



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Be happy. Be the blessing.

People often think of happiness as a reaction. Something happens, and our spirits get a boost. But really, happiness is proactive. It's cherishing what we already have and living life with our eyes open, purposefully seeking moments that fill us with joy.

Most of us don't lead exciting lives. Exciting events happen, but not on a daily basis. Moments, however, are daily. They're also abundant. And with each new moment comes a new opportunity to be happy. Even if we're not happy with life, we can be happy in the moment. We can savor it as we might a breeze, knowing it'll pass quickly, but enjoying it while it lasts.

As I write this, my two-year-old daughter, Camille, is cuddled on my lap. When she woke up today, she stood in her crib and called for me as she always does, saying, "Momma?...Momma?" in the sweetest voice ever. These moments flood me with joy. They make me pause and thank God she's my child. In short, they make me happy.

On a smaller scale, I also find happiness in the coffee I'm drinking. It's from a Keurig, which to me is like having Starbucks in my home. Being served by a machine is a treat. It makes my morning better.

And then there's the happiness I feel by taking the cluttered thoughts in my head and arranging them into this essay. Through writing, I sort through life, slowly gaining clarity so I can understand what I need to know.

My point is, happiness exists everywhere. It's simply waiting to be noticed. Being happy means being *present* in our lives. It means finding extra pleasure in things that make us smile. It means taking control of our happiness, and not expecting others — a spouse, parent or best friend — to carry the burden. No one wants that burden, nor do they deserve it.

Happiness doesn't land on our doorstep in a pretty package. Yet so often, we sit around like couch potatoes, waiting for the delivery.

It's a waste of time because no one can manufacture happiness for us. Happiness can only be made in our heart. Only we can kick the gears in motion.

And here's a thought for you: Instead of expecting others to bless us, why can't we be the blessing? It sounds counterintuitive, but one great irony of happiness is that we get more by forgetting our own for a while and creating it for others. Why? Because focusing on our happiness puts us in a bubble. It narrows our worldview, magnifying our problems. Soon we believe no one has it worse. We get down and hopeless. We wonder, "What's the use?" and decide to quit trying.

But if we look outside our bubble, we see the world's needs. We realize how good we actually have it. We want to help, so we get off the couch and begin using our God-given talents. It feels good because this is how we were designed to live. By giving and doing what a healthy mind and body are able to do. As we connect with others, we find purpose. We find the greatest happiness we've ever known from human interaction.

Happiness can be ours today, so let's not put it on hold. Let's quit telling ourselves we'll be happy when the right stars align — when we get a new house, a new car, a new job and boss — because that's an invalid excuse. Happiness is a habit, a way of looking at life. It's changing our filter so we can find happy moments each day. Without this filter, we stay locked in an unhappy place. As my friend Kim's mom says, "If you have to move an inch to be happy, you'll never be happy."

Happiness is within reach, and often under our nose. Let's do ourselves a favor by delighting in simple pleasures, and sharing our joy with others.

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