

"Les and Leslie deal in the real world and offer real solutions."

Dr. Gary Chapman, *Author of The 5 Love Languages*

Making HAPPY

THE ART AND SCIENCE
OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE

Drs.
Les & Leslie Parrott

#1 New York Times Best-Selling Authors

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To Corey and Mia Hays.
One of the happiest couples we know.
And a couple who has brought
unending happiness into our family.

- Do you know what you can do to instantly make your relationship 25 percent happier—starting today?
- Do you know how to counter the inevitable effects of taking each other for granted?
- Are you using happiness to build a firewall of protection around your relationship?
- Do you know the easy way to ensure that your partner is happier today than yesterday?
- Are you avoiding the most common mistake couples make in pursuing happiness together?
- Did you think marriage would make you happy—instead of you making your marriage happy?
- Are you ready to deepen your relationship by being happy in love?

Making Happy
reveals the answer to these questions and more!

Making
HAPPY

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“The highest happiness on earth is the happiness of marriage.”

William Lyon Phelps

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INTRODUCTION

Hooked on a Feeling

Knowledge of what is possible
is the beginning of happiness.

George Santayana

YOU MAY NOT KNOW his name, but Jason McElwain made a lot of people happy. As a struggling autistic high school student in Rochester, New York, he was a long way from making the cut for the school's basketball team. But his heart was in the sport, so the coach let him help out as "team manager." Jason took the job seriously and his fellow classmates respected him for it. He even wore a white shirt and black tie to every game as he sat on the end of bench, fetching towels and water for the players.

In his senior year the coach did something unexpected. He put Jason into the game with four minutes and nineteen seconds left on

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the clock. The crowd in that high school gym went wild, cheering Jason's name.

Jason took his first shot—missing the hoop by about six feet. But one minute later he got the ball again and made a three-pointer that set the gym on fire.

Jason wasn't done. He kept shooting and kept hitting. He scored twenty points in four minutes during his one and only game. He made six three-pointers—a school record.

In the news clip, Coach Johnson got choked up retelling Jason's story. "In twenty-five years of coaching I've never experienced the emotional high of that game," he said. "I just started to cry." And he's not the only one. The clip spread like wildfire through social media with more than three million hits and comments like:

"Oh no, I'm crying at work!"

"Amazing. I'm Facebooking this now."

"Just what I needed. Thanks!"

Teary joy wells up in almost everyone who sees the elated home crowd storming the court after Jason's final three-pointer and lifting him on their shoulders. Why? Because you can't help but to get an emotional lift yourself. The happy pandemonium in the gym is contagious. You want to share it with others.

We've shown the clip to students in our university classes, many who have seen it before, and they literally cheer and applaud the screen. When asked to describe their feelings we hear words like *awe*, *delight*, *thrill*, *surprise*. But mostly we hear *happy*.

The human spirit hungers to be borne aloft. We want a nudge toward happiness. Our God-given capacity for uplift is what makes us euphorically human. And according to a growing mountain of scientific research, happiness is not only critical to our relationships

and well-being, it doesn't depend on the uncommon McElwain brand of exhilaration hitting our e-mail's in-box.

Lifting our spirits, thankfully, isn't contingent upon finding YouTube miracles like Jason's basketball experience, Susan Boyle's surprisingly stunning solo on *Britain's Got Talent*, or "Sully" Sullenberger's phenomenal airline landing on the Hudson River. And our happiness—the kind that endures—certainly doesn't depend on getting a job promotion or winning the lottery. In fact, most of the things we think will make us happier don't. Humans, it turns out, are extraordinarily bad at predicting their own happiness (more on that later).

Isn't Marriage Supposed to Make Us Happy?

One of the most pervasive happiness myths is the notion that when we find our perfect partner—when we say "I do"—we'll have a lock on happiness. And we will, for a time. No doubt about it: marriage makes us happy. The problem is that marriage—even when initially perfectly satisfying—will not make us intensely happy for as long as we believe it will. Studies reveal that the happiness boost from marriage lasts an average of only two years.¹

Unfortunately, when those two years are up and fulfilling our goal to find the ideal partner hasn't made us as happy as we expected, we often feel there must be something wrong with us or we must be the only ones to feel this way. But we're not. It's the common course of love. And if left unattended, if we're not deliberately making happy together, our relationship suffers. If we turn the right dials to boost our happiness factor in love, however, our relationship soars.

Happiness, for a marriage, is like a vital sign. It's the heart rate of love. Like all vital signs, it can fluctuate. But, like all vital signs, it

has a set point, a level to which it strives to return. For healthy couples doing the right things, that set point is high. And when done well, marriage is a better predictor of happiness than having money or children.

This book, *Making Happy*, is dedicated to helping you keep the vital sign of happiness healthy and strong in your relationship. How will we do this? Not with armchair psychology. The strategies and principles of this book are built on an incredible amount of solid, time-tested research.

The New Science of Happiology

Psychologists have always been interested in emotion, but in the past two decades the studies have exploded, and one of the emotions that psychologists have studied most intensively is happiness—a topic that was previously in the exclusive hands of philosophers and poets. Even economists and neuroscientists have joined the happiness party. All these disciplines have distinct but intersecting interests: psychologists want to understand how people feel happy, economists want to know the value of happiness, and neuroscientists want to know how people's brains process and produce happiness.

Having three separate disciplines all interested in a single subject has put that topic on the scientific map. Papers on happiness are now published in the most prestigious peer-reviewed journals, scholars who study happiness are winning Nobel Prizes, and even governments around the world are rushing to measure and increase the happiness of their citizens.

Happiness is one of life's most cherished goals. On every continent, in every country, and in every culture, when people are asked,

“What do you want?” the most popular answer is “happiness.” When parents are asked, “What do you most want for your children?” the answer is most often “happiness.”

And when couples are asked about the kind of relationship they most want, they’ll talk about being happy together. “The happy state of matrimony,” said Benjamin Franklin, “is the surest and most lasting foundation of comfort and love.” Oliver Wendell Homes added: “Love is the master key that opens the gates of happiness.”

Making Happy Together

No doubt about it, love and happiness make beautiful music together. But truth be told, happiness is in short supply for too many time-starved and sleep-deprived couples. And the reason, we suspect, is that they don’t work at it—or more likely, they don’t know *how* to make it. Happiness, after all, is not something that *happens*, it’s something you *make*.

Some even call it quits for this very reason, saying: “We’re just not happy anymore.” Really? Is being married supposed to make you happy? No. That’s not how it works. Marriage doesn’t make *you* happy—you make your *marriage* happy. As the saying goes, you bring your own weather to the picnic. A happy marriage does not depend on the right circumstances or the perfect person. A happy marriage is the result of two people committed to making a happy life of love together.²

Every once in a while we encounter someone who tries to argue that making happy is a selfish pursuit. We understand that thought. After all, some silly and downright selfish things are done in the name of pursuing happiness. Many a marriage counselor will attest to

hearing something along these lines: “I’m not happy in this marriage; God wants me to be happy; therefore I want out of this marriage.” This self-centered perspective is mistaking hedonism for happiness. They think their circumstances are supposed to make them happy. They are pursuing pleasure at the cost of meaning. Don’t fall for this lie. Hedonism does not equal happiness. Hedonism, the goal of which is to maximize net pleasure, lacks *meaning* altogether. And meaning, as you’ll see in Part One of this book, is a vitally important ingredient of true happiness. It’s a fact, not just a biblical sentiment: You’ll find more happiness in giving yourself away than in any self-centered pleasure.

Our long-time friend Gary Thomas, author of *Sacred Marriage* and many other books, is well-known for asking this question: “What if God designed marriage to make us holy instead of happy?” How could it be otherwise? The pursuit of holiness can’t help but bring an abiding happiness and joy. Why? Because holiness, being devoted to God’s ways of being, subsumes *meaning* and *love*. And true happiness is never fulfilled without it. When we sow holiness, we reap happiness.

Truth be told, happy people are more loving people—the very opposite of selfish. When we get a lock on true happiness, it makes us more sociable and self-giving; it increases how much we like ourselves and our partner. Happiness improves our ability to resolve conflict. The bottom line: happiness makes us more loving and lovable. That, in a nutshell, is why we wrote this book.

What This Book Will Do for You

Why write a book on happiness and love? Because emerging research from neuroscience and psychology makes the link between a thriving relationship and certain happy behaviors absolutely clear.

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We've learned a lot about what makes couples happy, and we've put the principles to work in our own marriage—and we'd be stupid not to use that knowledge.

That's why this book is nothing if not practical. We have combed through all the scientific studies we could find on happiness to lift out the best of what we know works to make and maintain happiness in marriage. And we've settled on a half dozen *happiness boosters* that are sure to move the needle in your relationship. These are the six dials we know couples can turn to get the best effects:

- *Count your blessings*—nothing can increase happiness more quickly in a relationship than shared gratitude.
- *Try new things*—it's easy to fall into a routine or even a rut, but that is a killer to happiness, so you've got to shake it up.
- *Dream a dream*—the moment a couple quits looking to the future together is the moment they become vulnerable to dissatisfaction.
- *Celebrate each other*—we all applaud the big things, but it's the little and unexpected celebrations that can make or break a couple's happiness.
- *Attune your spirits*—the soul of every marriage hungers for deeper connection and meaning together, and when it's found, happiness abounds.
- *Add value to others*—when a couple does good beyond the boundaries of their marriage, goodness envelopes their relationship like never before.

These are the six boosters we'll explore with you, giving you dozens of practical ways to bring each of them more fully into your

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relationship. And we want to say this straight out: this book is not about making changes that involve more time, energy, or money. Making happiness is in many ways easier than you think.

We want this book to be interactive for the two of you (and even with other couples if you're using it in a small group). That's why we've provided you with questions at the end of each chapter. We hope you'll take time to use them together. By discussing, not just reading, the book with each other, the content will become far more personal and it will sink deeper roots into your relationship.

In the last section of the book you'll see that we've also provided you with a Three-Week Happiness Plan. We literally provide you with a little assignment for each of the twenty-one days in this plan. They are proven to work. We have done them ourselves and so have countless couples we've taught them to. You will love this plan. It is sure to infuse your marriage with deeper joy and more happiness. In short, it will guarantee that the two of you make more happy together.

Our Hope and Prayer for You

We've written every word of this book with you in mind. We want you to discover a deep and abiding joy in your relationship. We want you to make happy like you never have before. Why? Because you simply can't take a happy marriage for granted. Under normal circumstances, despite what you think, you will not live happily ever after. We all know the staggering divorce statistics. But have you ever considered all the couples who stay together in a dissatisfied and unhappy marriage? One of the most consistent findings in marriage research reveals that marital satisfaction declines over the course

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of marriage. Many couples grow accustomed to feeling despondent, cranky, and increasingly dissatisfied in their relationship—and they do nothing about it. And too often relatively happy couples don't know how to move from feeling good to feeling great in their relationship.

So remember this as you begin this book: marriage cannot be counted on to make you happy. You *make* your happiness in marriage. Unless you are *making* happy, the relationship you counted on to make you happy is likely to leave you feeling empty. But when you make happy together you are building a healthy hedge of protection around your love. Your marriage will not only go the distance, it will put a huge smile on each of your faces.

Les and Leslie Parrott
Seattle, Washington

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PART ONE

The Happiness Advantage for Couples

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1 Let the Happiness Begin

Happiness isn't a mood. It's a way of life.

Noel Smogard

THE LIST OF FAMOUS students from the hallowed halls of Harvard University is long, to be sure: John Hancock, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Helen Keller, Leonard Bernstein, John F. Kennedy, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Mark Zuckerberg, to name just a few. It makes sense. After all, the school has a long history. And as the oldest institution of higher education in the United States, founded in 1636, Harvard is pretty entrenched in convention and tradition. But not as much as you might guess.

Beginning in 2006, two professors, Tal Ben-Shahar and Shawn Achor, offered an unconventional course that remains the most popular class on campus, with an attendance of about fifteen hundred students per semester. No course has ever commanded such numbers at Harvard. Not before or since.

Professor Achor admits that he and Ben-Shahar have been shocked by its popularity. They never dreamed so many students

The greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances.

Martha Washington

would be interested in what they are teaching: *happiness*. But they are.

The Science of Happiness, the official course title, is often dubbed Happiness 101, and as the course syllabus says, it focuses

on “aspects of a fulfilling and flourishing life.” Remember, this is Harvard University—the school known for its high academic standards and rigorous requirements. How could such a course on such a squishy topic be taken seriously?

Getting Serious about Happiness

Hearing that Harvard was offering a course on happiness caused some scholars at other august institutions around the country to raise an eyebrow or two. Some skeptics believed it was a hoax. When Tal Ben-Shahar appeared as a guest on Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, Stewart asked how he could “get away” with a scholarly school having a course on such a soft and fuzzy subject. Ben-Shahar answered, “We now have a science of happiness.”¹

And we do. The word *science* is right there in the course title. But it’s more than semantics. The number of scholarly studies on happiness has exploded over the past two decades. Until recently, the countless studies produced by social scientists had been directed toward the other end of the human experience continuum—anxiety, depression, neurosis, obsessions, paranoia, delusions, and depression.

Why? It all started about one hundred years ago with a doctor in Vienna, Austria.

Paging Dr. Freud

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, wasn't a happy camper. He saw human beings as troubled creatures in need of repair. Freud himself was profoundly pessimistic about human nature, saying we are governed by deep, dark drives that we can barely control.

B. F. Skinner and the behaviorists who followed Freud weren't much happier, viewing human life as mechanistic if not robotic: humans were passive beings mercilessly shaped by stimuli and rewards or punishments.

In fact, some of psychology's most well-known experiments proved that normal people could become coldly insensitive to suffering and even cruelly sadistic. Research funders invested in subjects like *conformity*, *neurosis*, and *depression*.

The Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry, the expensive clinical bible of psychiatry, has five hundred thousand lines of text. There are thousands of lines on anxiety and depression and hundreds of lines on terror, shame, guilt, anger, and fear. But there are only five lines on hope, one line on joy, and not a single line on compassion, creativity, forgiveness, laughter, or

The great Western disease is, 'I'll be happy when . . . When I get the money. When I get a BMW. When I get this job.' Well, the reality is, you never get to when. The only way to find happiness is to understand that happiness is not out there. It's in here. And happiness is not next week. It's now.

Marshall Goldsmith



love. You get the idea. From the beginning and for nearly a century, social scientists have had little to say about positive virtues. But not anymore. Something happened in 1998 that changed everything.

O Happy Day!

When University of Pennsylvania psychologist Martin Seligman was elected president of the American Psychological Association by the largest vote in the organization's history, he gave a powerful keynote address to his fellow psychologists. On a balmy October night in North Carolina, his message was clear and blunt: he wanted psychologists to expand their myopic focus on treating mental illness and include promoting mental health. The same month, in the organization's newsletter, he wrote a piece titled "Building Human Strength: Psychology's Forgotten Mission," and said: "Psychology

My happiness grows in direct proportion to my acceptance, and in inverse proportion to my expectations.

Michael J. Fox

is not just the study of weakness and damage, it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken, it is nurturing what is best within ourselves."² No doubt about it,

 Seligman wanted nothing short of a new day, a sea change, a transformation or even a revolution of his profession. And he got it.

Seligman's speech and the work that followed launched a new movement among social scientists that is now known as Positive Psychology.³ As evidence, you'll find scientific journals dedicated to it, massive funding, countless studies, and hundreds of courses like the one on happiness at Harvard. Pathology, of course, still garners

plenty of grant money and research, but a new wave of science has shed an amazing amount of light on the positive virtues and character qualities most humans aspire to.⁴

Before going too much further, however, let's make sure we know what we're talking about when we say *happiness*.

Happiness Defined

Serious exploration of happiness isn't new, of course. Classical thinkers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle gave plenty of attention to it. And every language, without exception, going back to

Success is getting what you want, happiness is wanting what you get.

W. P. Kinsella

ancient Greek, has a word for *happiness*. But while we use the same word, we often don't mean the same thing.

People prior to the late seventeenth century thought happiness was a matter of luck or divine favor. Even the root of *happiness*, *hap*, means "chance." Happiness was not something you could control. It was dictated by fate or fortune. Happiness literally happened to us and was out of our hands.

Today we think of happiness more as a skill that can be developed. The founding fathers of the United States, in fact, made clear that happiness was a right to be *pursued*. This new way of thinking engendered more noble humanitarian sentiments—the belief that suffering is inherently wrong and that all people, in all places, should have the opportunity to be happy.

But this new way of thinking about happiness also comes with a challenge. When happiness becomes a given *right*, it backs away

from being something won through moral cultivation, carried out over the course of a well-lived life. Instead, it runs the risk of becoming

Happiness is not in our circumstance but in ourselves. It is not something we see, like a rainbow, or feel, like the heat of a fire. Happiness is something we are.

John B. Sheerin

ing something “out there” that is not only pursued, but also caught and consumed. And that’s where the pursuit of happiness can cause problems.⁵

Before we delineate happiness further, let’s pause for a moment and ask: What is *your* definition of a happy life? Are you living

it? Think carefully about this because your definition of *happiness* will influence every other significant decision you make. That may sound like an overstatement, but your definition of *happiness* really does frame your approach to living. If you think happiness is outside you, for example, you will make happiness into a search or a reward to discover or earn. If, however, you know happiness is inside you, then happiness becomes more of a compass, enabling you to live a better life.

These two basic perspectives are not so much the definition of *happiness* as they are the means to finding it. So let’s make the definition easy. Ready?

Happiness is the emotional state of feeling satisfaction, playfulness, contentedness, amusement, cheeriness, serenity, gratification, elation, triumph, joy, and/or bliss.

It’s important to note that *happiness*, in this definition, is a state. That means it’s not static. In other words, even the happiest of people—the cheeriest 10 percent—feel blue at times. And even the bluest have their moments of joy. Like all feelings, happiness can ebb and flow.

There you have it: a straightforward, if not informal, definition of *happiness*. But let's dig deeper. Why? Because happiness—the kind that embodies deep joy—is more than a feeling. To really get to the underlying meaning of *happiness*, you've got to not only pinpoint the feeling but also where it comes from. Why? Because the source of your happiness can make or break your personal pursuit of it.

The Two Wells of Happiness

When someone asked Eleanor Roosevelt to define *happiness*, here's what she said: "A feeling that you have been honest with yourself and those around you; a feeling that you have done the best you could both in your personal life and in your work; and the ability to love others." Mrs. Roosevelt obviously understood happiness to be an inside job.

Researchers call that *intrinsic* happiness because it's values-based. It's the result of personal growth, healthy relationships, contributing to the common good. *Extrinsic* happiness, on the other hand, is feelings based and comes about from obtaining rewards, praise, money, status, or popularity.

Harvard social psychologist William McDougall said people can be happy while in pain and unhappy while experienc-

The gap between our professed values and our practiced values is the gap between us and our happiness.

Marc Gafni

ing pleasure. Take a moment to let that sink in. You can only be happy in pain when it's values-based. And you can only be unhappy while experiencing pleasure when it's feelings-based. We're really talking about two kinds of happiness that both result in feelings of

satisfaction, gratification, and all the rest, but that have very different levels of shelf life.

Feel-good happiness is the momentary sensation of pleasure. When we joke around or have sex, we experience feel-good happiness. But here's the catch: we know from research that feel-good happiness is ruled by the law of diminishing returns. This type of happiness can lose its punch and it rarely lasts longer than a few hours at a time.

Value-based happiness is a deeper sense that our lives have meaning and fulfill a larger purpose than just pleasure. It represents a spiritual source of satisfaction. And here's some good news: it's not ruled by the law of diminishing returns. This means there's no limit to how meaningful and happy our lives can be. Some like to call values-based happiness *joy* because it's deep and more abiding. That's fine with us. Whatever you call it, it's found in our values.

Value-based happiness is the great equalizer in life. You can find value-based happiness if you are rich or poor, smart or mentally challenged, athletic or clumsy, popular or socially awkward. Wealthy people are not necessarily happy, and poor people are not necessarily unhappy. Values, more than pleasure, provide a deeper well for true happiness, and it's a well everyone can drink from. After all, everybody has the potential to live in accordance with his or her values.

How to Increase Your Odds of Disappointment

Happiness has increasingly been thought to be more about getting little infusions of pleasure, about feeling good rather than being good. For the uninformed, happiness becomes less about a well-lived

life and more about experiencing the well-felt moment. That's a dead end to true and solid happiness.

When feel-good happiness becomes more important than value-based happiness, hedonism rears its head. And narcissism isn't far behind. Feeling

good becomes the ultimate goal. Toughing it out and self-sacrifice are avoided at all costs. Self-seeking indulgence becomes the name of the game. Their orientation toward external sources of happiness means they're looking for things like admiration, acquiring stuff, and status. And we know from research that people who lean into this kind of happiness report less satisfaction and feel less energized.

It's known as the *hedonistic paradox*: when one aims solely towards pleasure itself, one's aim is continually frustrated. That's what novelist Edith Wharton was getting at when she said: "If we'd stop trying to be happy we could have a pretty good time." It's also what underlies what the great teacher Helen Keller said: "True happiness is not attained through gratification, but through a worthy purpose."

Of course, if you swing back the other direction too far and try to avoid feel-good happiness altogether, you risk becoming a stoic or puritan who relies on duty and represses pleasure to prove you can endure without having fun. And who wants that—especially in marriage? Either way, if you embrace one form of happiness exclusively, you instantly increase the odds for being disappointed.

Happiness doesn't depend on what we have, but it does depend on how we feel toward what we have. We can be happy with little and miserable with much.

William Dempster Hoard



Healthy happiness involves balance. That's why at the heart of this book you'll find a half dozen proven happiness boosters for couples that intermingle both feel-good and value-based happiness. They include things like counting your blessings, trying new things, attuning your spirits, and so on. While some may appear to be exclusive to one camp or the other, they're not. For married couples, these actions are not one-off tricks or techniques to conjure contentment. They are not mere mood managers. They are a way of life. Scratch that. They are a way of being happy in love together.

This Is Your Brain on Happiness

At the base of your brain is a bundle of nerves that wander throughout your body, linking your heart, lungs, and stomach as well as your facial and vocal muscles. The nerve bundle is known as the vagus nerve. It comes from a Latin word that literally means “wander-

It is pleasing to God
whenever thou rejoicest or
laughest from the bottom of
thy heart.

Martin Luther

ing” (think *vagabond*). Your vagus nerve reduces your heart rate and blood pressure while quietly communicating with the muscles that control respiration and digestion. It's a messenger to your brain saying everything is all

right.⁶ It's closely associated with oxytocin, the all-important hormone of human trust and devotion.

Oxytocin is essential to happiness, according to Jon Haidt, professor at the University of Virginia. In his view, human happiness

derives neither from external validation nor solely from within, but from *between*—through the relationships created by love and “something larger than yourself”—whether it’s a religious group, a volunteer organization, or a political campaign. “If happiness comes from between,” Haidt says, “then oxytocin is the hormone of between. It’s the catalyst that helps bond people together.”⁷

Oxytocin, often referred to as the love hormone, makes us more sympathetic, supportive, and open with our feelings—all necessary for couples to be happy in love. Studies at Claremont Graduate University have shown that high-oxytocin couples finish each other’s sentences, laugh together, and touch each other more often.⁸

Puritanism is the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.

H. L. Mencken

The chemicals in our body make us easier to love and be loved. And they are inextricably linked with feeling happy.⁹ It’s no exaggeration to say we’re designed to be happy in love. Of course we don’t always hang our happiness on the right actions. That’s what this book is about. But make no mistake, you’re built to be happy and so is your marriage.

Easy to Live With

Some people are afraid to value happiness. It’s true. They think it’s selfish. Until the eighteenth century, Western standards encouraged, if anything, a slightly saddened approach to life, with facial expressions to match. Walk through any historical portrait gallery to see

what we mean—including the ambivalent smile of a Mona Lisa. Back in the day, good Protestants “allowed no joy or pleasure, but a kind of melancholic demeanor and austerity.”¹⁰ They felt it best for sinful humanity to display a somewhat sorrowful humility.

Do you think that’s what God wants? We agree with Catherine Marshall who asked: “Whence comes this idea that if what we are

doing is fun, it can’t be God’s will?

No one can live without delight, and that is why a man deprived of spiritual joy goes over to carnal pleasures.

Thomas Aquinas

The God who made giraffes, a baby’s fingernails, a puppy’s tail, a crooknecked squash, the bobwhite’s call, and a young girl’s giggle, has a sense of humor. Make no mistake about that.”¹¹

Even Jesus said, “I’ve told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature.”¹²

Still, some sincere people, even today, have a tough time valuing happiness because they think it’s selfish. But isn’t the opposite really true? Isn’t unhappiness the ultimate form of self-indulgence? When you’re unhappy, you tend to be self-consumed. You take yourself pretty seriously. Happy people, on the other hand are more selfless. When we choose to value happiness, gratitude, playfulness, and joy, we become easy to live with. If this sentiment doesn’t sit so well with you, if you’re holding onto the idea that happiness is selfish, hang in there with us. We’re going to shed more light on this in the next chapter when we expose the “hat trick of happiness.”

This book is dedicated to helping you be happy in love together. Does that mean the proverbial fairytale of living happily ever after? We’ll get to that. For now it means being easy to live with. And that makes every couple happy.

For Reflection

1. Why do you think it took social scientists so long to begin studying happiness and well-being?
2. What do you make of the two wells of happiness: feel-good happiness and value-based happiness? Do you agree that value-based happiness is the great equalizer in life? Why or why not?
3. Are you easy to live with? Why or why not? And if you increased your level of happiness, do you think it would make you easier to live with? How so?

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2 Do You Know Your Happy Factor?

There are only two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.

Oscar Wilde

WHEN STEPHEN AND TERRI Weaver set out for a daylong fishing trip, they had no idea they would come back millionaires.

Sixty miles northeast of Little Rock, Arkansas, the couple stopped at a convenience store and picked up a lottery ticket on their way to a fishing spot. They stopped at the same store again on their way home and decided to grab another lottery ticket.

The couple won big that day in 2013—not once, but twice. The first ticket the Weavers purchased netted the couple a one-million-dollar prize, while the second ticket put a cherry on top with another fifty thousand dollars.

Kind of makes you think twice about going fishing together, doesn't it? After all, what couple wouldn't like to suddenly have a million dollars show up in their bank account?

But many lottery winners find their pot of gold brings loss. In 1997 a man named Billie Bob Harrell and his wife, Barbara Jean, won thirty-one million dollars in the Texas lottery. With three children to support, the first of their \$1.24-million annual payouts seemed like the light at the end of the tunnel. Instead it was the beginning of a horrifying year for the couple. It started out joyful: he quit his job at Home Depot and they took a trip to Hawaii, donated tens of thousands of dollars to their church, bought cars and houses for friends and family, and

even donated 480 turkeys to the poor.

If more of us valued food
and cheer and song above
hoarded gold, it would be
a merrier world.

J. R. R. Tolkien

But the spending and lending spiraled out of control. Just months after winning the jackpot tensions splintered their marriage. They separated. And tragically, twenty months after winning the lottery, Harrell com-

mitted suicide. Shortly before his death he told a financial adviser: “Winning the lottery is the worst thing that ever happened to me.”

It’s not an isolated story. Numerous big-money winners end up regretting the win they longed for. Not only does more money not make them happier, it often makes them flat-out miserable.

Mo’ Money, Mo’ Happy?

We can almost hear you saying, “Well, I wouldn’t mind having to struggle to be happier with a few extra million dollars in my bank account.” Okay. We hear that. But beware. A landmark study on happiness and major lottery winners published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that the overall happiness levels of lottery winners spiked when they won but returned to prewinning levels

after just a few months. In terms of overall happiness, the lottery winners were no more happy than the nonwinners and were sometimes less happy than they were before winning.¹

Another study at the University of California, Santa Barbara measured people's happiness six months after winning a modest

Happiness is not a set of desirable life circumstances. It's a way of traveling.

Ed Diener

lottery prize, equivalent to eight months' worth of income. It also found that the win had no effect on happiness.²

You might be thinking that's just fine because you're not about to gamble your hard-earned cash, let alone play the ludicrous odds of a lottery. We're with you. But what about a pay raise? How would you feel about a little increase in your current income? Would twenty thousand dollars more put a big smile on your face? Of course. Research in psychology and economics has found that people *do* get happier as their income increases—but only up to a certain level.³ Researchers find that life satisfaction rises with higher incomes up to a household income of about seventy-five thousand dollars. It levels off afterward.⁴ In other words, money doesn't make us happy so much as it prevents us from being miserable. Still, that doesn't stop the vast majority of us from believing that more money, regardless of our income, would make us happier.

The First Half of Your Happiness Your Set Point

As it turns out, people are not very good at predicting what will make them happy and how long that happiness will last. They expect positive events to make them much happier than those events


actually do, and they expect negative events to make them unhappier than they actually do.⁵ In both field and lab studies, we've found that passing or failing an exam, winning or losing an election, gaining or losing a great house, getting or not getting a promotion, and even getting married all have less impact on happiness than people think they will. A recent study showed that very few experiences affect

us for more than three months.

It isn't what you have or who you are or where you are or what you are doing that makes you happy or unhappy. It is what you think about it.

Dale Carnegie

When good things happen, we celebrate for a while and then sober up. When bad things happen, we weep and whine for a while and then pick ourselves up and get on with it. Scientists call it *habituation*. The rest of us call



it surprising. After all, you'd think that the thing we're pining for would make us happier than it actually does.

It all has to do with what experts call our *happiness set point*. In fact, they say that 50 percent of our happiness is determined by our genes.⁶ We have a range of happiness, we naturally fall into regardless of what happens. And generally speaking, we eventually return to our happiness set point even after a tremendous high or a deep low.

With a skull cap containing 128 sensors, Dr. Richard Davidson and his research team at the University of Wisconsin have been watching people's brains respond to happy as well as distressing circumstances. Their ongoing study aims to understanding how much of our joy level is set at birth, and how much we can control.

People with happy brains have their parents to thank, to a certain extent, not only for happy genes, according to Davidson, but also for loving childhoods. His studies as well as many others have shown

that angry or critical parents can actually alter where a child's happiness level eventually rests until it's set around age sixteen.⁷

The bottom line? Half of our happiness is determined by a combination of our biological heredity and early upbringing. While our happiness will seesaw following pleasing or traumatic life events, it will inevitably shift back to a natural level.⁸

But this accounts for just 50 percent of our happiness factor. Which raises a question: What about the other half of our happiness? Can we stretch the limits of our preprogrammed temperaments to be happier?

The Second Half of Your Happiness Your Choices

If our happiness set point is on the low end, making us less happy than others, are we doomed to stay that way? Hardly. The remaining portion of our happiness is within our control.

We take that back. Actually it's closer to 40 percent of the remaining portion of our happiness. Why? Because our circumstances account for about 10 percent of our happiness. In other words, having a job that pays enough money to meet our needs and being relatively healthy are circumstances that contribute to our overall happiness picture. But keep in mind this is only 10 percent. We underscore the percentage because most of us tend to bank so much of our happiness on our circumstances—just as the lottery winners do. We think that moving to a new house or a new city, securing a raise, or changing our appearance will make us happier. But we

You don't find happiness,
you make happiness.

David Leonhardt



are unlikely to find lasting happiness by changing our life circumstances. Why? Because of our happiness set point and our inclination to adapt to positive circumstantial changes so quickly.

Thankfully, lasting happiness does not lie mainly in increasing our set point or positively impacting our circumstances. It's found in the remaining 40 percent of the happiness pie—and that's completely determined by us.⁹ This significant portion of our happiness comes down to the choices we make, and they have nothing to do with our genetic make up or our circumstances. Happy people aren't just sitting around being happy. They are making happiness happen. And so are happy couples. They are pursuing happiness through intentional activities.

And what are these activities? Well, they're not difficult. They don't cost more money. And they don't consume inordinate amounts of time. The habits of happy couples are doable for any and all of us. To live at a level of happiness that surpasses our natural set point, enduring happiness only asks that we change a bit of how we think and behave. It's like weight. We all have a set point for weight, and if it's higher than we'd like we exercise and eat well daily to ensure we stay below that level. The same is true for happiness. We can boost our happiness above our preset level with a bit of effort. Ideally, that effort will become habit. Those prone to be less happy than oth-

Whoever is happy will
make others happy.

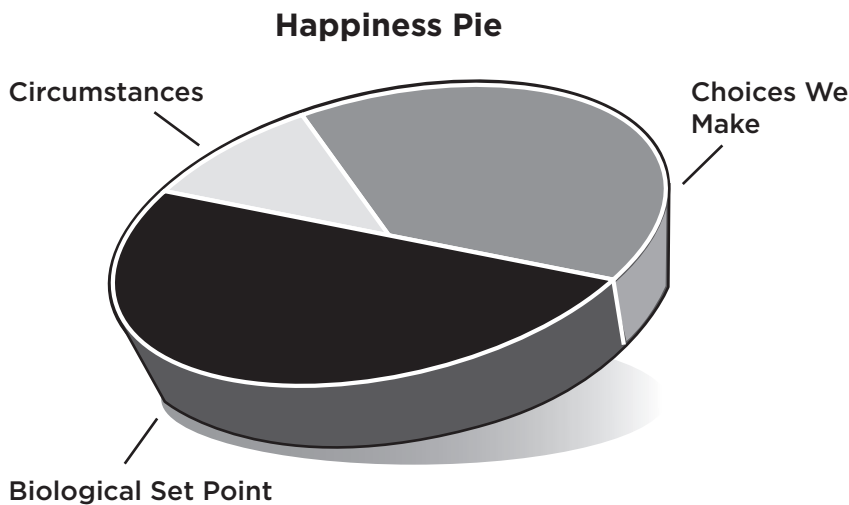
Anne Frank

ers aren't doomed. They just have to try a smidge harder to counteract the forces working against them. In fact, research reveals that all of us can actually fix our happiness set point to be permanently higher.

Sonja Lyubomirsky of the University of California, Riverside; Kennon M. Sheldon of the University of Missouri-Columbia; and

DO YOU KNOW YOUR HAPPY FACTOR?

David A. Schkade of the University of California, San Diego, summarized numerous findings and put them into a simple pie chart showing what determines happiness.¹⁰



The Hat Trick of Happiness

This book is dedicated to helping the two of you form habits of happiness together. Not just any habits—the ones we know have a proven impact on your shared happiness. You’ve seen them in the table of contents of this book. They include counting your blessings, trying new things, adding value to others, and so on. We’ll get to all of them shortly. But we first want you to know what they have in common and why they work to boost happiness that endures.

Pioneering researcher Martin Seligman outlined the ingredients for lasting happiness more than a decade ago: pleasure, engagement, and meaning.¹¹ We call them the hat trick of happiness. While they aren’t weighted equally in what they can do for our happiness factor, they each add to our overall well-being and joy.

Pleasure

There's no denying the fact that pleasurable activity and experiences heighten our happiness. Consider ice cream. Not the kind that comes in a square block from the freezer section of your grocery store. We're talking about the kind that's handmade in small batches using only all-natural dairy. We're talking about the kind that's churned with

Remember this: very little is needed to make a happy life.

Marcus Aurelius

very little air so that the flavor of caramel peanut clusters or mint chocolate chip dances on your tongue. The pleasure of this cold and creamy concoction can't help but make you happy.

Get the idea? Or how about a great movie that takes you on a thrill ride you didn't expect. A fantastic meal, relaxing conversation, great sex—all are gratifying pleasures. Pleasurable activities have a clear sensory and emotional component. They're all fun and they make us happy, especially when savored. In fact, the more we savor and relish our pleasures, the more happiness they bring. Not only that, but our pleasures are seemingly doubled when we experience them with the person we love. Sharing a pleasurable experience with the person you love is the single strongest predictor of improving pleasure. So as you'll soon see, many of our happiness boosters involve savoring pleasure together.

Engagement

Recently we sat on the floor in a crowded airline terminal and played a game of Scrabble on our trusty iPad. We had about thirty minutes to kill before we could board our flight and a quick game would do the trick. We've had a longstanding competition in our marriage with this

game. We play to win. And on this occasion the game was especially tight. The score was teetering back and forth with nearly every move. Triple word scores hung in the balance. It was anyone's game.

It was also time to board our flight and we barely heard the announcement from the agent. We'd lost track of where we were and how much time had passed. We had to scramble to gather our belongings and get on the plane.

That's engagement. Researchers sometimes call it *flow* and it has to do with a state of being so wrapped up in an activity that we lose ourselves in it.

Does flow equal happiness? Not exactly. If you were to ask us what we felt in the midst of our Scrabble competition we would have likely said, "Nothing." We were just passing time. But it was the engagement of our minds and our beings in the process that brought about a sense of satisfaction that heightened happiness.

Of course engagement doesn't require competition. Engagement can ensue while tending a garden, talking together about your goals and dreams on a road trip, playing or listening to music, working on a home-improvement project, or preparing for an important milestone. Anything that includes the loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity is engagement. It's the process of merging with what we are doing because it consumes us.

Meaning

While delighting in hand-dipped ice cream is fun and becoming consumed in a game of Scrabble can engender contentment, this third ingredient of happiness trumps both pleasure and engagement. And happiness without meaning creates a relatively shallow, self-absorbed, or even selfish life.

Every dedicated parent knows the experience of sacrificing for a child. And every loving parent will tell you that the sacrifice is fulfilling. It seems implausible, but it's true. Paradoxically, a parent's happiness is raised by the very fact that they are willing to have their own happiness lowered through years of dirty diapers, tantrums, and backtalk. Willingness to accept unhappiness from children is a source of happiness. Why? In a word: meaning. Raising a child is one of the most meaningful endeavors we can take on.

Of course you don't have to be a parent to experience meaning. We find meaning anytime we dedicate ourselves to something bigger than we are. Volunteering to help in a blood drive, sponsoring a needy child, mentoring a less experienced couple, or helping out in the life of your church all create meaning.

Consider an exercise we do every year with our university students in Seattle. In a class of 200 students, we assign half of them to take an afternoon and indulge themselves in something they think will make them happy. They might play video games, watch a movie, enjoy a great meal, and so on. We assign the other half of the students to take an afternoon and give themselves away by doing good for others. They might volunteer at a senior center, pick up litter

Love is the condition in which the happiness of another person is essential to your own.

Robert Heinlein



around campus, help a student with special needs, and so on. When the next class meets we assess their happiness and guess what we find? You got it. The group that does good for others is inevitably and consistently much happier than the group that indulged themselves in something that gave them pleasure. It's tough to trump love and meaning when it comes to happiness.

Get this: people who have meaning in their lives, in the form of a defined purpose, rate their satisfaction with life higher even when they feel worse than those who do not have a clearly defined purpose. Is it any wonder that *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren is the bestselling hardcover book in American history?¹² Meaning and purpose are essential to abiding happiness.

Pleasure, engagement, and meaning—the hat trick of happiness. Each of these ingredients is essential to leveraging the remaining 40 percent of the happiness within our control. They are the three big dials we can turn to counter our

circumstances and genes. But beware: pursuing pleasure by itself brings only temporary happiness. Pleasure alone has no lasting impact. Think of watching a fun TV show, or if you're a shopper, going to the mall. It's

enjoyable in the moment. Then the fun is over. Yet far too many people believe pleasure is the only road to happiness. It's not. In fact, it's the least enduring and fulfilling. Engagement provides a deeper satisfaction that typically persists after the activity is finished. And meaning provides the greatest and most enduring satisfaction of all. Together, pleasure, engagement, and meaning make for a full life.¹³

The greatest happiness in the world is the conviction that we are loved; loved for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves.

Victor Hugo

The Happiest Place on Earth?

The Danes must be doing something right. Denmark recently ranked as the happiest nation on the planet, according to the World Map of Happiness.¹⁴ The happiest city on the globe, however, is half a

world away in Singapore. Ninety-five percent of its citizens say they are either very happy or quite happy.¹⁵ You'll find the United States among the twenties when its happiness is ranked. And the happiest US city? Boulder, Colorado, is often at or near the top spot according to the National Well-Being Index.¹⁶ Who knew?


Money can't buy happiness. But it sure can buy the ability to measure it. Several organizations and governments spend millions on expert teams of researchers and statisticians who measure happiness across the world. But nobody takes happiness more seriously than a little country in South Asia. While most countries like America are busy measuring their Gross Domestic Product (the market value of all our good and services we produce), the Himalayan country

of Bhutan is actually more concerned with raising its Gross National Happiness.

It's pretty hard to tell what does bring happiness. Poverty and wealth have both failed.

Ken Hubbard

It all makes sense, if you think about it. As the old adage in business says, what gets measured



gets managed. And the better we measure happiness, the better we cultivate it—whether it's on a global or personal level. That's why we want to help take inventory of your own happy factor. And it's easier than you think.

Measuring Your Personal Happy Factor

They call him the Indiana Jones of happiness research. For almost forty years, Dr. Ed Diener has been a professor of psychology at the University of Illinois. But his quest to accurately measure people's happiness has taken him to exotic populations ranging from

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the Maasai in Africa to the Inuit in Greenland. And his happiness inventory below is among the most widely used and respected instruments around.¹⁷ It will take you just a couple of minutes.

Your Happy Factor Assessment

Use the scale of 1 to 7 below to rate your agreement or disagreement with the following five statements. Simply place the appropriate number on the line preceding it. Please be open and honest in your responding.

7—Strongly agree

3—Slightly disagree

6—Agree

2—Disagree

5—Slightly agree

1—Strongly disagree

4—Neither agree
nor disagree

_____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

_____ The conditions of my life are excellent.

_____ I am satisfied with my life.

_____ So far I have gotten the important things
I want in life.

_____ If I could live my life over, I would change
almost nothing.

_____ TOTAL Score

What Your Score Means

31–35 Extremely Satisfied: You love your life and feel things are going very well. Of course, just because you are so fulfilled does not mean you're complacent. You likely realize that your well-being is always in a process that requires tending to continue to grow. That's why you're invested in this book and you are sure to get a great deal of its message because of that.

26–30 Satisfied: You like your life and feel that things are going well. Life is enjoyable, but you also realize that you can maximize your life and live it more fully. In all likelihood, you like the idea of striving to bring more fulfillment into your life and that will bode well for you as you explore this book.

21–25 Slightly Satisfied: The majority of people in economically developed nations score here. While you're generally satisfied, you would very much like some improvement. You are probably ready for some changes that will boost your happiness. And that's exactly what you'll find in this book.

15–20 Slightly Dissatisfied: You probably have a few small but significant issues in various areas of your life, or you may have just one area that's a substantial challenge. Regardless, some changes are in order and this book will help you zero your efforts in on activities that will give you the greatest payoff.

10–14 Dissatisfied: You're not doing so well. It may be one big issue or several that are going badly. If your dissatisfaction is in response to a recent event such as bereavement, you will likely

return over time to your former level of higher satisfaction. Of course, if your dissatisfaction in life has been chronically low, we urge you to see a trusted counselor or pastor.

5–9 Extremely Dissatisfied: You're obviously very unhappy with your current life. You may have experienced a recent bad event such as unemployment or you may have a chronic problem such as an addiction or alcoholism. However, dissatisfaction at this level is typically due to multiple problem areas. Whatever the reason, we urge you to see a competent psychologist, counselor, or minister. This is not a journey to travel alone.

So Happy Together

As we wrap up this chapter and launch into the heart of this book, the happiness boosters, we want to make it abundantly clear: your happiness does not depend on your partner. It's not his or her job to make you happy. Happiness is an *inside* job. We said it earlier and we want to underscore it again. Marriage doesn't make you happy. You make your marriage happy. A common mistake is to say, "I used to be happy, then I got married, and now I'm not as happy as I used to be," and conclude there's something wrong with the marriage. Nope. You're just not turning the right dials to increase the happy factor in your marriage. You need to make happy together. And the next part of this book is dedicated to helping you and your partner do exactly that.

But, you may be asking, can I do these happiness boosters if my partner doesn't want to join in? Will it still pay off and increase my well-being in

the relationship? Absolutely. Why? Because happiness begins on the inside and is very contagious.

A Dutch scientist, Christiaan Huygens, back in the 1660s realized that two pendulums mounted on the same wall always ended up swinging in perfect synchrony, even when they had been set in motion at different times. The phenomenon is called *entrainment*, and it happens with husbands and wives as well. When one person begins to take on a new attitude or behavior in the relationship, the other often falls in sync. Research backs this idea up.¹⁸

So if you begin practicing some of these boosters on your own, your partner is likely to eventually join in. As Ed Diener says, “Happiness is not a set of desirable life circumstances. It’s a way of traveling.” And we’re confident you’re going to enjoy this journey.

For Reflection

1. Would making more money make you happier? If so, how much more money and why or how would it elevate your mood over the long run?
2. What do you make of the fact that 40 percent of your happiness is determined by your choices? Do you agree? Why or why not? And what choices have you made this week that have led to long-term happiness with your partner?
3. How do you feel about the results of your happy factor self test? Do you agree with them? Why or why not? What about your partner’s results?