

Happy?

By Bob Young

Are you really happy? It's a question that has crossed all of our minds. How can I measure my happiness? What makes me happy? Am I happy right now? I am passionate about my life—I rejoice in the things I am able to do. I love family and friends, or at least the ones that are a part of my small circle. My faith is at the core of my being. I appreciate the little things in life: a colorful sunrise, a rainy day, the color of fall, my morning coffee, a song that sparks a memory, the laughter of children — especially my grandchildren. These little things make me happy. But is that really enough to declare myself happy?

I have been intrigued by the study of Blue Zones—those places on earth where people live longer than normal. But don't happy people live longer than unhappy people? Is there a "happiness blue zone"? Dan Buettner, author of *Thrive: Finding Happiness the Blue Zones Way*, thinks so. According to Buettner, six areas of life are important to happiness: home, self, finances, social life, work, and community. Each area contributes to our overall well-being or lack thereof. This list is not surprising—it parallels a fairly standard listing of the major areas of life.¹ How I view and experience family, self, things, others, accomplishment, and community has a major impact on my perceptions and my happiness. While "happiness is in the eye of the beholder" in some sense, it is also possible that some of the ingredients of happiness are more readily available in some places than in others. The surroundings of one's life, volunteering time, connecting in a faith-based community, socializing regularly, having a fulfilling job with tasks, roles and responsibilities that one sees as significant, and enjoying one's family connections are all important factors in finding happiness. Here is my list:

Self: keep myself sharp mentally, physically, emotionally

Spiritual: strengthen my spiritual life and stay connected with others with like interests in spiritual things, both locally and globally

Family: continue to value, strengthen, and enjoy family ties; do not take my spouse or others in the family for granted; seek times to share life and relish the moments

Finances: spend money on things that matter, value experiences and not things

Accomplishments (past): review my life so that I can see it clearly and identify the things accomplished that made a difference

Accomplishments (present): especially in a life stage where regular, full-time employment is not a part of life, do little things regularly that give me a sense of accomplishment, e.g. house maintenance and projects, gardening, exercise, reading and writing are among my favorites.

Current activities: continue to do what no one else can do, or what others are unlikely to do, especially in areas of ministry and mission.

And what are you going to do to live a happier life?

¹ The parallel is not perfect, but one can identify similarities. One list I use frequently includes the following life areas: economic; spiritual; emotional; physical; mental, and social—including family, friends, and community.