



Searching for Happiness: How Generosity, Faith, and Other Spiritual Habits Can Lead to a Full Life

Martin Thielen

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“If money, success, and beauty don’t make people happy, what does?” This question, asked by a wealthy, successful, beautiful, but obviously unhappy congregant, led Martin Thielen, a senior pastor at Cookeville United Methodist Church and the author of several books, to take a good look at the extensive research on happiness. He found that people who have minimal income and few material assets—from Pennsylvania’s Amish and Northern Greenland’s Inuit to Africa’s Masai—were reported to have “virtually the same levels of life satisfaction as Forbes magazine’s richest Americans.”

Studies have shown that our health, income level, physical appearance, and marital status account for only about 10 percent of our life satisfaction, and genetics accounts for about 50 percent. Thielen’s book addresses the remaining 40 percent: our attitudes and behaviors. The good news is that this is the part that we can control. In fact, whenever we act with generosity and kindness, our bodies are programmed to release the very hormones that have a long-term impact on our happiness.

Happiness really is an “inside job,” writes Thielen, and this is what people who want to get, and stay, happy do: they turn their trials into opportunities for growth, cultivate optimism, focus on the present, practice forgiveness, nurture relationships, practice generosity, express gratitude, care for their bodies, and care for their souls—all things that are within our reach.

KRISTINE MORRIS (Spring 2016)

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