



## WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL

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### Don't Worry, Be Happy

By Freddy Davis

Everyone wants to be happy, right? But what does that even mean? Probably if you asked 100 people you would get 100 different answers. The truth is, people's definition of happiness is tied absolutely to their worldview beliefs. People who think happiness is found in "things" will live life attempting to accumulate "things." People who believe happiness is found in seeking adventure will go places and do things they consider to be adventurous. People who think happiness is found in accumulating power will seek power. And the list could go on.

Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with going after what gives a person pleasure in this life. Everyone enjoys certain things that relate to our material life, and naturally seek opportunities to enjoy those pleasures.

There is an organization that tries to define happiness for us, and actually puts out an annual report ranking the relative happiness in countries around the world. (You can read an article about this at <https://cne.news/article/4680-can-the-happiness-report-teach-us-how-to-build-a-happy-nation>.) It currently ranks 147 countries. This annual report is published by the University of Oxford's Wellbeing Research Centre in partnership with the Gallup polling organization, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, and the Editorial Board of the World Happiness Report. Their top 10 "happiest places on earth" include:

1. Finland
2. Denmark
3. Iceland
4. Sweden
5. Netherlands
6. Costa Rica
7. Norway
8. Israel
9. Luxembourg
10. Mexico

The U.S. comes in at number 24.

You can see the entire ranking at [https://data.worldhappiness.report/table?\\_gl=1\\*gvz3xe\\*\\_gcl\\_au\\*MTU5MjMzODY0My4xNzQ2ODIyNzI1](https://data.worldhappiness.report/table?_gl=1*gvz3xe*_gcl_au*MTU5MjMzODY0My4xNzQ2ODIyNzI1). [Somehow Disney World did not get included in the survey. :-) ]

In case you are interested in how they come up with their annual ranking, it is based on a single question from the Gallup World Poll, derived from the Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale. This polling is done every year to keep a running account on how the world is faring over time regarding happiness. The question they ask is:

*Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?*

Along with this survey, they do economic modeling using six variables:

- Having someone to count on
- Log GDP per capita
- Healthy life expectancy
- Freedom to make life choices
- Generosity
- Freedom from corruption

It is also helpful to know who is on the editorial board so we can see what perspective is being used to make these assessments.

- John F. Helliwell is Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of British Columbia, and a Distinguished Fellow of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research.

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- Professor Richard Layard is a labor economist who has worked for most of his life on how to reduce unemployment and inequality. He was the founder-director of the London School of Economic Performance.
- Jeffrey D. Sachs is a University Professor and Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University.
- Jan-Emmanuel De Neve is Professor of Economics and Behavioral Science at Saïd Business School, a Fellow of Harris Manchester College, and Director of the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford.
- Lara B. Aknin is the Distinguished Professor of Social Psychology at Simon Fraser University where she directs the Helping and Happiness Lab.
- Shun Wang is a Senior Associate Professor at the International Business School Suzhou in Xian Jiaotong-Liverpool University.

As we look at the information above, we are able to make some evaluations as to how these people define happiness, and why they use the criteria they use.

### 1. Is the Report Biased?

The first question we should ask is, “Are the editors of the report biased in making their evaluation?” Well, of course they are. In fact, anyone who would use any set of criteria to make an evaluation about happiness is biased, no matter what they believe. They are biased based on the fact that they have used their personal worldview beliefs to determine a definition of happiness. Thus, having the knowledge really doesn’t help us much. The real issue we must address is not “are they biased,” but does their bias reflect actual reality? What is the actual truth about what gives a person the greatest fulfillment in life, and does the approach of the World Happiness Report get at that? So, what is the particular bias these editors bring to the table?

Our first clue comes from the backgrounds of the editors themselves. The

deductions using only this information are not definitive, but they do point us in a particular direction.

It is noteworthy that every one of the editors are university professors at secular universities whose specialties are some form of social science – notably economics, behavioral science, and social psychology. There is a biblical way to approach all of these disciplines, but that is not permitted in secular universities. The only approach that is permitted in those schools is based on naturalistic worldview beliefs.

### 2. Do the six variables used to determine happiness actually show happiness?

It has already been noted that the editors of the report use six factors to gauge happiness. It was noted that those factors are:

- Having someone to count on
- Log GDP per capita
- Healthy life expectancy
- Freedom to make life choices
- Generosity
- Freedom from corruption

Looking at these, there are three things these factors depend on; economic data, subjective responses to polling, and the personal evaluations of the study’s editors. By selecting these three factors, the editors have put themselves in a position that makes sure their results cannot be trusted. While the polling does ask the same question to all respondents (which is a good thing), the cultural environment of every country is different, so the meaning of the question itself can and will be interpreted differently by the people in the different countries.

But there is another problem with the happiness index; it assumes that all happiness can be measured by temporal factors. It doesn’t even touch on the spiritual condition or beliefs of the individual or of society. Nor does it recognize that human beings are anything beyond natural animals. The researchers are actually fine with this, and would respond that since happiness is a sense that individual respondents feel, non-material considerations are not necessary. Their view is that it

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If you wish to contact us directly, you may do so by the following methods:

321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312

E-mail:  
[info@marketfaith.org](mailto:info@marketfaith.org)

Phone: 850-383-9756

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doesn't matter whether people live in a controlled cult environment like what exists in North Korea, for instance, or in freedom like what exists in the United States. If they *feel* happy, that is good enough. It doesn't matter that the definition of happiness being expressed by people living in different circumstances is different.

But it does matter. It matters because the very idea of happiness is a subjective concept. It is basically just a feeling that can mean one thing at one time and something entirely different at another.

### 3. Does Happiness Equate to What is Good?

There is another serious problem with the happiness index. It is almost completely divorced from people's real life circumstances.

People only know what they know. In the survey, the Nordic countries tend to be at the top of the happiness scale. Yet there are serious problems in these countries that portend grievous problems going forward. There are problems with immigration that are, literally, changing these countries' demographics – which inevitably affects the mood of the population. There are also serious problems of youth crime, which indicates problems in the family structure. Beyond that, these countries are all aging, which means their social safety nets (which are an important part of their sense of happiness) are in danger of failing in the future.

On the other end of the spectrum we have the poorest of the poor and war-torn countries. We find a lot of these in the Middle East and Africa. People in those countries evaluate happiness in entirely different ways. They have to find things that help them have good feelings in spite of living in horrible political and economic circumstances. They don't even know what it is like to be happy in the way the people in the Nordic countries define it.

### Is Happiness All it Is Made Out to Be?

The truth is, the very notion of happiness is a very shallow concept. It is, of

course, great to have good feelings, but feelings are purely temporal. There is something more.

When we understand reality based on a biblical worldview, we come to recognize that the ultimate in fulfillment in this life is not based on the temporal happiness we find in this world, but on the personal connection we have with God. It is joy and contentment that humanity is really seeking, not happiness. Here is how the Bible expresses it:

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.* Matthew 5:6

*13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again; 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never be thirsty; but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life."* John 4:13-14

*11 Not that I speak from need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with little, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.* Philippians 4:11-12

*6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it, either. 8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.* 1 Timothy 6:6-10

*5 Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever abandon you,"* Hebrews 13:5

A biblical worldview provides a level of inner peace that mere happiness is totally incapable of producing. People whose worldview beliefs seek for nothing more than happiness are missing out on an element of reality that they don't even know exists.

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