

Leader's Guide

Created for Happiness: Understanding Your Life in God

By Cynthia A. Bond Hopson



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United Methodist Women

PURPOSE

The organized unit of United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.

The Vision

Turning faith, hope and love into action on behalf of women, children and youth around the world.

Living the Vision

We provide opportunities and resources to grow spiritually, become more deeply rooted in Christ and put faith into action.

We are organized for growth, with flexible structures leading to effective witness and action.

We equip women and girls around the world to be leaders in communities, agencies, workplaces, governments and churches.

We work for justice through compassionate service and advocacy to change unfair policies and systems.

We provide educational experiences that lead to personal change in order to transform the world.

“Happiness is the consequence of personal effort. You fight for it, strive for it, insist upon it, and sometimes even travel around the world looking for it. You have to participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings. And once you have achieved a state of happiness, you must never become lax about maintaining it. You must make a mighty effort to keep swimming upward into that happiness forever, to stay afloat on top of it.”

—Elizabeth Gilbert
Eat, Pray, Love

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Introduction: On Happiness and Such

What is happiness and why does it matter? Asking those two questions may seem crass and irrelevant since most of us expect to be happy in our lives and activities. We invest at least some thought and effort into what would be required to arrive at a place called happiness and spend some time there, yet few of us have dissected the concept or even considered it worthy of study.

In many cultures, simple lives are eked out on fragile mountainsides and in ravaged valleys where what it takes to be happy is clearly not defined by things like automobiles, lavish feasts, or expendable incomes. Rather, in these instances, family, friends, and peace are treasured and living is not so much thriving as it is surviving. In more developed nations and cultures, extravagant and conspicuous consumption fueled by greed, status seeking, and the accumulation of those very things that separate the haves from the have-nots may be present, but true happiness may still be elusive.

So, as we begin an in-depth examination of the pursuit of happiness, be prepared for rich, robust, and passionate conversations that may be uncomfortable at times but will ultimately enrich all those who participate. You have been chosen to lead this study because of your wisdom, expertise, and an insatiable thirst for deeper meaning and understanding of how to live more closely connected to God's plan for your life.

As you prepare to lead this study, know that the countless hours you spend in preparation and presentation will not only bless you and your life, but also offer you an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. Ask God for the grace and courage you need to experience all that this study has to offer so you may share and enrich the lives of the participants.

Preparing to Lead the Study

There is no law that says those who facilitate this study have to be eternal optimists (glass half-full folks), or even that they have to be happy. The participants in your class will come to your sessions with great expectations and we want you to be inspired, prepared, and effective.

The goals of this study include:

- Defining happiness in the sacred and secular spaces so you will know it when you see it;
- Examining what the Bible has to say about happiness;
- Gaining a better understanding of the ways happiness affects us and the choices we ultimately make; and
- Linking John Wesley's philosophy of happiness, wholeness, and holiness to how we choose happiness in today's society.

This leader's guide is divided into four sessions to cover the seven chapters of *Created for Happiness*.

The basic text that was carefully and lovingly prepared for this study dissects happiness in many of its forms: pop culture depictions, perceptions around our self-image, the role of happiness in the scriptures, and how Methodism founder John Wesley's understandings of happiness, including "social holiness," is lived out.

Participants will probably choose this study because it sounds like fun and because they think they either know everything or nothing about the topic. Your job, if you've chosen to accept it, is to make sure it is fun but enlightening, challenging yet satisfying, interesting but mind-expanding, refreshing but a little uncomfortable. Happy trails to you!

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THIS STUDY

The following are some suggestions to help you prepare to lead this study:

Four to six weeks before your class begins:

- Begin a time of deliberate prayer to get centered and plan the exercises you will use during your sessions.
- Make an extensive to-do list and put every little thing on it so you don't forget anything. This detailed list will be a tremendous gift as you go along—there are other things more frustrating than forgetting your table covering, but if you put it on the list, this will be one less item to fret over when the time comes.
- Keep a diary or journal of your thoughts during this time of preparation. To do this, spend at least ten minutes every day observing people as they go about their daily lives. In your diary, make a section with the following headings: gender,

approximate age, setting, what prompted the response/behavior (i.e., seeing a cute baby on the plane made half the passengers stop and engage). This should be done discreetly and informally (without staring, please) during the course of your day.

- Pick up a couple of mid- to large-sized plastic bins for organizing, assembling, storing, and transporting your materials. As you think of and gather your items, put them in the bins so you won't forget anything.
- Begin planning what your classroom will look like and what you would like to include. Your mission team will provide you with a modest stipend for books and supplies—use it carefully. It is easy to overspend and buy things that you will have no use for after the study.
- Plan to create a resources display of suggested books, DVDs, handouts, and conversation starters.
- Look around your home and other spaces for potential classroom items that will create an atmosphere for learning (such as table coverings, books with happy titles, family pictures, etc.).
- Look over the suggested lesson plans and adjust them to suit your personal style. Presume that all participants will have their own books and that only a few will have gotten a head start on their work.
- Collect some past issues of **response** magazine. They are great resources and make even greater display items—you can also make a collage of relevant pictures from past magazines.

Two weeks before your class begins:

- Ask the registrar for a participants' roster so you may send the participants in your class a note if you'd like. You don't need to send anything elaborate, just a simple message such as the following:

Dear Janet,

I am delighted you will be in my class at Mission u. In preparation for the study, please buy a copy of *Created for Happiness* and bring a Bible to class. If it is possible, I invite you to bring an object, picture, or image that is promoted by advertisers as products that deliver happiness. See you soon.

- Your personal note will make Janet's day (and every other participant's), and give you a happy connection before class begins.
- Put final touches on your lessons and do a trial run to make sure you have enough activities and assignments to fill the time (usually not a problem). It's better to have too much material than not enough, but respect your students' time and do not keep them longer than the time allotted for the session. If they want to stay and mingle, encourage them to do so, but don't make them late for their next activity.
- Double-check your to-do list and get ready to have a great time!

CREATING A CLIMATE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Participants who attend Mission u come from a variety of ethnic and economic backgrounds; they each come with a different history and join your session while experiencing different emotional stages in their lives. While they come to be challenged and informed, please be patient and prepared to facilitate the study even if they are not all bubbly and happy. Expect everyone to participate and make sure everyone has the opportunity to speak if they'd like.

The environment you create in your room will set the tone for how the study is perceived, received, and achieved. Look for bright, cheery colors to decorate with and, no matter what else you include, you must bring at least one smiley face! You might consider making inspirational posters for the walls and tables (single-sided sheets that you leave on the table as conversation starters and then give away at the end of the sessions). Make sure you get permission before you stick anything on the walls and do not be unkind to the environment in your efforts. Put yourself in your participants' shoes and think about what would be helpful to you, then begin there.

Assemble your materials in an easy-to-approach area and make them attractive and inviting. Appeal to at least three of the five senses if you can—but please be sensitive to those with allergies and keep fragrance-related items to a minimum. If there are fragile or irreplaceable items you want to share, keep them in a secure place, talk about them, walk them around the room so everyone can see, and then return them to storage.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

“What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas,” isn't just a slogan—it is a poignant reminder that some things we see and experience need to be kept between God and us!

Establishing this understanding as the class code will be important. During your opening session, work purposefully to create a safe and sacred space for participants to learn, grow, and share their feelings. There will probably be several people from each church in your class, and while there is no way to assure complete confidentiality, state this expectation early and often.

Adopting a code of conduct similar to the one below will help govern your time together to ensure every person is seen, heard, respected, and valued. The class should read the rules aloud to stress the importance of adherence.

SAMPLE CODE OF CONDUCT

- I will pay attention and listen carefully to what is being said both verbally and nonverbally without jumping to conclusions.
- I will refrain from using electronic devices that might distract me from the discussion.
- I will not interrupt others when they speak.

- I will remember to be kind, sensitive, and empathetic.
- I will try to put myself in the other person’s shoes before I judge.
- I know there is always more for me to learn.
- I will work to understand and to be understood.
- I know we are all entitled to our opinions. The world will not end if the speakers don’t share mine.
- If I disagree, I will not pout, sulk, or be disagreeable.
- I will try to avoid arguments around politics and religion.
- I will not be rude or dismissive.
- I will respect my class, do my assignments, and arrive on time.
- I will not share what goes on in this class with outsiders.
- I understand that cultural differences may make others reluctant to speak quickly and loudly—I will refrain from responding to every comment to allow time for contemplation and discernment.
- I will pray that this class will bless and enrich each of us.

MUSIC RESOURCES

For gathering and singing

You must obtain permission to print or project the words and music to any song and include the copyright information. Copyright notices/credits must be included for any songs that are copied or projected. See Appendix C for a list of the notices for songs that are specifically suggested in the sessions. Permission to copy or project all other songs must be obtained by the leader. If you are using hymnals or songbooks, permission is not needed.

“Ain’t Dat Good News,” *Songs of Zion*, no. 114

“All Things Bright and Beautiful,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 147

“Amazing Grace,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 378

“Because He Lives,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 364

“Blessed Quietness,” *Songs of Zion*, no. 206

“Certainly, Lord,” *Songs of Zion*, no. 161

“Christ Is All,” *African American Heritage Hymnal*, no. 363

“Christ the Lord Is Risen Today,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 302

“Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 400

“God Will Take Care of You,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 130

“Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 140
“Hallelujah! What a Savior,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 165
“He Looked Beyond My Fault,” *Songs of Zion*, no. 31
“He Understands, He’ll Say ‘Well Done,’” *Songs of Zion*, no. 178
“Hold to God’s Unchanging Hand,” *African American Heritage Hymnal*, no. 404
“I Surrender All,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 354
“I’m So Glad,” *African American Heritage Hymnal*, no. 238
“I’ve Got a Feeling,” *African American Heritage Hymnal*, no. 313
“Jesu, Jesu,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 432
“Jesus, We Are Here,” *African American Heritage Hymnal*, no. 401
“Joy to the World,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 246
“Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 89
“Marching to Zion,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 733
“Never Alone,” *African American Heritage Hymnal*, no. 310
“O How I Love Jesus,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 170
“Open My Eyes, That I May See,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 454
“Our God Is an Awesome God,” *African American Heritage Hymnal*, no. 126
“Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 94
“Sanctuary,” *African American Heritage Hymnal*, no. 462
“*Sois la Semilla*” (You Are the Seed), *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 583
“Something Beautiful,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 394
“Spirit of the Living God,” *The United Methodist Church*, no. 393
“This Little Light of Mine,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 585
“To God Be the Glory,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 98, 99
“What Does the Lord Require,” *The Faith We Sing*, no. 2174
“Woke Up Dis Mornin’,” *Songs of Zion*, no. 1469

For listening and reflection (songs can be downloaded)

“Bridge over Troubled Water,” Aretha Franklin, cover version, *The Very Best of Aretha Franklin: The ’70s*

“From a Distance,” Bette Midler, *Some People’s Lives*
 “I Believe in You,” Don Williams, *I Believe in You*
 “I Hope You Dance,” Lee Ann Womack, *I Hope You Dance*
 “Lean on Me,” Bill Withers, *Still Bill*
 “Live Like You Were Dying,” Tim McGraw, *Live Like You Were Dying*
 “The Circle of Life,” Elton John, *The Lion King* soundtrack
 “The Good Stuff,” Kenny Chesney, *No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problems*
 “Wind Beneath My Wings,” Bette Midler, *Beaches* soundtrack

DVDS AND OTHER ELECTRONIC SOURCES

Killing Us Softly: Advertising’s Image of Women, Jean Kilbourne, 34-minute DVD.
 Clips from this video may be used for instructional use only.

SCRIPTURES

The following scriptures have been selected to coordinate with this study:

Deuteronomy 30:15–20	Proverbs 6:20
Deuteronomy 6:4–15	Matthew 5:1–14
Nehemiah 8:9–10	Matthew 6:19–21
Psalms 32:11	Matthew 6:25–34
Psalms 35:9	Matthew 22:34–40
Psalms 37:1–9	Matthew 25:31–46
Psalms 105:43	John 15:11
Psalms 112	Philippians 4:4–7
Psalms 121	Philippians 4:8–13
Psalms 126:5	2 Timothy 1–7
Psalms 119:1–16; 33–40; 73–80	3 John 1:2–4
Psalms 144:15	Revelation 21:1–7
Proverbs 3:13	

MATERIALS FOR THE SESSIONS

Have the following materials available for all sessions:

- Bible
- Newsprint and easel
- Markers
- Hymnals and songbooks

Session 1: Defining and Creating Happiness in Our Sacred and Secular Spaces

(Chapters 1 and 2)

“A cheerful heart is a good medicine.”
—Proverbs 17:22a

MUSIC AND RESOURCES

“Bridge Over Troubled Water,” by Aretha Franklin, cover version

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Explore happiness as a tangible concept.
- Define and better understand how happiness is created, defined, and manufactured by media in the secular arenas.
- See how and if secular influences create a culture of want or unrealistic expectations.
- Eliminate barriers to wholesome happiness.
- Discuss the distinction between happiness and joy.

MATERIALS

- Bag of multi-colored decorative glass stones (one for each participant)
- Bible
- Copies of the Happiness Survey found in Appendix A
- Markers
- One clean sheet of paper for each participant
- Package of at least 50 small, lined index cards
- Recycled paper cut into 4x4 pieces (these don't have to be exact—they are for Activity 2)
- Small box or garbage can for Activity 2
- *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2012*
- *The United Methodist Hymnal*

PREPARATION

Read the following articles from www.religion-online.org: “The Church and Communication in the Technological Era” by William F. Fore (www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=632) and “The Churches’ Role in Media Education and Communication Advocacy” by the

National Council of Churches (<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=632>). Both articles can be found by selecting “Media Education” under the “Communication” heading on the www.religion-online.org home page.

Read Resolution no. 8016, “Proper Use of Information Communication Technologies,” in *The Book of Resolutions*. This resolution discusses how to “resist becoming mere consumers of messages that are created and controlled by a relatively small number of super-powerful transnational media corporations.”¹

Prepare all needed materials in advance, including writing the Code of Conduct to be posted on the wall at the beginning of the session.

ROOM SETUP

Set up two altars or worship centers in the class, one for consumerist culture or *mammon*, and one for the living God. Hang a long piece of paper or fabric symbolizing a journey or road from one to the other with the following words written on it: “Journey from being consumers to citizens in the household of God.” These altars will be used in all four sessions.

Students are most comfortable when they have their own desks or work space to write on. Arrange your room so that a sense of community may develop—round tables are preferable to square ones, but use what’s available. With rectangular tables, put chairs on the sides to avoid a perceived “head of the table” power scenario.

Give each student one of the decorative glass stones upon arrival. This will serve as a gentle reminder of the class. Tell them: “In your hand is something to remind you of this class. Let this stone remind you to find something to smile about every day.”

OPENING WORSHIP (10 minutes)

SING

Begin with one of the suggested hymns.

SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 30:15–20; Matthew 6:25–34

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

Lord, we have come to this place from near and far, from our chaotic lives and rusty, dusty routines, from all that was and is to all that might be, to the possibilities. We welcome you to our midst and ask that you be near us and breathe your gentle mercies on us so we may leave this place renewed. Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What does Deuteronomy 30:15–30 invite us to do?

Matthew 6:26–27 reminds us to stop worrying because God supplies our earthly needs of food and clothing. What are some of the other tangible and intangible things that make life meaningful?

God feeds the sparrows and you are worth more than them—how much are you worth to God’s kingdom? Are there things you can do to increase your worth to God?

What are some of the things you mentioned here that belong in the worship center to symbolize your Godward journey?

THE SAMPLE CODE OR GROUND RULES (10 minutes)

Go through the information listed under “Confidentiality and Rules of Engagement,” and ask participants if they want to delete or add anything to the list. Then post the code on the wall.

INTRODUCTION (20 minutes)

Leave an empty chair at each table. In small groups at the tables, ask participants to introduce themselves to each other. If they brought them, participants should show the objects, pictures, and images they have brought to the class that represent happiness for them or that are promoted by media makers and advertisers. After the introductions at each table, each group selects one or two pictures or images or products promoted by advertisers and places them on the empty chair.

EMPTY CHAIR METHOD

Discuss the following questions. Each group should assign a note taker/reporter.

- What is it about this image of happiness that makes people want to buy this product or experience?
- What are your favorite advertisements for cars, trucks, deodorant, hair and skin care. Why are they your favorites?
- What are the feelings and emotions that the images in the advertisements evoke in you?
- How does the media industry use images, colors, sounds, and other means to package happiness?
- Come up with one question that you would like to ask the makers or advertisers of products that promote happiness.

Each group should share their insights with the whole group.

Invite volunteers who would like to take on a role play. The volunteers should be two people who would like to speak on behalf of the makers of advertisers of products of happiness.

Lead participants in a discussion about this activity, asking questions such as:

- What surprised you about what you heard or saw?
- Did/should this activity prompt plans for change?

Invite one person from each table to collect all the consumerist images and products of happiness to bring to the worship center and place them at the altar of consumerist culture or the culture of mammon. Explain what consumerist culture is: A culture that places consumption of goods at the center.

TIME WITH THE TEXT (30 minutes)

Distribute index cards to each group and ask participants to spend 20 minutes in their small groups discussing the following questions based on their reading of Chapters 1 and 2.

1. What are the things that make for true happiness according to Cynthia Bond Hopson?
2. What are some of the definitions that she included to describe happiness?
3. What would you like to add to these definitions?
4. In your small groups, write down your insights and definitions on your index cards.

START WITH ME, GOD: LET'S SEE WHAT'S INSIDE

William F. Fore, a United Methodist minister who wrote the mission study *Mythmakers: Gospel, Culture and the Media*, explains, "If I could ask a fish, 'How do you like the water?,' the answer probably would be, 'What water?' It's hard to analyze what you take for granted. If your leader asks you, 'How do you like the media environment?' would your response be, 'What media environment?' Media supply the mental environment in which we 'swim' every day. Newspapers, books, films, radio, and television are called media because they mediate to us the things that lie outside our direct personal experience. They are the bridges between our environment and us. Media create the world in our minds."²

We want to be happy, but may not realize or understand what's subconsciously blocking our progress. It may be that we are caught in the consumerist culture that shapes our lives in such a way that ours becomes a life in a media fishbowl.

It may be that childhood wounds and scars or low self-esteem block our Godward journey. Whatever it is, we need to address it and move forward triumphantly. Legendary novelist and Harlem Renaissance giant James Baldwin’s philosophy was that addressing issues might not fix them, but they certainly can’t be fixed unless they are confronted. Today, let’s see if we can name our fears, all those things that distort true happiness, and confront them at their source.

ACTIVITY 1: TAKE THE HAPPINESS SURVEY

After completing the survey found in Appendix A, use the following questions in your discussion:

- What surprised you most?
- What is one thing you would like to change?
- What is your biblical concept of happiness and joy?

ACTIVITY 2: TAKING OUT THE GARBAGE!

Ask participants to sit quietly and think about what makes them happy, and what their vision of happiness is. On index cards, write the words “To Keep” on top and list all the things that come to mind. Celebrate the things on this list.

Now, what are the things that block or get in the way of happiness? Use more index cards or slips of paper to write all the things that make you sad or unhappy: addictions, molestation, estrangement, unhappy marriages, bad credit. Write freely, nobody will see these things that will go in the garbage can—it’s garbage, remember? It is cathartic to name the things that bog us down, so bring all this “trash” to the garbage individually and repeat this affirmation:

Lord, today we have taken out the trash and now we’re free to be all you have created us to be. Amen.

Close with prayer.

SONG

“I’m So Glad,” *African American Hymnal*, no. 238

CLOSING WORSHIP (10 minutes)

Sing one of these suggested songs: “I’ve Got a Feelin’,” “Christ Is All,” or “This Little Light of Mine.” The leaders of small groups gather the index cards from their respective groups, and place them at the altar. Ask participants to gather and join hands for the closing litany and prayer.

CLOSING LITANY

Leader: Today, we choose happiness and we intend to move forward and count it all as joy because you have said that is your plan for us!

People: Lord, today we are free to be.

Leader: Yes, Lord, we are free to be triumphant, we are free to be at peace, we have given you our scars, our troubles, our miseries, our doubts, and fears—all the things that distract us.

People: Lord, today we are free. Hallelujah!

Leader: And whom the Son sets free is free indeed.

ALL: Praise the Lord. Amen.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NEXT SESSION

- Read Chapters 3 and 4.
- Individual activity: Visualize a journey. Draw a picture of a journey on a piece of construction paper or in your notebook. It can be a road, a trail, footsteps, a boat, or a ship on the sea. What are the things that are most essential for you to journey toward becoming a citizen of the household of God?
- What does it take to be the change that you want to see? Name these changes.
- What are some of the things that sidetrack you from this journey? Who or which small group can you rely on to keep you on the right track?

1. *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2012*, #8016 “Proper Use of Information Communication Technologies” (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 915.

2. William F. Fore, “Swimming in the Media Fishbowl,” **response**, July 2004, 10.

Session 2: What the “Good Book” Says About Being Happy

(Chapters 3 and 4)

“By talking to yourself every hour of the day, you can direct yourself to think thoughts of courage and happiness, thoughts of power and peace. By talking to yourself about the things you have to be grateful for, you can fill your mind with thoughts that soar and sing.”

—Dale Carnegie

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Look at media influence on concepts of happiness and acceptability.
- Examine how our self-images are shaped.
- Affirm our positive attributes and self-worth.
- Encourage participants to begin thinking more critically about their media exposure and what they know, feel, and understand about themselves and their emotional well-being.
- Explore the biblical understandings of happiness.

MATERIALS

- Bibles in different translations
- Computer with Internet connection
- Projector and speakers

PREPARATION

Have a couple of different versions of the Bible available.

Watch online video clips from *Killing Us Softly* (3 and 4) by Jean Kilbourne. These videos demonstrate how media advertising and images are geared to shape women’s perceptions of themselves. If you choose to play clips available online (i.e., YouTube), you may legally play only 10 percent of the video, or three minutes (whichever is shorter).

Set up a picture of a laughing or smiling Jesus at the worship center, which symbolizes the journey from being consumers to citizens in the household of God (optional).

OPENING WORSHIP (20 minutes)

SONG (select one)

“Open My Eyes, That I May See,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 454

“All Things Bright and Beautiful,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 370

“All My Help Comes from the Lord,” *African American Heritage Hymnal*, no. 370

SCRIPTURE

Invite participants to quietly meditate on James 1:2.

After allowing some time for the meditation, read Matthew 5:1–11 aloud, substituting the word “happy” for “blessed.”

OPENING LITANY AND REFLECTION

Right: My joy comes from knowing I am a child of God.

I was not promised nor do I expect an easy life.

I was promised that my Savior would never leave me so . . .

Left: I walk with confidence knowing I am never alone.

I delight in the glorious kingdom created for me

I anticipate sun and rain, some sweet days and some bitter.

That is life.

Right: I am on an exciting journey

With God and God’s people.

I am in love with all creation.

Left: Tomorrow may knock me down,

But I will rise.

Not on my own power.

No, not with my own feeble might.

Right: But with the power Peter and John

gave the lame man at the Beautiful Gate;

with the faith of Shadrach,

Meshach and Abednego;

with the confidence of David

over his foe Goliath;

Left: With Mary, Martha, Mary Magdalene, Salome, Joanna, Susanna, and many others who journeyed with Jesus supporting his risk-taking mission.

ALL: For with God, I am mighty, equipped for the journey ahead, clothed in righteousness, and strong.

(Written by Roger A. Hopson for this study. Used with permission.)

DEBRIEFING AND REFLECTION

After you finish the litany, take time to debrief from the previous session with the following questions:

1. What was the most important thing you heard?
2. What did you discover about yourself from your homework assignment?
3. What does happiness look like?

TIME WITH THE TEXT (40 minutes)

Ask the group the following questions:

- What are the key themes in Chapter 3?
- How do images of media shape our desires, longings, and self-image?
- Is the culture of the church powerful enough to counteract the constructed images of happiness in the media? Why? Why not?
- What are some of the actions that we can take to educate people to be critical viewers of media and advertisements?

Optional: Show a clip from *Killing Us Softly*, or any other relevant video that promotes products as a source of happiness. Be sure to check for permissions. If you choose to play online clips of *Killing Us Softly* (i.e., YouTube), you may legally play only 10 percent of the video, or three minutes (whichever is shorter).

Divide the participants into four groups and assign each one of the themes in Chapter 4: Happiness in the Law, Happiness in the Psalms, Happiness in the Gospels, and Happiness in Paul's Epistles.

Let us invite ourselves into the sites of happiness in the biblical landscape. In four groups, examine one of the following sections: Happiness in the Law, Happiness in the Psalms, Happiness in the Gospels, and the Happiness in Paul's Epistles, and summarize the key concepts in them by answering the following questions:

Each group should select a note taker/reporter for their discussion.

1. What is your understanding of happiness from these Bible readings?
2. How is happiness both inner-directed as well as other-directed?
3. Which biblical understanding from these readings can enrich your spiritual journey?
4. Which one seems hard to follow?

5. What are some of the ways you cope when happy days seem far away?
6. Sarah Lancaster says in Chapter 4:

The practice of distinguishing “happiness” from “joy,” arose in order to do something important, that is to distinguish true happiness from false happiness. But to use the word “happiness” only for false happiness is misleading when we read translations of the Bible or theologians like John Wesley who use “happy” and “happiness” quite freely when they talk about life with God. In fact, because some English translations of the Bible do use the word “happy” at all, we must think about what is meant by that word.

What is the key concept in this argument? Why is it important to reclaim the usage of the word "happiness" in its wholesome meaning for one's individual and collective spiritual journey?

7. Where have you seen God at work in your life, church, and community?

Take time for each small group to share their responses with the large group.

START WITH ME GOD: LET'S SEE WHAT'S INSIDE (20 minutes)

Participate in individual reflection and journaling on things and relationships that make up the word “happiness.” What are some of the ways you can cope when happy days seem far away?

1. What are some of the ways God blesses those who faithfully follow?
2. How can we be more effective in sharing our faith?
3. What role do those who are poor play in a discussion about what God expects from us?
4. What more can you do to be faithful and obedient to hear and answer God's call in your life?
5. What are some of the things we can do to please God?
6. Does global warming have a place in a discussion about happiness and keeping God's commands?
7. How do we explain/reconcile death, destruction, and disaster with happiness, joy, and trust in God in a biblical context?

CLOSING WORSHIP: THINGS AND RELATIONSHIPS
THAT MAKE UP THE WORD “HAPPINESS” (10 minutes)

PRAYER (unison)

God of life, we come before you this day. We are mindful of the things that please you. We are thankful for the community of faith and we cherish the relationships that we can link with to realize your mission of happiness on earth. Amen.

SONG (select one)

“Sanctuary,” *African American Heritage Hymnal*, no. 462

“Jesus, We Are Here,” *African American Heritage Hymnal*, no. 401

“He Looked Beyond My Faults,” *Songs of Zion*, no. 178

CLOSING LITANY (unison)

Leader: God is love and is always there to care for and about me. He gave his very best to prove it. How do I know?

People: **The Bible tells me so.**

Leader: God can do anything and everything. Really cool stuff like putting out fires in furnaces, getting rid of mean ol’ giants, you name it, and my God can do it. How do I know?

People: **The Bible tells me so.**

Leader: Our God is awesome. He reigns with wisdom, power and grace. How do I know?

People: **The Bible tells me so.**

Leader: So, I am not afraid of anything because God is always with me. How do I know?

ALL: **For the Bible tells us so. Hallelujah!**

CLOSING PRAYER (unison)

Lord, peace and happiness are yours to give and ours to graciously receive. We thank you. We thank you for our families, for our friends, for food and shelter, all the sources of joy you bless us with daily. Remind us Lord to share your joy and your peace with all those we meet. Let the world see you at work in our lives—enrich them for your glory. Amen.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NEXT SESSION

- Read Chapters 5 and 6.
- Read your favorite happiness scriptures, or those you rely on for strength and courage.
- Journal about two times when these passages have made the difference between despair and hope.
- Complete these statements: If I had a coat of arms, it would look like _____ (*fill in the blank using words and/or an image*). The crest representing my core of happiness would look like _____ (*fill in the blank; optional: draw a coat of arms or create one from construction paper*).

Session 3: John Wesley and the Methodists

(Chapters 5 and 6)

“Let your words be the genuine picture of your heart.”

—John Wesley¹

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Examine further biblical references of happiness.
- Examine John Wesley’s views on happiness in detail.
- Grapple with Wesley’s understandings of happiness and their modern-day relevance.
- Understand the power of lifestyle choices and how they affect decisions and outcomes.

MATERIALS

- Newsprint and markers
- Packages of yeast and a box of table or other salt

PREPARATION

- Thoroughly read the chapters to make sure the pertinent details of Wesley’s work are covered during the discussions.
- Provide ample time to complete each task to achieve maximum impact.
- Include Wesley resource materials in your display area.
- Bring yeast and salt to lift up and place at the altar to show that we can serve as “leaven” (Matthew 13:33) and salt of the earth (Matthew 13:13) to transform the world.
- Be ready to ask participants to share how their different cultures understand happiness and how media in different cultures promote or do not promote the concept of happiness as sold by the dominant media in the United States.

OPENING WORSHIP (15 minutes)

SCRIPTURE

Read Philippians 4:4–13

SONG

“O How I Love Jesus,” The United Methodist Hymnal, no. 170

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

O Lord, our Lord, “our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.” We come now to witness to your love and grace. We thank you for happiness, joy, peace, contentment, and all that these words represent in our dailiness. They are good and perfect gifts from you and we graciously receive them. Amen.

DEBRIEFING AND REFLECTION

From your homework, share scripture passages that made a difference in your life.

Share your word-pictures of your coat of arms. What is the happiness crest on your coat of arms or what is the core of happiness for you?

TIME WITH THE TEXT (30 minutes)

John Wesley’s influence more than 230 years after the denomination’s founding is amazing and significant. Work in small groups to learn more about him. Allow 10 minutes for the small group discussion and 20 minutes for large group sharing.

- Group 1: Read the sections titled “The Image of God” and “Salvation and Happiness” in Chapter 5, and dramatize the impact of the findings and include how they affected your preconceived notions of happiness.
- Group 2: Read the sections titled “Happiness through Holiness,” “Happiness as a Feeling,” and “Heaviness.” Share stories of a mentor or role model who has embodied happiness in the midst of it all, including heaviness and sorrow. Write their names on index cards.
- Group 3: Read the section titled “Singing” in Chapter 6. Also, look at the various hymns of John and Charles Wesley, and discuss the images they use for joy and happiness to see if they are still relevant today. Be sure to look at “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” and “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.”

Ask each small group to share with the whole group.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND LIVING OUT BIBLICAL AND WESLEYAN UNDERSTANDING OF HAPPINESS

Facilitate a discussion on cultural diversity with the whole group using the following questions:

- What are some understandings of happiness from different ethnic and racial groups?
- How is the “image of God” interpreted and appropriated in different cultures and categories of people (race, ethnicity, gender, class, etc.)?
- Is John Wesley a role model?
- Are you a role model? Why or why not?

CLOSING WORSHIP (15 minutes)

Leader places the packets of yeast and salt at the center of the worship center table.

REFLECT

Celebrate the work you have done so far in this and the other two sessions. Ask participants to reflect about where they are now versus where they were two sessions ago. Ask them to share at least one thing they’ve learned. Applaud and affirm what you hear.

Ask how we can be “yeast” and “salt” to bring about transformation. (Pause a few seconds for personal reflection focusing on the yeast and salt at the center.)

Leader: “You are the yeast and the small grain of salt” as the hymn “You Are the Seed” says.

CLOSING SONG (select one)

“*Sois la Semilla*” (You Are the Seed), *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 583

“What Does the Lord Require,” *The Faith We Sing*, no. 2174

“Our God Is an Awesome God,” *African American Heritage Hymnal*, no. 126

“Amazing Grace,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 378

CLOSING LITANY

Leader: We rejoice today for your servant John Wesley and we thank you for his life and ministry. You have created each of us with a grand plan for our lives, too.

People: Lord, we are ready to live into your will for us. Help us to seek your will.

ALL: Lord, we come today with our hearts and hands open. We want to become a vessel you can use. Warm our hearts and send us forth to be your people in the world's parishes. We want to be the yeast that brings about change, silently and steadily for the good in our communities, so all may taste and see that the Lord is good, always good. Amen.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NEXT SESSION

- Read Chapter 7 and the Epilogue.
- Be prepared to sit according to your conferences, districts, or clusters, as the case may be, and work on action plans in the next session. Come with action plans that can be implemented individually and collectively. Your ideas for action should include ways of adopting voluntary simplicity, addressing consumerist culture promoted by media, and implementing spiritual practices for the formation of God-intended happiness as seen in the Bible and Wesleyan understandings.

1. John Wesley, Sermon 24, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, 4," in *The Sermons of John Wesley*, General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church, www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-24-Upon-Our-Lords-Sermon-on-the-Mount-4

Session 4: Looking in the Right Places

(Chapter 7 and Epilogue)

“I think happiness is what makes you pretty. Period. Happy people are beautiful. They become like a mirror and reflect that happiness.”

—Drew Barrymore

BEFORE CLASS

Play “From a Distance,” by Bette Midler, and “I Believe in Love” by Don Williams as participants arrive for class.

Ask participants to sit with their conference, district, or cluster as they enter the room.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Look at ways of addressing media’s promotion of a consumerist culture, especially concepts and images of happiness and acceptability.
- Affirm positive use of media and information technologies.
- Commit ourselves to the spiritual practices that help embody happiness as outlined in the Bible.
- Select practices from John Wesley that are useful for us to be a witnessing faith community in today’s world.
- Create action plans to undertake voluntary simplicity.

MATERIALS

- Box of 50 or 100 No. 6¾ envelopes
- Package of 3x5 index cards cut in half vertically
- Bible

PREPARATION

Give each participant one envelope and three slips of paper at the beginning of the class and explain that they will get additional instructions during the closing worship.

OPENING WORSHIP (10 minutes)

Begin your time of worship by singing one of the recommended hymns.

REFLECTION

Ask participants to share their thoughts about the songs that were playing as they entered class and what emotions they evoked—love, mercy, forgiveness. Ask how they might live these out after the class ends.

Ask how participants can work collectively to be the church in the world.

TIME WITH THE TEXT (15 minutes)

In small groups discuss:

- What are the key themes in Chapter 7 and the Epilogue?
- Pick one key phrase that is significant for your journey from being a mere consumer of products to becoming a citizen in the household of God.
- What are some of the things you could do to simplify your life and increase your chances of happiness?

Small groups share their responses with the whole group.

SHARING ACTION PLANS (1 hour)

The following are some options to work on in class and at home. (Some of these are taken from “Action Ideas,” in the July 2004 issue of **response**, p. 29.)

1. Develop the habit of critically analyzing your media usage.
2. Outline steps to make media more accountable to the needs and interests of the public.
3. Spend more time community building.
4. Use social media to promote social justice issues and to make a better world for all people.
5. Support community radio. Hundreds of small stations need program content and moral and economic support. Send them copies of newsletters, event announcements, and study topics. Support station fund drives with volunteerism.

6. Send information to community, ethnic, and alternative-language newspapers and other media channels. Your local church, conference, and United Methodist Women members are taking a stance on care for the earth, peace, and other social justice issues. Be guests in the program.
7. Join community networks. Neighborhoods are connected through the Internet with community bulletin boards that invite people to events and public hearings.
8. Be advocates for community media.
9. Organize a spiritual growth study on *Created for Happiness* in your local church.
10. Take concrete steps to practice happiness as outlined in the Bible.
11. Make efforts to reclaim the word “happiness,” which the consumerist culture has appropriated. Using the H-word (happiness) more often as part of our spiritual vocabulary.
12. Begin to voluntarily lead a life of simplicity.
13. Participate in self-care.
14. Seek other-directed actions (participating in your community, visiting nursing homes, participating in advocacy efforts, etc.)

PLANNING THE STEPS AS A GROUP

Come up with some definite action ideas (including ideas to study this text and address consumerist culture) to be implemented as a group.

Develop some steps to implement them. Determine the following:

- The time frame when this should take place,
- Groups within the church that you can partner with,
- Secular organizations in your area that are engaged in addressing the same issue, and
- Next steps.

SHARING (15 minutes)

Each group shares the action ideas they have developed and the steps to implement them.

INDIVIDUAL WORK (10 minutes)

Answer this statement: When I get home, I will _____. (See the examples below, but what you decide to do is up to you.)

- Enjoy life more by doing the things I love.
- Share my joy by volunteering for a worthy cause. (These could include food banks, literacy councils and GED preparation for prisoners, family shelters, humane societies, Meals on Wheels.)
- Analyze what I'm doing with my time so I won't take on anything new unless I'm letting something else go.
- I will focus this year on the quality of my activities rather than the quantity. Anything that I don't have to do and that I'm not enjoying, I will give up so I can take on something I do enjoy.
- Tackle that stubborn project I've been avoiding.
- Read at least three bestsellers in the next year.
- Keep my "Happiness Journal" going as a gentle reminder that I am blessed and as an opportunity to spend time with God.
- Eat healthier foods and exercise at least four hours a week.
- I will make myself a bucket list—those things I want to do before I kick the bucket (die) and I'll get busy completing it.
- Learn a new language.
- Rest when I'm tired.

STEPS TO ACHIEVE THE INDIVIDUAL GOALS I HAVE SET (10 minutes)

- Determine the time frame.
- Ask what financial commitment might be involved.
- Develop concrete steps to accomplishing each goal.

CLOSING WORSHIP (30 minutes, depending on the group size)

Take 10 minutes to reflect and debrief. Plan to ask any of the following questions:

1. How have your thoughts and understanding about happiness and joy changed?
2. What are the action ideas that you have decided to implement individually?
3. Take time to pause and reflect on how you are going to be part of the collective action/ideas your group has already shared.

CLOSING WORDS

Share the following statement with the group:

We've spent almost eight hours together, and we have enjoyed each other's company. We have lifted up, encouraged and supported each other and as we prepare to go home, here's another gentle reminder of your time here.

Write "Sunshine Insurance" on the outside of the envelope you received at the beginning of the session. Don't seal it, yet. Please find at least three people in this room and write a statement that would brighten their day if any and everything has gone wrong. The only rule is that it has to uplift, encourage, or affirm the other person. The person who is receiving the "insurance" should simply reply, "Thank you so much for noticing/saying so." Do not negate the compliment.

Here's an example: "Margaret, your passion to help other shines through all that you do. Thank you." (If Margaret hasn't been smiling, she will be now!) Make sure you think about it and are sincere with your words—look for the positive (not just today but every day).

After everyone has written and received at least three notes, bring everyone back together and let them share a few. Explain that it's called "sunshine insurance" because you keep it close by—in your desk, drawer, or purse—so whenever you need a little sunshine, it's handy.

You might make one for yourself so you can show them how it works. Make sure everyone has at least three slips of paper.

CLOSING LITANY (unison)

"Wind Beneath My Wings"

I have been given this day to savor or waste.
I can scurry with the driven or set my own pace.
I can dance with the children
Before they learn to fly,
Or live in isolation, never asking why.

I can live for others and claim my place in the sun,
Or I can wither alone, seeking and loving none.
The choices I make today will echo through my soul
Will I be a shadow or will I be whole?

(Written by Roger A. Hopson for this study. Used with permission.)

CLOSING PRAYER

Our God and Creator, we belong to you, heart, mind, body, and spirit. You shower us with patience and mercy and for that we are grateful. Remind us, Lord, that your plan is for us to be happy and whole and we will seek your will in being so. We will go now in peace. Amen.

Appendix A: Happiness Survey

Take your time and think carefully about your answers. You will be asked to share some of your answers with the class, but this information is to help you better understand happiness in its intricacies.

1. What are seven things that make you smile whenever they are mentioned or come to mind?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

2. What are four things you are passionate about?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

3. What were you doing the last time you laughed so hard you cried?

4. What are seven things you love about yourself?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

5. Do you know how to give and receive compliments?

6. What do you need to change about how you honor yourself and your personal time?

7. Is there a difference between happiness and joyfulness for you? If so, which one are you now and what prompted it?

8. Do the people around you bring you down or lift you up? What do you do for the people around you?

9. What are four areas of your life where you could cultivate a greater sense of honesty and integrity?

1.

2.

3.

4.

10. Is there anybody you need to forgive? Do you need to be forgiven by someone else for something you've said or done? Can you let go and move on?

11. Are you more than you have become?

12. When do you feel God's presence most in your life?

13. Are you a glass half-full or half-empty kind of person, or somewhere in between? What does "attitude is everything" mean to you?

14. This is what I did on the happiest day of my life:

Appendix B

HAPPINESS JOURNAL

Set aside at least 10 minutes each day for the next 31 days to be on the lookout for happiness and use the following form to record your experience. Duplicate enough pages to use one a day for the month and keep them in a loose-leaf binder.

Today I am thankful for:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Here's how I can bring/share joy:

I will visit _____ at the nursing home.

I will call/send a note to my _____ grade teacher/ _____ professor and tell her/him how they blessed me.

I will smile more today and say hello to two people I wouldn't ordinarily speak to:

_____ and _____.

I will laugh loudly and often today.

I'm doing _____ today because it brings me unspeakable joy. Hallelujah!

Appendix C

COPYRIGHT NOTICES FOR HYMNS AND SONGS

The following is a list of copyright notices and permissions for songs that are specifically mentioned in the sessions. If you plan to copy or project these songs, the notice for the song must appear at the bottom of the page. Copyright notices and permissions for songs not listed here must be obtained by the leader.

Session 1

I'm So Glad

African-American spiritual

I've Got a Feelin'

Words: Congregational Praise Song

Music: Congregational Praise Song; arr. by Kenneth W. Louis and Nolan Williams

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Christ Is All

Words and music: Kenneth Morris

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This Little Light of Mine

Words: Afro-American spiritual

Music: Afro-American spiritual; adapt. by William Farley Smith

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Session 2

Open My Eyes, That I May See

Words: Clara H. Scott

Music: Clara H. Scott

All Things Bright and Beautiful

Words: Cecil Frances Alexander

Music: 17th cent. English melody; arr. by Martin Shaw.

All My Help Comes from the Lord

Words: Rev. Cleophus Robinson

Music: Rev. Cleophus Robinson; arr. by Evelyn Simpson-Curenton

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Sanctuary

Words: John Thompson and Randy Scruggs

Music: John Thompson and Randy Scruggs

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Jesus, We Are Here

Words: Zimbabwean; Patrick Matsikenyiri

Music: Patrick Matsikenyiri

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He Looked Beyond My Fault

Words: Dottie Rambo

Music: Londonderry Aire, trad.

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Session 3

O How I Love Jesus

Words: Frederick Whitfield

Music: 19th cent. USA melody

Sois la Semilla/You Are the Seed

Words: Cesareo Gabarain, trans. by Raquel Gutierrez-Achon and Skinner Chavez-Melo

Music: Cesareo Gabarain

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What Does the Lord Require?

Words: Albert F. Bayly

Music: Erik Routley

Words © 1988 Oxford University Press; music © 1969 Hope Publishing Co. All rights reserved. Reprinted under OneLicense.net A-709087.

Our God Is an Awesome God

Words: Rich Mullins

Music: Rich Mullins

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Amazing Grace

Words: John Newton

Music: 19th cent. USA melody

About the Author

Cynthia A. Bond Hopson is assistant general secretary of the Black College Fund and Ethnic Concerns at The United Methodist Church's General Board of Higher Education and Ministry in Nashville. In her work she interprets, promotes, and manages funding for the eleven United Methodist-related Historically Black Colleges and Universities. She received a B.A. in mass communications in 1985 from Clark College (now Clark Atlanta University); an M.S. in journalism from Murray (KY) State University in 1989; and a Ph.D. in journalism from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale in 2000. She is chief inspiration officer of Touched by Grace Ministry (www.touchedbygraceministry.com), an author, motivational speaker and activist. She and her husband, Roger, a United Methodist minister, love to travel and spend time with their two children and four grandchildren.