

HAPPINESS

Today is designated by the United Nations as the International Day of Happiness. People around the world are being encouraged to reflect on the meaning of happiness.

It's a universal desire, and you might think that we humans would have worked out the "*happiness factor*" by now. Yet for many people it remains elusive. We have never been richer in our part of the world – but we are not necessarily any happier as people, when compared to previous generations.

One of the biggest mistakes we make is to imagine that material things will bring happiness our way.

Consumer societies such as ours depend on dissatisfaction. As long as we feel we're never rich enough, never beautiful enough, never good enough, and never with enough "stuff", we set ourselves up for trouble.

For example, the pleasure we get from a new purchase is short-lived - whether it's a new dress, a new car, or a new kitchen.

Visiting Glasgow recently, Professor David Myers of Hope College, Michigan stated that; "*happiness is less a matter of getting what we want than wanting what we have.*"

A few years ago a friend sent me a card with a cartoon picture of the Dalai Lama opening the present that his fellow monks have given him for his birthday. His face is sporting a wide grin. The box is completely empty. "*Nothing!*" he exclaims happily, "*– just what I always wanted!*"

On one level that's a sad scene. Imagine getting an empty box for your birthday! But on another level there is a deep truth here. Real happiness is not about how much material stuff we have in our lives.

Sociologists and modern day statistics confirm what wise religious teachers have always been saying.

Happiness is not about getting more - it's about being content with what we have. It's not about speeding up – it's about slowing down. It's not about external rewards – it's about having a sense of our value as a person.

Jesus said, "*Life is not defined by what you have – even when you have a lot!*"

Being accepting of our own intrinsic worth, being grateful for what we have, realising that life is about more than just "me", having meaningful relationships with others, following a spiritual path and pursuing a dream, are all better pointers to happiness than all the "**stuff**" in the world.

David McLachlan
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