

Wednesday March 19, 2014

Secrets of success and happiness

By Jim Taylor

Do you want to be happy? Do you want to be successful? (Would anybody say they didn't want to be happy or successful?)

If so, you should recognize that happiness and success take two different paths. At least, so says Sonia Lyubomirsky, in her recent book, *The Myths of Happiness: What Should Make You Happy, but Doesn't; What Shouldn't Make You Happy, but Does*.

In brief, she suggests that happiness depends on saying Yes as often as possible; the secret to success is learning to when to say No.

Of course that's an overly simplistic formula. Saying Yes to everything won't leave you time to enjoy anything. But like all simplistic formulas, it contains a grain of truth. To mix my metaphors a little, take Sonia's advice with a grain of salt.

Saying Yes to opportunities – especially those that may lie slightly outside your comfort zone – leads to a greater range of experiences. A friend tells me that she has decided to try one thing outside her comfort zone, every week. She's learning to say Yes.

It stands to reason that if you keep saying No to everything that comes along, you're going to get stuck in a deep and lonely rut. Which is hardly a formula for happiness.

As an old saying goes, "At our deathbeds, we're more likely to regret the things we didn't do than the things we did."

When to say what

But remember that saying Yes may also mean saying No to doing things the same old way. Years ago, a youth group at our church created a banner. "The Seven Last Words of the Church," they suggested, were "We've Never Done It That Way Before."

That doesn't mean saying Yes indiscriminately. Armed robbery and hard drugs can have distinctly unhappy consequences. Without adequate training, so can sky-diving, rock climbing, scuba diving, and white-water kayaking.

Similarly with saying No.

Warren Buffett is reputed to have said, "The difference between successful people and very successful people is that very successful people say 'no' to almost everything."

They're not negative – they're just obsessive about their goals.

Author Malcolm Gladwell popularized the idea that experts have to put 10,000 hours into practicing their skill – whether that skill involves playing the cello or outsmarting the stock market. The only way to get those 10,000 hours is to say No to a lot of distractions.

The key is knowing when to say Yes and when to say No. Saying Yes to every extra-marital affair will lead to an unhappy marriage. Saying No to every financial risk will never make you another Warren Buffet.

How do you strike a balance? Know the difference between your goals. If your goal is success in a specific field, say No to everything that will distract you. If your goal is a full and happy life, say Yes as often as possible.

Protect the time you need for your priority; open up the rest of your time as much as possible.

To quote Sonia Lyubomirsky again, the happiest people seem to be "those fortunate folks who have little or no excess time, and yet seldom feel rushed."

They know when to say Yes, and when to say No.

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YOUR TURN

I have no letters to quote today (sob!). Three of you wrote about last week's column; Rafael Vallejo, Frieda Hogg, and Claudine Laforce, all said, in various words, that they really liked the column.

Frank Martens, however, took issue with my paraphrase of Psalm 121. He argued that I shouldn't credit God with preventing me from falling off a cliff, because, "One would hardly think that you would be dozing off when you are climbing in terrain that requires your full concentration. So, in effect, you are the one paying attention; you are the one making the decision where your next step will be."

Frank calls himself an atheist. He went on, "I do not expect someone else to protect me from my own foolishness. I thank Mother Nature for the good days and the bad. But I would never expect Her to save me from my own stupidity ..."

PSALM PARAPHRASES

When I read Psalm 95, the appointed psalm for Lent 3, I can't help thinking about the first dog Joan and I had. A small brown-and-white terrier cross, he always greeted our arrival with overflowing joy, even if we had been away for only a few minutes. I hope it's not sacrilegious to let a dog paraphrase a psalm.

1 We run to our Lord with glad little sounds of joy.

God is our hope, our strength.

2 We come before God with our whole beings quivering.

We have no words worth using;

We whimper with happiness.

3 For our God is great and good.

There is no one greater.

4 When God speaks, we would not dream of disobeying.

5 When God steps into the street, cars come to a standstill;

Flowers look up in their beds;

Weeds flee from lawns in fear.

6 So we pour ourselves out on the ground before God;

We lie down and shiver in ecstasy;

We leap into the air in delight.

7 For this great God is our God.

We belong to God;

We are pampered pets in God's household.

When God whistles, we come running.

8 But God issues a warning: "Do not test my patience.
9 Your associates knew my authority,
but still they tried to get their own way.
10 They obeyed me to my face," God says,
"But behind my back, they broke my rules.
11 So I banished them from my house.
From now on, they sleep in the doghouse."

For paraphrases of most of the psalms used by the RCL, you can order my book *Everyday Psalms* from Wood Lake Publications, info@woodlake.com.

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to jimt@quixotic.ca. Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, www.seemslkegod.org;
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, www.traditionaliconoclast.com
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.

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I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at jimt@quixotic.ca, or send a note to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca
