Where are your Treasures?

by Dr. Leanna Floyd

How many of us have said, "If I win the lottery, my problems are gone! I can pay my bills, buy a new car and house, and pay off my student loans. I would be so happy!" Many of us are geared toward future-oriented thinking: focusing on how great things will be when we achieve certain goals. But by always living in the future, we are guilty of missing the greatness associated with living in the present and learning to be content in our situation.

A God-Shaped Void

Because my husband is a professional athlete, I have had the opportunity to meet and interact with a lot of individuals who are "rich" by most standards; however, some of those individuals are unhappy. At first I had a difficult time understanding this; but as I inquired more, I discovered there was a God-shaped void in their lives and the material things of this world only brought them temporal happiness, not a stable and enduring feeling of contentment or joy. These shocking findings led me to delve into the topic of happiness and to ask the questions: "What is happiness and how is it obtained?"

Scholars have offered a wide range of ideas regarding happiness. They include Donald Latumahina's idea that happiness is a decision one makes and Mohandas Gandhi's belief that happiness is the direct result of the tranquility created when an individual's thoughts, words, and actions are in harmony. For a working definition, let's agree that happiness is more or less a state of well-being and contentment that is pleasurable in nature. Generally speaking, happiness is a state of being most of us strive to achieve. Some believe wealth, fame, and success will bring happiness. However, there is a significant number of people who have the aforementioned things and are not happy.

Whether you are watching television, reading a magazine, or driving down the road, one is bombarded with images of shiny new cars, models draped in diamonds, and large mansions with gorgeous lawns. The people in these advertisements are always smiling, laughing, and enjoying life thus fooling us into thinking that to be "happy" like them we too must have these "things." Those material possessions are considered treasures by earthly standards.

Biblical Truth

Unlike the world's view of acquiring tangible items or the idea that wealth makes one happy, the Bible tells us "richness" is not the amount of money we have but rather what we do with our resources. God's Word instructs us to, *"Use [our] money to do good. [We] should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this [we] will be storing up [our] treasure as a good foundation for the future so that [we] may experience true life"* I TIMOTHY 6:18-19, NLT. LUKE 6:38 NLT implores us to *"Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full...running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back."*

Giving vs. Keeping

Given the state of our economy and the personal finances of many, some may be hesitant to give of their time, money, or resources to others. With such conditions, individuals tend to use various aversive coping strategies to justify why Biblical principles of giving do not apply to their circumstances. When people hold conflicting beliefs, they experience a feeling of psychological discomfort. For instance, if one believes they should tithe their income but simultaneously feels giving away their money will cause financial hardship, the two conflicting beliefs collide, resulting in feelings of uneasiness and discomfort. This dissonance will adversely affect their emotional and psychological well-being.

Some psychological theorists, particularly those who practice cognitive-behavioral techniques, believe an individual's thoughts directly influence one's feelings, which influence actions. For instance, if one lives in fear of "not having enough," then, most likely, their behavioral response will be to conserve or hoard. It is crucial to avoid this pitfall by identifying these thoughts and replacing them with Biblical Truth.

When one engages in giving activities such as volunteering time, effort, and treasure, then the behaviors related to giving can positively affect negative or conservatory thinking and subsequently enhance one's psychological and emotional well-being.

A Giving High

Researchers have studied the impact of giving on an individual's physical and emotional states. Studies have shown the act of giving literally has a physical benefit by causing a reduction in the production of stress hormones, such as cortisol. Researchers believe if one engages in various helping activities such as volunteering time, one is less likely to focus on stressors and is able to switch their attention to the happiness and joy that comes from helping others. As a result, individuals are less likely to be stressed.

Social change advocate Allan Luks examined the physical effects of helping others. He found individuals who regularly volunteered and helped others experienced the same health benefits of people who regularly engaged in vigorous exercise or reflective meditation. Luks concluded, positive social contact with others released endorphins which resulted in a less agitated and stressful condition in the giver.

Getting Practical

Clearly, there are many benefits to participating in altruist acts. Not only does the recipient earn benefits but the giver also enjoys benefits. In giving to others, you are in reality blessing yourself. There are many practical ways to give back and volunteer. For example:

- **share your knowledge and expertise with others at a local school or church,**
- **donate used clothes and various household items to local agencies such as Goodwill or the Salvation Army,**
- **contact your local hospice and volunteer to help care for others in need,**
- **visit nursing and retirement homes to offer companionship, or**
- **donate goods to local food pantries.**

There is a plethora of things one can do to give. The Bible instructs us to give with a spirit of generosity. By doing so, this will determine the type and degree of blessing we receive in this life and life to come.

So, what is happiness and how is it obtained? The world tries to fool us that we are rich and happy based on the quantity and quality of the material things we have here on Earth. The Bible tells us that we are rich and well to do when we store up our treasures in heaven which brings us genuine happiness and joy.

Leanna Floyd *holds a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the Florida School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University. She is the wife of Chicago White Sox's starting pitcher, Gavin Floyd, and the proud mother to one-year-old son, Jax Stone.*