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101 WAYS TO HAPPINESS



*Nourishing Body,
Mind, and Soul*

MITCH FINLEY



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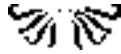
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26 ***Read a Book You Wouldn't Ordinarily Read***

When you read a book, chances are you choose that book because it is the kind of book you like to read. The topic of the book is interesting to you. You enjoy gardening so you are ready to read a new book on gardening. Or perhaps you enjoy any book by a particular author. You are a fan of James Lee Burke, or Annie Dillard, or Jon Hassler, or Anne Tyler, or Mary Higgins Clark, or Kent Haruf, so you read new books by your favorite author as they appear. Certainly books on a favorite topic or by a favorite author nourish your soul.

To not only nourish but stretch your soul, read a book you wouldn't ordinarily read. You have no great curiosity about the history of Minnesota, so read a book on the history of Minnesota. You are not intrigued by religions other than your own. So read a book on other religions. Here is the truth: you can learn more about what you already know by reading about people, places, or things you know little or nothing about.

You can learn more about Christianity by reading about Judaism or Islam. You can nourish your happiness by reading a book by a historian of religion. You can nourish your happiness by reading a book by an author you never heard of before. You can nourish your happiness by reading a book by an author you are sure you'll disagree with.

Perhaps you don't take fiction seriously. Maybe you think of fiction as a mere diversion to be taken along only on summer vacations. Maybe you think of fiction as less important than non-fiction. Are you ever mistaken. Read some great fiction and you'll find out why. Read a classic, such as *Silas Marner* by George Eliot, or a contemporary classic, such as *Franny and Zooey* by J. D. Salinger. Read *Half-Wits*, a wonderful but little-known novel by Gerard E. Goggin about the mystery of good and evil—if you can find a copy. Good fiction nourishes happiness like non-fiction never can.

Next time you visit your local public library, instead of heading for the usual sections you gravitate toward, consciously choose to browse in a section you rarely visit. If you almost never read history, wander through the history section. If you hardly ever visit the nonfiction area, go there and see what you can find. Browse the books on astronomy, business, or the care and feeding of gerbils. Read a biography of a person you never heard of before.

We all too often allow ourselves to drift in the same old directions, the same old patterns, and it's good for your happiness to purposely bump yourself into a completely different groove now and then. Otherwise we become spiritually stale.

27 *Watch Classic Comedy, and Laugh Again*

Probably you have heard about people who turned up with a terminal illness and decided to respond not only with medical science but with humor. People have laughed themselves back to health, and one of the ways they laugh is by watching old movies starring Laurel and Hardy, the Three Stooges, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, the Marx Brothers, or Abbott and Costello. The old comedies have something newer cinematic approaches to comedy don't, and whatever it is it makes people laugh and laugh.

Laughter nourishes happiness. Of course. Laughter is one of the most appropriate responses to the human comedy. If we can laugh, long and hard, it means we don't take ourselves or the world too seriously. It means that we know, deep inside, that everything will ultimately be OK, even if things appear to the contrary. Above all, life and the universe are benevolent, and God is in love with us and all of creation.

Why do the old comedy films nourish happiness in special ways? It's difficult to pin down, but they actually seem to have a spiritual quality about them. Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, in particular, revealed a remarkable degree of insight into the simple

joy and goodness of living. No matter what happened, they retained a kind of innocence of heart unique to their approach to humor. In his biography, *Mr. Laurel and Mr. Hardy*, John McCabe observed:

Laurel and Hardy lasted twenty-nine years (1926–55) as an active working team, and yet in all that time their basic gags were not many and they remained the same. Clearly, then, there is a deep, basic quality—dare one call it spiritual?—that kept them in public affection for so long, a quality transcending the mere oddity of physical appearance, pantomimic ability, and gag cleverness. This element permeated their work and it is inherently their brightest glory. The quality is *innocence*.

In a 1928 two-reeler titled *Leave 'Em Laughing*, there is a scene where Stan and Ollie, still under the influence of “laughing gas” after a riotous visit to the dentist, cause a major traffic jam in their topless Model T Ford. Stopped by a cop, played by Edgar Kennedy, Stan and Ollie laugh uncontrollably, and before it’s over the cop has lost his pants.

In a still from this movie, Stan and Ollie sit in their flivver laughing and laughing as the cop, in his long johns, writes them out a ticket. This scene is a wonderful image of a healthy spirituality. Stan and Ollie laugh uproariously as the cop scribbles on his pad. But the cop, grim as he can be, has no pants. Stan and Ollie stand for a healthy spirituality that refuses to take religious legalism (the cop) seriously. Laurel and Hardy represent happiness set free, and watching their films helps set us free, too.

28 ☞ *Give Up Bitterness*

It’s easy to advise someone to give up a negative, hopeless, bitter outlook on life, and sometimes the advise is deserved. In other cases, people are so deprived of power and control over their own lives that they become bitter and resentful at a young age

and stay that way. It's the extraordinary individual who can overcome social and cultural circumstances to become a confident, hopeful member of society.

This said, it's amazing how often people in ordinary circumstances take refuge in bitterness and resentment. "I can't" is their theme song. "I can't. I have no power, no influence, no ability to improve my situation. And it's not my fault. Poor me."

Nearly everyone slips into this pathetic state now and then. To nourish your happiness, give it up. Give up bitterness and resentment. They do no good, not for you and not for anyone else. All they do is render you powerless. Bitterness and resentment eat away at your natural happiness, eroding your energy, depleting your natural reserves of talent and inspiration.

Give up bitterness. So the world done you wrong. Big deal. It happens to everyone. Don't feel like the Lone Ranger. Whatever you are bitter and resentful about happened yesterday, or last week, or years ago. Forget it and move on. If you need help to do this, no big deal, find a good counselor or therapist and follow his or her advice.

Sometimes people become dedicated whiners. They blame their present unfortunate circumstances on others. "I'm unhappy because my parents didn't give me healthy self-esteem." "I'm depressed because my father beat me, my mother ignored me, and my brothers and sisters hated me. It's all their fault." "I'm addicted to nicotine and alcohol because I had an unhappy childhood. It's not my fault."

People who talk like this are sitting ducks for self-help gurus who charge enormous fees to attend their workshops. "Find your inner child," they beckon, "and you will be free and happy again." "Gotta find my inner child," the guru's groupies purr. They romanticize the idea of childhood. They forget that sometimes children are the most obnoxious beings in the world—almost as obnoxious as adults sometimes are.

Bitterness and resentment are understandable. Bad things happen to good people, and good people don't like it one bit. Why should such bad things happen to me? But look. Life is a

mix of good and bad, happy and sad. You have to expect that sometimes life will kick sand in your face. So what? Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and get back to living. So things didn't work out the way you hoped they would. All the same, you can try something else.

Give up bitterness and resentment. You will be happier.

29 *Visit Someone Who Is Lonely*

Dorothy Parker (1893–1967) was a famous short-story writer, theater critic, and writer of light verse. She was also a wit, and she used her wit to her advantage one time when she was lonely. Parker had a small, drab, cubbyhole of an office in the Metropolitan Opera House building in New York. The trouble was, no one ever came to see her. So when a man arrived to paint Dorothy Parker's name on her office door, she talked him into painting, instead, the word "GENTLEMEN."

Not everyone has the opportunity to deal with loneliness the way Dorothy Parker did. Anyone who is housebound will tell you that there is little a person in such circumstances can do except wait and hope someone will come to visit. Lonely people need to have people visit them, but what we sometimes don't realize is the extent to which visiting someone who is lonely can nourish your happiness.

What is loneliness but the absence of human companionship? What is easier to give someone than your presence? The surprising thing is how nourishing such visits can be for your own soul. Indeed, if you are lonely one of the best things you can do is to visit someone else who is lonely. That way you make two people happier with one visit.

Where can you find someone who is lonely to visit? It's not difficult, not difficult at all. In convalescent homes, retirement facilities, day-care centers, the place you work, down the street, just around the corner, you will find lonely people. The tough part is not finding a lonely person to visit. The tough part is

deciding to visit a lonely person in the first place. You're so busy, you have so many things to do. But look. You need the opportunity to visit someone who is lonely and you hardly realize it. At all, at all.

Fine, you say. I will visit someone who is lonely. My spirituality requires it, my happiness quotient needs it, and—more important—the lonely person needs it. So I find a lonely person. It's not difficult. I go to visit. What do I say? What do I do?

Here is what you say and do: nothing. Quite often, a lonely person wants nothing more than someone to listen, someone to show some care. A lonely person is still a person, the same person he or she has always been. So get to know the person you are visiting, even if it is your own elderly mother, father, aunt, uncle, or cousin. Get to know the person you are visiting. Ask what his or her life has been like. What is the person interested in now? People don't stop being alive when they're lonely, so find out what the person likes to do.

Once you get yourself off the dime, visiting a lonely person is easy.

30 *Be a Kind and Considerate Driver*

Driving an automobile can be dangerous to your happiness. Or at least it can deprive you of whatever modicum of peace of mind and heart you had before you got behind the steering wheel. What is it about driving? A well-mannered person, a person who ordinarily is as polite as can be, can turn into a mean-spirited, ill-mannered, profanity-spouting pain in the neck for other drivers once he or she is on the road. Freeway driving seems to be especially dangerous. In the late 1980s, on a few occasions drivers actually started shooting guns at one another on a Los Angeles freeway, and a couple of people died.

Perhaps it's the psychology of driving a car that does it. You are in control of a large machine, a machine with tremendous power, a machine that is also a status symbol, and in a sense you

become your car. How dare anyone be rude to you on the road? Another driver stops suddenly and you almost have a collision. Anger surges through your entire being. Maybe you shout an obscenity at him or her or make an obscene gesture. He or she does the same in return. A few blocks down the street you see your chance to get even. You rev your engine as you wait at a stoplight, and when the light changes to green you roar away from the intersection and get ahead of the other driver.

You drove around the block three times looking for a parking space. Suddenly you spot one. You step on the gas wanting to get that parking space before another driver sees it. Just as you are about to pull into the space, another car whips around your car and zips into the parking space. You're furious. It was obvious you were about to park there.

To nourish your happiness, you can plot and plan to be a kind and considerate driver. Instead of giving in to anger, instead of being a driver who shouts obscenities and makes obscene gestures at the slightest perception of offense, you can give way to other drivers and be patient when they make stupid or unsafe choices.

You and another driver spy the same empty parking space at the same moment and make a dash for it, arriving at almost the same moment. As a kind and considerate driver, you may give way to the other driver. So you actually got their first. Big deal. The world will go on. Gesture kindly and smile as you back your car away and allow the other vehicle to park. You'll feel good for having made such a choice.

Think of driving as a way to express your true self, not of the automobile as a powerful extension of your desire to be in control. Think of your driver-self as the same as your regular-self. Be just as polite in your car as you are at other times. It will nourish your happiness.