



Includes  
*What's Your  
Happiness  
Style?*  
assessment!



the  
happiness  
dare

"If you've ever wondered  
if God really cares  
about your happiness,  
this book is for you."

**Lysa TerKeurst**

*New York Times* bestselling author

JENNIFER DUKES LEE

If you've ever wondered if God really cares about your happiness, this book is for you. Within these pages, Jennifer shows us how to live out a "holy pursuit of happiness" and personalizes this with an eye-opening assessment you can take to find out what happiness style you naturally flourish in. I can't say enough good things about *The Happiness Dare!*

**LYSA TERKEURST**

*New York Times* bestselling author and president of Proverbs 31 Ministries

Jennifer Dukes Lee's insightful and engaging words share not only the *how* of happiness but also the *heart* of it. More than just helpful information, *The Happiness Dare* lays out a path to spiritual and emotional transformation. As someone for whom happiness doesn't come naturally or easily, I wish I'd had this book years ago.

**HOLLEY GERTH**

*Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of *You're Already Amazing*

Jennifer grabbed my attention on every page with her thoughtful and thought-provoking words on what happiness looks and feels like. This book will inspire you to let your guard down so you'll be empowered to experience the life-changing and God-given happiness found throughout every season and circumstance.

**MELISSA MICHAELS**

*New York Times* bestselling author of *Love the Home You Have* and *The Inspired Room*

I was *so* blessed and challenged by reading this book. It spoke to me at a deep level and inspired me to embark on my own Happiness Dare! Thank you, Jennifer, for inspiring us all to boycott cynicism and wring the delight out of the ordinary days.

**CRYSTAL PAINE**

*New York Times* bestselling author and founder of MoneySavingMom.com

In all of our striving for happiness, could it really be that God wants us to be happy too? In *The Happiness Dare*, Jennifer Dukes Lee helps us discover a truth a lot of us have been missing and dares us to boldly walk in the freedom God intended for us all along. I absolutely loved this book!

**RUTH SCHWENK**

Founder of TheBetterMom.com; author of *Hoodwinked* and *Pressing Pause*

In *The Happiness Dare*, Jennifer invites every kind of reader to find happiness and the God who created it. She not only reveals

the beautifully biblical case for “happy holiness,” but she invites us beyond theory and into the living.

**SARA HAGERTY**

*Author of Every Bitter Thing Is Sweet*

Happiness—it’s that elusive destination our culture seeks at all costs. And often when we finally grasp the slippery emotion, it’s fleeting. In *The Happiness Dare*, Jennifer unpacks the journey to a truly happy life found in Christ instead of our feelings. It’s practical, it’s encouraging, it’s a dare we should all take! I highly recommend this book.

**KRISTEN WELCH**

*Author of Rhinestone Jesus and Raising Grateful Kids in an Entitled World*

*The Happiness Dare* is so much more than a book. Jennifer has created an insightful, fun, wise, and encouraging life-guide to help us become the best version of ourselves by living in our God-given sweet spot. Packed with powerful stories, tools, and everything you need to discover your personal happiness style, you’re in for a treat. Get rid of the guilt and get ready to enjoy the way God made you!

**RENEE SWOPE**

*Bestselling author of A Confident Heart*

With her familiar warmth and wisdom, Jennifer Dukes Lee has written a captivating book that will transform the way you think about happiness. Combining biblical truth and brilliant storytelling, she answers all of the questions I have privately wondered about happiness, revealing how it beautifully intersects with joy and holiness in the Christian life. You don’t want to miss *The Happiness Dare*. It will have you doing your own happy dance.

**JEANNIE CUNNION**

*Author of Parenting the Wholehearted Child*

As I read *The Happiness Dare*, I kept repeating one sentence to myself about its author: *Wow, she really gets me.* Jennifer is a most insightful and trustworthy writer, and I connected with this book in a way I’ve connected with few others. Not only is *The Happiness Dare* the best kind of medicine for any woman who fears happiness is unattainable or unholy; reading it is just plain *fun*. Pick up this engaging book and discover your own sweet spot of happiness: where your earthly pleasure meets heavenly joy.

**KRISTEN STRONG**

*Author of Girl Meets Change*

the  
happiest  
dare

Pursuing your heart's deepest, holiest,  
and most vulnerable desire

JENNIFER DUKES LEE



TYNDALE<sup>®</sup>  
MOMENTUM

*An Imprint of  
Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.*

Visit Tyndale online at [www.tyndale.com](http://www.tyndale.com).

Visit Tyndale Momentum online at [www.tyndalemomentum.com](http://www.tyndalemomentum.com).

Visit the author at [jenniferdukeslee.com](http://jenniferdukeslee.com).

*Tyndale Momentum* and the Tyndale Momentum logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Tyndale Momentum is an imprint of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois.

*The Happiness Dare: Pursuing Your Heart's Deepest, Holiest, and Most Vulnerable Desire*

Copyright © 2016 by Jennifer Dukes Lee. All rights reserved.

Cover and interior images are the property of their respective copyright holders and all rights are reserved. Peppermints copyright © pixelrobot/Dollar Photo Club. Wrapped candy copyright © torsakarin/Dollar Photo Club. Fruit candy copyright © Oleksandr Kovalchuk/Dollar Photo Club. Candy border copyright © Palabra/Adobe Stock. Dotted radial copyright © rfvectors.com/Adobe Stock. Candy corn and ribbon candy copyright © Pamela D. McAdams/Adobe Stock. Ribbon copyright © lessnik/Adobe Stock. Carrot copyright © ggroup/Adobe Stock. Checklist icon copyright © skarin/Adobe Stock. Communication icon copyright © pixelalex/Adobe Stock. Shoe icon copyright © nexusby/Adobe Stock. Gift icon copyright © vector icon/Adobe Stock. Book icon copyright © rashadashurov/Adobe Stock. Gummy bear border copyright © andersphoto/Adobe Stock. Peppermint candy frame copyright © bulentmut/Adobe Stock. Jelly beans copyright © silverspiralarts/Adobe Stock. Post-it copyright © haller/Adobe Stock. Sprinkles copyright © Pamela Uytendaele/Adobe Stock. Confetti sprinkles copyright © maksim\_/Adobe Stock.

Author photograph copyright © 2015 by Erica Locke. All rights reserved.

Designed by Nicole Grimes

Published in association with the literary agency of William K. Jensen Literary Agency, 119 Bampton Court, Eugene, OR 97404.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,<sup>®</sup> *NIV*.<sup>®</sup> Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.<sup>®</sup> Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked CEV are taken from the Contemporary English Version, copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version<sup>®</sup> (ESV<sup>®</sup>), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked GNT are taken from the Good News Translation in Today's English Version, Second Edition, copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version. Scripture quotations marked TLB are taken from *The Living Bible*, copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NCV are taken from the New Century Version.<sup>®</sup> Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *THE MESSAGE* by Eugene H. Peterson, copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible,<sup>®</sup> copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Lee, Jennifer Dukes, author.

Title: The happiness dare : pursuing your heart's deepest, holiest, and most vulnerable desire / Jennifer Dukes Lee.

Description: Carol Stream, IL : Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016013248 | ISBN 9781496411143 (sc)

Subjects: LCSH: Christian women—Religious life. | Happiness—Religious aspects—Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4527 .L445 2016 | DDC 248.8/43—dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016013248>

Printed in the United States of America

22	21	20	19	18	17	16
7	6	5	4	3	2	1



# Contents



INTRODUCTION: The Confession of a Happy Woman .....	ix
---	----

## *Part 1: You Have Permission*

CHAPTER 1 Stalking Happiness .....	3
CHAPTER 2 The Holy Pursuit of Happiness .....	21
CHAPTER 3 The Happiness Dare .....	35

## *Part 2: You Have a Style*

CHAPTER 4 The Importance of Finding Your Happiness Style ....	53
CHAPTER 5 The Doer .....	73
CHAPTER 6 The Relater .....	91
CHAPTER 7 The Experienter .....	111
CHAPTER 8 The Giver .....	133
CHAPTER 9 The Thinker .....	153

## *Part 3: You Have a Choice*

CHAPTER 10 Five Minutes to a Happier You .....	175
CHAPTER 11 The Principle of Small Daily Gains .....	193
CHAPTER 12 The Principle of Good Enough .....	209
CHAPTER 13 The Principle of Putting Up Your Dukes .....	225
CHAPTER 14 The Principle of the Head-to-Foot Alleluia .....	243
CHAPTER 15 The Happiness Cycle .....	263

What's Your Happiness Style? .....	269
------------------------------------	-----

Acknowledgments.....	279
----------------------	-----

Notes .....	283
-------------	-----

About the Author .....	290
------------------------	-----





## INTRODUCTION

# *The Confession of a Flappy Woman*



This book scares me.

I know how crazy that probably sounds to you. This is a book about happiness, after all. Surely as you peeled open the first pages of this book, you expected to read a happy story about a happy woman who holds all the secrets to a happy life.

But instead you find me, a woman in knots.

Let me begin by setting the record straight.

Am I a happy woman? Yes. Most of the time, I am a genuinely happy woman. You are far more likely to see me with a smile than with a scowl. Science tells us that people are born with a “happiness set point.” That baseline is written into our genes. Some of us start with higher set points than others. If something good happens, our happiness rises. If something awful happens, our happiness plummets. But after a while, our mood generally inches its way back to our personal genetic set point.

Genetically speaking, my happiness point is set to sunny. But I am more than a happy woman. I am a person who lives—as Ron Burgundy famously said in *Anchorman*—“in a glass case

of emotion.” I’m hopelessly human, which makes me terribly, wonderfully complicated.

In the last several days, a whole range of emotions has surged through me—anger, elation, despair, hilarity, guilt, and confusion. I have lost my cool with my kids, laughed so hard my belly hurt, become impatient in traffic, and experienced an all-out bawlfest during a commercial where a loving father makes origami cranes out of gum wrappers for his daughter.

I have repeatedly been described as a “passionate” woman. Which means I seriously have *all the feelings*. As I am writing these words, the emotion *du jour* is fear. That’s because, of all the feelings I’ve ever felt, happiness is the hardest to wrap words around.

I’m scared to write a book about happiness because I know what a disaster I can be some days. Will you find me credible? Will I sound too perky—or too morose? I want to show you the messy me, the unhappy me, in the pages ahead. But will you wonder whether the sad me can lead you to a happy place? And during your own very worst day, will you get annoyed by the happy-clappy me if you meet her on a page? (If you’ve read my first book, *Love Idol*, you know that I’ve always battled my need for your approval, so I’ve dragged that aggravating little aspect of my personality straight into the opening pages of this book.)

Right now, I’m sitting inside a little cabin in northern Minnesota. To me, this is one of the happiest places on earth. Our family comes here at least once every summer to find peace and solace among the loons and the pine-scented air. Writing from this place, I would like to present you with a carefully constructed portrait of a pious, perfect happiness. See me, napping

in a hammock after committing various Bible verses to memory. Watch me, paddle boating with the kids and winking flirtatiously at my husband. I am always with a smile, patient and tolerant of my children squabbling. In this portrait, there are no biting flies or sunburns or ruffled feelings. Of course, all of that is a misleading, incomplete picture. Can I show you more?

Last night, right here in this happy northwoods cabin, I went to bed in tears. I heard a loon crying outside my window, a haunting echo across the lake. The nearly full moon hung overhead, sprinkling diamonds of light across rippled water. I pressed my face into the pillow.

Just before bed, my husband, Scott, and I had a stupid fight. We tangled with words. It was a ridiculous argument, but it broke the irascible me open, and that spitfire passion I told you about shot out of my guts and onto the plaid comforter. I was a human volcano, the opposite of happy. I woke up this morning with yet another emotion: remorse. (And about an hour ago, I got up the nerve to apologize; therein one finds the emotion called “being humbled.”)

How can this woman—mildly deranged when provoked and prone to lose her hinges—tell you what happy looks like? Can I write only on the days when my claws have retracted? Is someone perpetually sweet and affable more suited for this task? Even so, I cannot keep this to myself. You see, I took one fantastic dare. That wild dare made me feel new and warm and bright on the inside, like I swallowed a star.

So, hi, here I am—your new friend, tapping out words and embarrassingly feeling all the feelings right in front of you. A friend told me the other day that it was okay to let you know I was scared. “The last person they want to hear from is someone

who has it all together.” Well, then. Mission accomplished. This is me—glitchy, imperfect me.

I decided to trust my friend, and that’s why this book begins with a confession. You needed to know, at the starting line, that the Happiness Dare is one thrilling ride that changed me a lot—but it still scares me a little. Because maybe? This dare will scare you a little too.

PART 1

*You Have Permission*

In this section of *The Happiness Dare*, we will:

Discover why happiness is such a vulnerable  
and scary emotion

---

Learn the true relationship between  
happiness and holiness

---

Find out how happiness relates to joy

---

Rediscover that God is the inventor of happiness  
and that he shamelessly entices us to chase after it

---

Take a dare that will change our lives . . .  
and our world



## CHAPTER 1

# *Stalking Happiness*



*It was when I was happiest that I longed most. . . .  
The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing. . . .  
to find the place where all the beauty came from.*

C. S. LEWIS

For most of my life, I considered myself a happy person—not the kind of woman who claps with giddy delight over her breakfast waffles, but the kind of woman who makes regular use of her grin.

I grew up in a happy home with two parents who loved me. My life wasn't perfect, but I was exceedingly blessed. Mom and Dad took us every Sunday morning to the brick-front Methodist church, which sat a block away from our home. Sunday afternoons were spent with the radio tuned to 94.5 FM for Casey Kasem's *American Top 40*.

There were countless games of tag and Ghost in the Graveyard. My hair was held firmly in place by Aqua Net, and I kept my limbs cozy inside of leg warmers. The town library was three blocks from my front door, and we were permitted

to climb onto the roof of our house to read our books. I slid every morning down a wooden banister. My mom was the town prankster—every summer she planted a plastic tomato in the neighbors' garden, giving them the false hope of the town's first crop. Dad drove a silver Mercury and taught us about hard work and loyalty. He worked for the same farmers' co-op for all of my growing-up years. A banana-seat bike carted me a good many miles around my hometown. My cat answered to Garfield.

We didn't have air-conditioning, but that meant I fell asleep on May nights with windows cracked open wide enough for the rain and lilacs to sneak in on a fragrant ribbon, floating under my nose during dreams.

But there were hard days too—a tapestry of funerals, break-ups, surgeries, and teenage counseling appointments for my anxiety. I still have the cassette tapes my therapist used to try and hypnotize me into a better frame of mind. But even then, I had it in me solid to believe that life was generally good, and that it was all going to work out in the end.

As an adult, I've seen life mostly through the same rose-colored lenses. To me, the proverbial glass has usually been half-full. Sure, there have been hard seasons. I could spend whole chapters telling you about the mess of my marriage in the early years, Scott's and my dual workaholism, and a long stretch of postpartum depression after our daughter Anna was born. I took a little yellow pill to keep me level. But even during those inevitable times when the glass looked half-empty, I was always thankful that I had a glass—and that there was something in it.

Then I entered middle adulthood. I held the same glass as before, but it felt like the contents were leaking through a hole I couldn't find. I had fallen into a bland malaise—me, a chronic



Eeyore—but not for any one particular reason. I wasn't exactly despairing, but I knew I wasn't as happy as I could be. I wondered if maybe this was what people called a midlife crisis. I wasn't sure.

There were legitimate reasons for my sludgy feelings. I had entered a season of protracted loneliness. My husband's dad, Paul, became sick with leukemia and then died within the year, leaving a hole in our hearts. My husband scrambled to figure out how to farm seven hundred acres of land on his own. Four days before Paul died, a car flew into my lane on an icy highway, crashing into my van. I was grateful to have survived, but I ended up with a wound that took six months to heal. The whole ordeal caused me to consider how fragile life was—and how quickly mine was passing by. I began to rethink my life's purpose, my plans, and whether I was living the life God wanted for me.

You know how it goes: In one skinny minute, a crisis can grow out of nowhere to devour your happiness. All over the planet, right this instant, happiness is being snatched away by a tumor with long fingers, by a spouse with stubborn addictions, or by a coworker with a mean streak who makes the office feel like a hike through the Mojave Desert—while wearing stilettos.

But sometimes it's the little irritations that chisel away at your joy: Your jeans don't fit like they used to. You miss your flight. You lose your cool. You burn the pizza. You sell out. You think un-Christian thoughts in church. One kid kicks the other in the shins, and your own personal meltdown makes theirs look like an English tea party. Your favorite show is canceled. Someone you care about doesn't invite you. You shrink your favorite T-shirt. You envy how everyone else seems to be finding the secret to a happy life—and how it comes so naturally to

them, with perfectly plated suppers and exotic beach vacations. You experience guilt when you live the opposite of what you preach to your kids—hypothetically speaking, of course. All of it makes you feel shadowy on the inside, not exactly like the person you want to be.

During my own gloomy season, questions clinked around in my insides, like ice against glass, about the meaning of life. Was Solomon—the king with enough status and wealth to seek happiness in every earthly pleasure imaginable—right? Was it all “Meaningless! Meaningless!”<sup>1</sup>

As I asked these questions, I was certain that my life wasn’t bearing the fruit of happiness like it could. And I wondered if part of the problem was my misinterpretation of what it meant to live happily in Jesus. I knew what the Bible said about picking up my cross and walking the narrow way home. When Jesus came again, I was pretty sure he’d rather find me suffering for him than swinging merrily from the rafters. Yet in my wearying efforts at lugging around my piety, I felt like I was missing something crucial.

My life was—statistically speaking—half over, and I was afraid I had been sleepwalking through it. My productivity would tell you otherwise. My productivity would tell you I was a *machine*. I was operating as if my worth—and my happiness—could be calculated in efficiencies, proficiencies, boxes checked, and ladders climbed. Ask me to serve on your committee, and I would shout, “Yes!” You needed someone to take the lead? You could count on me! Who needed sleep? I could sleep when I was dead.

Night after night, I awoke to see the clock staring back at me:  
2:28 a.m.

3:19 a.m.

4:25 a.m.

During those hours, I would roll over to stare across the darkened room. The trees, illuminated by the outdoor lamp-light, cast lacy shadows that shuffled across the wall next to the metal cross. My mind replayed events of the day previous. When I was done with yesterday's missteps and mistakes, I would fixate on the worst-case scenarios of tomorrow.

I'd quickly remind myself that life was too short to fret like this. I even knew the Bible verses that said so. I'll bet you have them underlined too. "Do not worry about tomorrow." "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."<sup>2</sup> Those were the kinds of verses I shared with people nearly every day on my blog and social-media pages. Before I ever write a message quoting Scripture to my readers, you can be fairly certain that I have preached the same words to the most bankrupt parts of myself. A lot of that preaching happened in the dark hours at the Church of St. Mattress.

I didn't want my tombstone to read, "Here lies a woman who had great intentions but lived with deep regret." Also? I wanted to have more fun before I was in said grave, taking—as my mother would say—my "dirt nap." I wanted to be a woman who lived joyfully until I drew my last breath.

My self-affirming pep talks generally lulled me back to sleep, with my peace temporarily intact and my resolve strengthened. But by morning, my inner crazy was coming in through the back door of my brain. Before 9:00 a.m., I found myself barking orders at the girls, bemoaning my deadlines, and deepening the crease on my forehead. My disordered thoughts robbed me of the ability to enjoy life, despite the innumerable blessings I'd been given: a

good man, two beautiful girls, health, a roof over my head, and a church family. Yet I was missing my life. I was missing God.

At night, I'd fall back asleep, trees waving outside in the breeze, only to wake up again with those alarm-clock numbers staring back at me as I quoted verses, made promises, and vowed again that tomorrow would be different.

I had lost the fullness of my happiness and I didn't know where to find it. What I'm going to tell you next might sound a little crazy, but it's the truth: During those times of unhappiness, my great comfort came in believing that God didn't care about happiness anyway. My great comfort came in believing that God cared more about my holiness. So I figured, *If I can't be happy, I'm still good with God.* My holiness, then, became an excuse to stop seeking happiness.

This is a tragic error of Christians everywhere. Welcome to the atrophy of the human soul. But this is where some of us are right now. We are highly suspicious of happiness. We really *do* want to be happy—secretly of course—but we'll tell everyone else it's joy we want. Because isn't joy the holier aim? Isn't happiness against the rules?

Some of us may believe that we have to pick one or the other: happiness or Jesus. During my gray days, I didn't know yet that there was a third option: happy holiness. When I discovered happy holiness, it felt like fireworks were going off inside my chest. I had come to understand this truth: Our inner desire for happiness isn't a sin. It's a desire planted in us by God himself.

Yes, you read that right: happiness. Not the reverse of joy. Not the opposite of holiness. But authentic happiness, found in Jesus.

## What We're All After

We've just met, but there's something I know about you. You want to be happy too.

How can I be so sure of that? Over thousands of years, people have craved it, sung about it, prayed for it, and wished upon the shimmering stars for it: happiness. It's the underline of every New Year's resolution, the reason behind every diet, the hope underneath every "I do" at the altar. Happiness is the aim of every human—from the free-wheeling squanderer to the most saintly woman under your church steeple.

You and I just want to be happy.

I don't know one person in my life who prefers an unhappy marriage to a happy one; an unhappy heart to a happy one; an unhappy workplace; or unhappy kids. I don't know a sane soul who would dare say, "I wish I wasn't so happy."

Blaise Pascal wrote it more bluntly:

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Yikes to the hanging part. But still. It's this longing for happiness that drives us. It's the core motivation behind the colleges we pick, the career paths we choose, the clubs we join, the friends we associate with, the people we marry, even the

sacrifices we make for others. We might call it purpose, contentment, peace, joy—but if Pascal and dozens of other philosophers are right, we are motivated by what we think will create more happiness for ourselves and for those we love.

But this happiness we seek is not a wimpy emotion. Happiness has been advertised as some kittenish, fluffy feeling. In reality, happiness can make your heart race with excitement—and sometimes with a bit of fear. Because on our happiest days, we are worried it won't last. My husband and I will go long stretches of argue-free days—and not just argue-free days, but truly happy and blissful days, days when I thank the good Lord for giving me the man I have. He's so precious to me. But on those days, I'm also scared to live into the fullness of my happiness. I hold back my enthusiasm, an emotional tempering, because I'm afraid of what's ahead.

Quarrels like the one we had in the northwoods remind me that the future is always ticking toward the inevitable argument and the forgiveness that will surely need to be asked for. Even worse, we know happiness can be fleeting because trouble awaits us all.

“In this world you will have trouble,”<sup>4</sup> Jesus said.

Not “might.”

Not “if you're especially naughty.”

Not “probably.”

Jesus said you *will* have trouble. As a result, happiness leaves us vulnerable.

### **Why Happiness Is a Vulnerable Desire**

Happiness is a vulnerable desire because crisis is an absolute guarantee.

We all know we might be one phone call, one diagnosis, or one fight away from losing what feels so good right now. How can I live with extravagant happiness today if the remote possibility exists that one of my two girls has a yet-undetected terminal illness? I can't tell you how many times I've gotten up at 3:00 a.m., playing out worst-case scenarios that are not likely to ever unfold.

But the truth is, my worst nightmares are someone's present reality. What right do I have to be happy in a busted-up world where people are weeping over graves right this second?

If we are in a season of great blessing, we might feel guilty for it when we look around at a warped world filled with pain. Dare I be happy when people are starving, dying, or running for their lives from terrorists?

Furthermore, if God wants us to be happy, what does that say about us when we are unhappy? If we are not happy today, does that mean that we are doing something wrong? If God wants us to be happy and we are just not "feeling it" for a day, or for a whole season, does that mean we've been found disobedient to an all-seeing God?

If God wants people to be happy, but we're miserable, it is easy to believe that one of these two hypotheses is true:

1. I'm doing life all wrong.

or

2. God doesn't really see me or love me. He sees and loves all the other happy people, with their unfiltered profile pics; trophied kids; second honeymoons; job

promotions; and perfectly plated, Instagrammable dinners. But if my own life is a mess, maybe God doesn't see or love me.

There are two more reasons why happiness is such a vulnerable desire:

1. **In moments where we dare to feel happy, someone else might resent us for it.** If you've ever been the target of someone's envy, you know what I mean. You got the promotion, reached a new fitness goal, or received special recognition. You were happy, for good reason. But not everyone shared in your happiness. You could practically feel their envy from across the room. If that's you, these words, attributed to actress Bette Midler, will make a ton of sense: "The worst part of success is trying to find someone who is happy for you."

Furthermore, we may feel bad when we know that the source of our happiness is the prayed-for dream of someone we know. I remember, for instance, feeling a tempered happiness when I found out that I was pregnant after Scott and I had tried for exactly a month. When I saw the faint lines show up on my pregnancy test, I rejoiced. But then I started counting. Immediately I could name five women who had been trying to have a baby for months, even years.

Happiness makes us feel vulnerable because we don't know how to appropriately express ourselves when someone else can't have what we have. We don't want our happiness to be the source of someone else's unhappiness.



2. **Happiness leaves us feeling vulnerable because it actually does have a shadow side.** There's a negative form of happiness, a "do whatever makes you happy" philosophy that really *is* selfish. We all know people who have looked for happiness in ill-advised places.

In the enemy's hands, what God meant for good is always used for evil. It's one of the enemy's favorite tricks—to make you misuse a gift from your Creator. The main problem with happiness isn't in our *desire*. It's in the ways we sometimes try to feed that desire.

At the root of idolatry is the cunning twisting of truth. Cool gifts from God—like sex, food, and even happiness—become nooses slipped around our spiritual necks. The enemy convinces us that anything God made is better in excess.

What we think will bring us happiness is sometimes short-lived, if not dangerous. (I can say that, because I once tried to ride a mechanical bull. My happiness lasted approximately 3.5 seconds, followed by an intense case of unhappiness in my right hip. But I digress.)

We can see how the chase for happiness has moved people miles away from God. We look around and see the carnage left behind when people indulge the carnal pursuit of happiness: the broken families, empty bottles, and drained checkbooks.

But wait. That doesn't mean we ought to turn our backs on the worthy pursuit of happiness. Author Randy Alcorn writes, "Is there selfish and superficial happiness? Sure. There's also selfish and superficial love, peace, loyalty, and trust. We shouldn't throw out

Christ-centered happiness with the bathwater of self-centered happiness.”<sup>5</sup>

Humans are great mistreaters and mistrusters of the virtue of happiness. When life is good, we feel guilty about being happy. When life is bad, someone else will remind us that another person has it worse. And if we stay unhappy too long, we can feel forced by someone to *get happy, for heaven's sake!*

Dear humans everywhere: The pursuit of happiness is not for wimps.

### **Happiness Is . . .**

Charles Schulz said that happiness is a warm puppy. I think that it's more like a roaring lion.

Happiness is terrifying, like coming face-to-face with something that can eat you for breakfast. But dare we climb up on the back of the lion? When we're riding on the back of that lion, we're giving in to a fiercely courageous emotion called happiness.

What is happiness?

Happiness is the feeling of contentment that wells up inside of you when you are at peace with who you are and the life you've been given.

Happiness is a feeling, but it's also a decision. It's a choice we get to make every day, even on our hardest days.

Happiness is an outward expression of an inward joy that is found in Jesus.

Happiness is a gift from a happy God.

Happiness is an offer extended to us by the gospel—an offer of happiness forever, starting with happiness today. God has

been daring me to find it, to grab hold of the golden mane of Aslan<sup>6</sup> and ride the hills. Can I show you more? In the pages ahead, I will invite you to take an actual dare. It's called the Happiness Dare—a journey that will take you toward your heart's deepest desire.

We'll unpack this dare in more detail in chapter 3, but let me give you a sneak preview: The source of your happiness is already inside you—and it won't demand that you try harder or pretend you're someone else.

This is not a dare to find self-centered happiness. Every year, I meet thousands of people while I serve as a speaker at conferences and retreats across North America. Many of these people share their hearts with me, and at root, all of them desire happiness. But these people are not self-centered. They are not on some vain hunt for flimsy, buy-it-at-the-store happiness.

These people are *you and me*.

They are doing a lot of the right things but feeling as if it's all falling apart. They are faithful in prayer and diligent in serving while caring for kids, aging parents, or both. They are trying to hold down jobs while also ensuring that the dishes are washed and the lawn is mowed. Many of the people I meet are women who see themselves as the keepers of everyone else's happiness, so they are knocking themselves out with a lot of overhustle.

These people struggle with crazy schedules, suffering marriages, prodigal children, weight gain, and financial loss. They are *just like you*—overworked, overwhelmed, overcommitted, and overextended. They thirst for happiness, but they don't know if God even wants to satisfy that thirst—because it feels selfish to ask.

But what if we didn't merely ask for happiness? What if we stalked it? Early on during this Happiness Dare, I happened upon a letter written by Flannery O'Connor. Her words made my heart bounce around inside of me: "Picture me with my ground teeth stalking joy—fully armed, too, as it's a highly dangerous quest."<sup>7</sup>

Flannery was grinding her teeth with a singular purpose: the stalking of joy.

I have hopped on the back of a lion to stalk joy and *happiness*, even if it's a dangerous quest.

## Road Map to Happiness

There are treasures for you in this book, oh, lion rider. I invite you to ride a glorious path strewn with gladness and delight. Knowing where we're headed will be helpful for both of us, so I've made a map centered on the three parts of this book.

**Part 1: You Have Permission.** This is where we are now. We are just beginning to rethink happiness, and we're about to be reintroduced to the one who invented happiness. God doesn't just approve of our happiness. He shamelessly entices us to chase after it. For some of us, this is a game-changing perspective shifter. So many of us are missing the pleasure of a life in Christ because we have long thought that happiness is mostly a self-centered, carnal pursuit.

Many people, including me, need permission to be happy. We need to know that we are not at odds with the gospel if we seek authentic happiness. Happiness isn't unholy. It's gravely misunderstood. We're spending these first chapters rethinking

happiness and reclaiming our God-given right to experience it. Part 1 of this book is the permission we all need to take the Happiness Dare.

**Part 2: You Have a Style.** This is where things get exciting for us as we begin to live happier lives. We will learn that we each have our own happiness styles. We are all wired by God for happiness, but what brings us happiness varies widely.

Our “What’s Your Happiness Style?” assessment will pinpoint how you are wired. You’ll learn what your own personal happiness style reveals about you. The easiest way to take the assessment is to visit us online at [www.thehappinessdare.com](http://www.thehappinessdare.com). This survey will pinpoint your happiness style within five minutes. (The assessment is also found in the back of this book.) Knowing your style will help you live more fully into the life God has given you, even on your hardest days.

**Part 3: You Have a Choice.** Here we’ll explore how to apply our happiness practically in our everyday lives. We will look at four of the major obstacles standing in the way of our happiness. And together, we will move past those obstacles to live a fuller, richer version of happiness that changes our lives—and our world.

### **What’s at Stake**

Our happiness has great power. Happiness can change this tired world, a world that has become overrun with cynicism and heartache. How can happiness change the world, you ask? A girl named Anne Frank spelled it out in eight words: “Whoever is happy will make others happy too.”<sup>8</sup>

Dare takers are world changers. No matter how happy or unhappy we are in this moment, our multiplied happiness matters more than we can imagine. Our world needs a huge happiness upgrade. Amen? Everywhere we look, we see people malnourished in happiness—sometimes in our own bathroom mirrors. We’ve lost the buoyancy of spirit that Charles Spurgeon spoke of in the nineteenth century: “Those who are ‘beloved of the Lord’ must be the most happy and joyful people to be found anywhere upon the face of the earth!” If ever we needed happy people down here, it is now.

Happiness breeds happiness. But you know what else? Unhappiness breeds unhappiness. Whatever we feel inside of us ripples outside of us.

Happiness is not a weak “feeling.” It’s revolutionary. No matter how happy or unhappy you are today, you will benefit from a boost in your happiness. Your happiness matters because it changes you, it transforms our world, and it glorifies our Maker.

Together, we can begin to “circumstance-proof” our happiness. We can refuse to link our happiness with the events and incidents in our lives. Instead, we can build a more valuable virtue within ourselves—a virtue that is like Teflon to all the biting cynicism of the world.

This Happiness Dare takes courage. It takes courage to wake up and say, “Happiness isn’t in things. Happiness isn’t in circumstances. Happiness isn’t in money or status or popularity. Happiness is in me.”

Happiness might be the bravest decision you’ll ever make.



