLUSION

Feelings of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, are used to promote wisdom and to encourage righteous living. Justly applied, they can be powerful and effective sources of feedback regarding the consequences of actions. But justice does not always prevail in this life, and sometimes the consequences of actions seem to reward sin and punish godliness, thus encouraging more evil.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil (Ecclesiastes 8:11; KJV).

The innocent often suffer with the guilty. Nevertheless, it is wise to reflect carefully upon one's life when many sorrows come, in order to see what may perhaps need correcting, because, recall, the Lord chastens those whom He loves.

In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider. . . . (Ecclesiastes 7:14; RSV).

The experiences of sorrow and joy are pervasive feelings and deeply personal.

The heart knows its own bitterness, and no outsider shares its joy (Proverbs 14:10; MOFFATT).

All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast (Proverbs 15:15; KJV).

Be gentle and sympathetic with the afflicted. Solomon said:

As one that taketh off a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon soda, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart (Proverbs 25:20; ASV).

And Paul said:

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15; RSV).

All of the things that bring joy and pleasure can be used to combat sorrow and pain; including drugs that anesthetize and sedate (intended for medicinal purposes).

Procure strong drink for a man about to perish, wine for the heart that is full of bitterness: let him drink and forget his misfortune, and remember his misery no more (Proverbs 31:6, 7; JB).

—Walter Porter

THOUGHTS ON WISDOM

"To all mankind He has given her in some measure, but in plenty to those who love Him."

The Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus 1:10

"Wisdom was first of all created things; intelligent purpose has been there from the beginning."

The Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus 1:4

"Wisdom shines bright and never fades; she is easily discerned by those who love her, and by those who seek her she is found."

The Apocrypha, Wisdom 6:12

"The true beginning of wisdom is the desire to learn."

The Apocrypha, Wisdom 6:17

"The intellect of the wise is like glass; it admits the light of heaven and reflects it."

Augustus William and Julius Charles Hare

"The wise know too well their weakness to assume infallibility; and he who knows most, knows best how little he knows."

Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*

"By wisdom wealth is won;
But riches purchased wisdom yet for none."

Bayard Taylor, *The Wisdom of Ali*

"The chief aim of wisdom is to enable one to bear with the stupidity of the ignorant."

Pope Xystus I, *The Ring*