

Hope for the uprooted woman



The Pursuit of Happiness by Ann Kelley

The year was 1989 and my little family of three—husband Doug, 4-year-old Jonathan, and me—made the move from the desert southwest where we'd lived all our lives to the green of the Pacific Northwest. Doug had just completed his Ph.D. and would be teaching at Seattle Pacific University and, after working to make ends meet during grad school years, I would be a stay-at-home mom. We were filled with anticipation and hope.

Cloudy days ahead

Seattle couldn't have been more different from Phoenix. Instead of the daily dose of sunshine and desert vistas that had defined my world for most of my life, I was hemmed in by hills and trees and what seemed like a constant ceiling of gray clouds and never-ending rain.

Doug enjoyed the excitement of the new job and the connection he was making with faculty and students. I was left on my own to figure out how Jonathan and I would spend our days. With ridiculously rabid hope I looked at every mom at the park, at church, or at the children's museum as a potential best friend. Forming friendships was tortuously slow and frustrating! (If only there had been an *After the Boxes Are Unpacked* book or class!)

Finally, one night after Doug came home from teaching, I began to describe the disappointments of my day and couldn't control the tears that began to flow. The tears became sobs as I hunted unsuccessfully for a tissue to wipe away the ugly snot. Eventually, I managed to choke out, "**I just want to be happy!**"

I'll never forget how hard it was to make a new life in Seattle. But, fortunately, I didn't stay in that unhappy place. Slowly, Doug and I found good friends who enriched our lives and have continued to be dear friends to this day, even though we eventually returned to Phoenix.

Life is hard when happiness is elusive. We've all been there. We've all longed to return to happier times. How can we respond when happiness doesn't come easily?

Researching this topic has been eye-opening for me.

I learned that **happiness isn't a feeling, but is a skill** that I can get better at. I learned that enjoyment, satisfaction, and purpose are essential for lasting happiness.

Practicing **gratitude** will add happiness to my life. Even if I can't think of anything to be grateful for, my *attempts* to be grateful increase the activity of the neurons in my brain that increase my sense of well-being!

I was inspired when I read about the "**Casserole-Toting Church Ladies...**" who, despite their smiles and seeming simplicity, had experienced all kinds of adversity and, yet, chose to persist in their faith and investment in others.

Plus, I registered for Mayo Clinic's free **Kindness Kickstart Program**. It turns out practicing **acts of kindness** makes us happier and benefits our overall health! This program has helped me become more aware of opportunities to show kindness to others AND to myself.

Send me your feedback and/or your stories as you take steps toward happiness!

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Bloom provides inspiration as you seek to grow and thrive

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The Three Elements of Happiness: enjoyment, satisfaction, and purpose

Harvard professor, social scientist, and author, Arthur Brooks, has researched and written extensively about happiness. His research has revealed that happiness is not a feeling, though feelings of joy and love can be present. Rather, happiness is a combination of three elements: enjoyment, satisfaction, purpose.

Enjoyment: Pleasure itself is fleeting and, especially when pursued as a solitary activity, can lead to addiction. But pleasurable experiences **while making memories with others** is the key to a sense of enjoyment. Creating or joining in pleasurable experiences with others requires time and effort.

Pleasure + people + memory = enjoyment

Satisfaction: Satisfaction is **the joy you get from accomplishing something you've worked for**. *Satisfied* is how you feel when you achieve something difficult, even painful, that was meaningful to you.

Desire + work + sacrifice = satisfaction

Purpose: We can make do without enjoyment for a while, and even get by with little satisfaction. But if we lack purpose we are utterly lost. Without it, we can't navigate life's inevitable challenges and crises. **When we do have a sense of purpose, we can face life with hope and inner peace.**

Meaning + hope + inner peace = purpose

"Arthur Brooks Build the Life You Want." *Richroll.Com*, uploaded by Rich Roll, 18 Sept. 2023, www.richroll.com/podcast/arthur-brooks-781.



Four Steps to Take When You Feel Unhappy

1. Ask what am I grateful for?

Feeling grateful activates the brain stem region that produces dopamine. Trying to think of things you are grateful for forces you to focus on the positive aspects of your life. This simple act also increases serotonin production. (Lack of enough serotonin can lead to depression and anxiety.) Not finding anything to be grateful for? Simply trying to identify things you're grateful for is enough to produce serotonin!

2. Label negative feelings

Trying not to feel something doesn't work, and in some cases even backfires. The bottom line: describe an emotion in just a word or two will help reduce the emotion.

3. Make a decision

Making decisions includes creating intentions and setting goals, reducing worry and anxiety. Make a "good enough" decision. Don't sweat making the absolute 100% best decision. Recognizing that good enough is good enough helps you feel more in control.

4. Touch people

One of the primary ways to release oxytocin is through touching. [Even] small touches like handshakes and pats on the back are okay. For people you're close with, make more of an effort to touch more often. A hug, especially a long one, releases oxytocin.

Conclusion

Everything is interconnected. **Gratitude** improves sleep. **Sleep** reduces pain. **Reduced pain** improves your mood. **Improved mood** reduces anxiety, which improves focus and planning. **Focus and planning** help with decision making. **Decision making** further reduces anxiety and improves enjoyment. **Enjoyment** gives you more to be grateful for, which keeps that loop of the upward spiral going. Enjoyment also makes it more likely you'll **exercise and be social**, which, in turn, will make you happier.

Korb, A. (2015) *The upward spiral: Using neuroscience to reverse the course of depression*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

The Casserole-Toting Church Ladies Hold the Secret to Happiness by Megan Hill

I found unexpected heroes—and a model for faithful living—in the elderly women

Several years ago, a small, aging congregation in our town shut its doors for the last time, and its members drove a few miles down the road to join our church. In a single Sunday, our congregation grew by half a dozen older women—we called them “the senior sisters”—who immediately proceeded to attend prayer meeting and assemble casseroles with unfailing regularity.

When I first encountered these women, I was like a character in one of Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple novels: I was charmed by the sweet, sweater-knitting exterior and failed to adequately appreciate the sharp mind and depth of discernment that lay beneath. Because these women showed up to church week after week wearing pearls and carrying peppermints in their purses, I assumed they had equally shiny spiritual experiences.

But, dear reader, it was I who was naïve.

The church ladies seemed just alike to me. They formed a repeated image in a church hall of mirrors—every hand holding a Bible, every face wearing a smile. But they were alike not because they were fake but because they were real. Their sameness (and deeper happiness) came not from sidestepping adversity or denying its existence but from meeting all kinds of adversity and persisting in the faith.

Over the years of worshipping alongside these women, I learned their stories. One woman had survived a car accident that killed her husband and left her the disabled single mother of two. Another had lost a child to cancer. One woman had suffered domestic abuse. Another spent her days caring for a husband with dementia. Altogether they had suffered illness, mistreatment, and the death of loved ones. They had

experienced trials that, for others, might have been the first page in a story of spiritual wandering.

In the church, too, they persevered. Over a lifetime of churchgoing in various places, they had at times been frustrated by the worship, offended by the members, and disappointed in the elders. And yet, here they still stood. They had worked and worshipped, suffered and yet rejoiced, asked God hard questions and searched diligently for his answer. They had stuck around. And out of their experiences emerged a single story: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (Eph. 4:4–6).

Likewise, we must never assume that someone who is happy is naïve, someone who is content must also be ignorant, and someone who is faithful just comes by it naturally. Do we want to overcome doubt and persist in the faith? We can learn how from the church ladies.

Perhaps the ordinary, faithful women in our churches also seem alike because they are so like someone else who is very familiar. They have been made like the one who was continually acquainted with grief, who was tempted in every way without sin, who joyfully did the will of the Father, and who—having loved his own—loved them to the end (Isa. 53:3, Heb. 4:15, John 4:34, John 13:1) In their week-by-week faithfulness, these church ladies have been conformed to the image of Jesus.

I want my story to be just like theirs.



Hill, Megan. “The Casserole-Toting Church Ladies Hold the Secret to Happiness.” *Christianity Today*, Aug. 2016.

Don't wait for things to get easier, simpler, better. Life will always be complicated. Look for small opportunities for happiness in the moment you are in right now. Otherwise, you might run out of time. We can't often choose our circumstances, but we can better control our reactions and emotions. Choose small moments of joy. —Anonymous



The Art of Kindness by Steve Siegle, Psy.D., L.P.C.

Kindness has been shown to increase self-esteem, empathy and compassion, and improve mood. It can decrease blood pressure and cortisol, a hormone directly correlated with stress levels. People who give of themselves in a balanced way also tend to be healthier and live longer.

Kindness can increase your sense of connectivity with others, decrease loneliness, combat low mood and improve relationships. It also can be contagious, encouraging others to join in with their own generous deeds.

Looking for ways to show kindness can give you something to focus on, especially if you are anxious or stressed in certain social situations.

Good for the mind

Physiologically, kindness can positively change your brain by boosting levels of serotonin and dopamine. These neurotransmitters produce feelings of satisfaction and well-being, and cause the pleasure and reward centers in your brain to light up. Endorphins, your body's natural painkiller, also may be released when you show kindness.

Take action

Start your day with this question: **"How am I going to practice kindness today?"** For a homework assignment, I have invited some patients to pay attention and periodically document their evidence of kindness to others and especially to themselves during the day. This positive focus is like planting positive seeds in your mind garden. Where focus goes, energy flows.

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Increase your awareness of opportunities to be kind. Check out Mayo Clinic's **Kickstart Kindness Program**:

www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/the-art-of-kindness

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