**What? You Mean It’s Not Your Job to Make Me Happy**

The Poet Mary Oliver wrote these beautiful words, “Hello, sun in my face. Hello you who made the morning and spread it over the fields...Watch, now, how I start the day in happiness, in kindness”. Good Morning Emerson!

For a good portion of my adolescence, young and even middle adulthood, I lived from a place of frequent moodiness, loneliness and worthlessness. I am not sure where I got all my demons from but knew I had them as over the years I had kept diaries and prayer journals that would often chronicle my internal dialogue and frankly read these a few years ago was downright depressing! Perhaps it was when I was at the age of 6 or 7 and hearing my parent’s frequent fighting and where I heard my name and my mother reminding my father, “You know he was a mistake.” or my first grade teacher who sexually abused her students at a Japanese Catholic School on the Island of Okinawa or the bladder reflux condition I had where I often could not control myself and would urinate in my clothes as a young boy that I came to the dark conclusion that I was truly an unlovable and worthless failure.

Living with such shame perhaps was excuse enough to have a mind that was constantly in a state of dark, negative and foreboding self-talk. And certainly, the deep self-loathing had some wonderful motivational power as a young boy to seek out opportunities for recognition and achievement in academics, sports and the arts. And as my father’s job as an Army Officer moved me in the middle of 2nd Grade; after 5th Grade; after 6th Grade and after 10th Grade, the recognition and achievement were coping mechanisms I found to overcome my self-loathing and to “fit in.” Somehow I graduated from West Point and married the gal of my dreams and had a wonderful military career that culminated in my teaching leadership at West Point. I graduated Suma Cum Laude from the Harvard Business School and after leaving the Army was hired by one of the most prominent global consulting firms in the world, McKinsey & Company. Yet with most of the things I accomplished, I always thought deep down inside I was an imposter only waiting for the day where all my many imperfections would be revealed.

It was probably in the year 2001 that I realized I needed some external help and ended up with an 82-year-old social worker by the name of Kempton Haynes. We would meet on Monday late afternoons at 5:00 pm at Grace Presbyterian Church on Ponce. The church offices would be deserted excepted for Kempton Haynes and I. His approach to working with me in the first few sessions was quite simple. He would just exhibit this warm and inviting smile and just keep smiling until I would say something. I remember our first session, as he smiled at me, I could not let the silence linger and so my response- “I guess I am supposed to talk.” He would keep smiling; “I suppose I am to talk about myself.” His smile and my continued dialogue, well since I am here because I have some “stuff” to work through, I guess I should talk about these….” However, by the 4th session, even Kempton had his limits as he shared his first observation: “Man, I would hate to be your wife.” I was stunned and completely caught off guard. “Why would you say such a thing.” His simple response was life changing. “Because you have made it her responsibility to make you happy. She is your best and only friend, lover, wife and mother of your children and it must be pretty hard being her.”

Kempton’s simple observation has become transformational and life giving as that moment started me on the journey of seeing that my joy and happiness was fully and solely my responsibility and that I had some major work to do to start cultivating something that was so important and yet that I had delegated to others.

Perhaps another life-giving insight in my life has been from the writings of Viktor Frankl. Viktor was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist as well as a Holocaust survivor. Frankl’s famous book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, that he wrote in 9 days, tells the story of how he survived the Holocaust by finding personal meaning in the experience, which gave him the will to live through it. He went on to later establish a new school of existential therapy called logotherapy, based in the premise that man’s underlying motivator in life is a “will to meaning,” even in the most difficult of circumstances. I have reflected on the following two quotes for the last 16 years at least several times a week as they continue to challenge, inform, and transform how I view life and hopefully how I live life.

*Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.*

*Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.*

For me the first quote remains the most powerful for if Viktor can choose his attitude in a hell hole like Auschwitz, certainly I can choose my attitude in world where I have been blessed by so very much.

From the preface to *Man's Search for Meaning* by Gordon W. Allport

*"As a long-time prisoner in bestial concentration camps Viktor Frankl found himself stripped to naked existence. His father, mother, brother, and his wife died in camps or were sent to gas ovens, so that, excepting for his sister, his entire family perished in these camps. How could he - every possession lost, every value destroyed, suffering from hunger, cold and brutality, hourly expecting extermination - how could he find life worth preserving?"*

Even in the degradation and abject misery of a concentration camp, Frankl could exercise the most important freedom of all - the freedom to determine one's own attitude and spiritual well-being. No sadistic Nazi SS guard could take that away from him or control the inner-life of Frankl's soul. One of the ways he found the strength to fight to stay alive and not lose hope was to think of his wife. Frankl clearly saw that it was those who had nothing to live for who died quickest in the concentration camp.

From Man’s Search for Meaning:

“We stumbled on in the darkness, over big stones and through large puddles, along the one road running through the camp. The accompanying guards kept shouting at us and driving us with the butts of their rifles. Anyone with very sore feet supported himself on his neighbor's arm. Hardly a word was spoken; the icy wind did not encourage talk. Hiding his hand behind his upturned collar, the man marching next to me whispered suddenly: *"If our wives could see us now! I do hope they are better off in their camps and don't know what is happening to us.* That brought thoughts of my own wife to mind. And as we stumbled on for miles, slipping on icy spots, supporting each other time and again, dragging one another on and upward, nothing was said, but we both knew: each of us was thinking of his wife. Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading and the pink light of the morning was beginning to spread behind a dark bank of clouds. But my mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look then was more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise. A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth--that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: ***The salvation of man is through love and in love.*** I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world may still know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when a man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way--an honorable way--in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment.

In front of me a man stumbled and those following him fell on top of him. The guard rushed over and used his whip on them all. Thus, my thoughts were interrupted for a few minutes. But soon my soul found its way back from the prisoner’s existence to another world, and I resumed talk with my loved one: I asked her questions, and she answered; she questioned me in return, and I answered as my mind still clung to the image of my wife. A thought crossed my mind: I didn't even know if she were still alive, and I had no means of finding out (during all my prison life there was no outgoing or incoming mail); but at that moment it ceased to matter. There was no need to know; nothing could touch the strength of my love, and the thoughts of my beloved. Had I known then that my wife was dead, I think that I still would have given myself, undisturbed by that knowledge, to the contemplation of that image, and that my mental conversation with her would have been just as vivid and just as satisfying. *"Set me like a seal upon thy heart, love is as strong as death."*

I have read these incredible words many times and they always stir something significant and emotional in me. Perhaps because I have been lucky to have met my wife Claudia well over 36 years ago and remain as in love with her as the day I fell madly head over heels in love with her as a young cadet at West Point and it resonates with me that Frankl could keep his joy and optimism about him in the worst of circumstances just by engaging in an imaginary conversation with his loved one.

It is important that for you to understand for the context of this sermon that I define happiness as the experience of positive emotions-pleasure combined with deeper feelings of meaning, flow, connection, and achievement.

And I want to offer you a simple but powerful construct for us to about based upon this definition of happiness. Mo Gawdat, who works at Google X, devised with his son a mathematical formula for happiness: Measured by their equation, happiness is greater to or equal to **Your Perception of events in your life, minus your expectation of how life should be.** It took me several attempts to get my mind around this definition. At its essence, he is saying the same thing as Frankl. If you want to be truly happy, change how you view life and choose expectations that will support your joy and happiness. Being wealthy or the smartest or most talented in something doesn’t help. The scientific research will tell you that once you get to an average level of income, your happiness plateaus. When you go even higher, wealth starts to work against you as people start to treat you differently; and you start to feel constant disappointment. When Gawdat’s 21-year-old son died during a routine medical procedure, Gawdat of course was heartbroken and he decided to lean on his equation and reset his expectations while striving every day to feel better. Gawdat says, “Happiness, is very much like staying fit. It is a choice. You can actually achieve it and there is a method to make it happen.”

Several years ago, I spoke at Emerson about the life of Alice Herz-Sommers. In February of 2014 she died at the great age of 110! And at that time, Alice was the world's oldest survivor of the Holocaust. She was imprisoned at Theresienstadt, which was conceived by Hitler as a "model" concentration camp. Can you imagine the horrors and suffering she witnessed? Alice was a pianist and in between the summer of 1943 and the camp's liberation at the end of the war, she played more than 100 concerts at Theresienstadt. Most were solo recitals culled from memory from her extensive repertoire.

In the camp Alice found the kind of meaning that Viktor Frankl spoke of as she learned what she could live without. Rather than grieving for what she did not have, she rejoiced in what she had. Alice knew that no one could rob her of the treasures of her mind. "I am richer than the world's richest person because I have music in my heart and mind," she said at the age of 108. While performing she and the other performers could nearly forget their hunger and their surroundings. Besides the terror of finding their names on a deportation list for Auschwitz, the fear of dying of starvation, typhus, and other diseases had become a reality. "Music was our food, our religion and our hope," she says. "Music was life. We did not, could not, and would not give up."

Alice is anything but naïve and is acutely aware of the evil that has always been present in our world. **"I know about the bad, but I look for the good**," she says.

Groundbreaking research in neuroscience and psychology is affirming that when we are in a positive, optimistic and enthusiastic state of being, we are ultimately happier and much more creative and productive. Yet looking for the good does not come naturally to us-our biological and evolutionary characteristics leave us highly prone to look for the negative; to see threats all around us and to be ever ready for flight or fight. And the statistics of our society give stark credence to the impact of negative emotions:

* Many studies show how prolonged stress, chronic fatigue, and deepened cynicism lead to other unhealthy outcomes such as obesity,
* Type 2 Diabetes, High Blood Pressure which in turn have been shown to influence chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer.
* Depression rates today 10 times higher than in 1960 with over 150 million prescriptions written for anti-depressants;
* Fifty years ago, the average age of depression was 29.5; today it is exactly half-14.
* 75 % of Americans in 1940 reported being “very satisfied”; today that number has dropped to well below 67% despite extraordinary progress in quality of life.
* And we know all too well that over the last 20 years our country’s obesity has climbed from 22% to close to 35% and continuing a steep trajectory.

I love to show a picture of the last statue that Michelangelo carved before his death. The statute of Mary holding Jesus taken off the cross of Calvary is unfinished but still very much extraordinary. It is in a gallery all by itself in Milan, Italy and I have had the privilege of staring at this masterpiece for many minutes. What makes this statue so amazing is that Michelangelo was carving this statue two days before he passed away at the age of 88 in the year 1564 when the life expectancy of an Italian was 37!

Alice, like Michelangelo, lived her long life with great passion and joy and points us to a key theme in the pursuit of happiness. In the New Testament in the Book of Luke, Chapter 17, Verse 21: Jesus says in conversation with his disciples: “Neither shall they say, see here! or, see there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”

This teaching is quite consistent with Buddha’s as he states: “All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think we become. Happiness comes from within. Do not seek it without.”

 Many of us have been carefully taught that happiness will come when we have achieved and fulfilled our goals; “One day when\_\_\_\_\_\_, I will be happy,” and far too often base our future happiness on the possession of something material such as a house, a particular kind of car, a title and position, a level of salary, some type of notoriety. And when we get there, we find only momentary pleasure and quickly go back to whatever level of dissatisfaction we were at before getting what we thought would bring us eternal happiness. Today, groundbreaking research in Neurosciences and Psychology confirm what Jesus, Buddha, Viktor Frankl and the Dalia Lama have been telling us all along, that we have this all wrong-that happiness is the precursor to success, not merely the result. In a wonderful recent book, The Book of Joy by the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, The Dalia Lam writes:

*“From the very core of our being, we simply desire joy and contentment. The ultimate source of happiness is within us. Not money, not power, not status. Sadly, many of the things that undermine our joy and happiness we create ourselves. Often it comes from the negative tendencies of the mind, emotional reactivity, or from our inability to appreciate and utilize the resources that exist within us. We create most of our suffering, so it should be logical that we also have the ability to create more joy. It simply depends on the attitudes, the perspectives, and the reactions we bring to situations and to our relationships with other people.*

We now know that positive emotions flood our brains with dopamine and serotonin; not only making us feel better but lighting up the learning centers of our brains to high levels. And that happiness, enthusiasm and optimism actually fuels better engagement and achievement as the more happy, positive, and optimistic we are, the more creative, imaginative, open, thoughtful, and productive we become.

So, if the pathway to happiness lies in what we tell ourselves, then what are those practices that we can do to better cultivate a spirit of greater and more consistent happiness in our lives? I call them practices because I think for most of us, that is indeed what it requires and it doesn’t happen without clear intention, focused attention and persistent effort. The Human experience contains the seeds of greatness as well as the seeds of despair and I believe each of us has those seeds within us and what grows is what we nurture and feed.

In my own journey, I have found that this pathway can be organized into three core elements: **Doing good; Feeling good; and Engaging fully in life**.

1. Doing Good begins with seeking, finding and keeping a Purpose that is bigger than our own self-interests….Mary Oliver wrote: “What will you do with your one wild and precious life?” The Emerson Mission Statement “Seek truths, celebrate differences, act on our Unitarian Universalist Principles, inspire the best in each of us and serve the world,” is certainly a bold purpose that calls us to strive and reach beyond ourselves to achieve. I also believe that each of us should try to define our own purpose statement.
2. A dear friend of mine, John Buonviaggio who has spent a large part of his life in prison ministry and is one of the most compassionate people I have ever met, said it best- “that what you keep you lose but what you give away is yours forever.” And so, armed with a purpose bigger than our own self-interest the happiest people on earth are those who live lives of noble service to others and find ways every day to give what they have away to others.
3. “One of the best ways to make yourself happy is to make others happy; one of the best ways to make others happy is to be happy yourself.” And so, to do good we must nurture and cultivate ourselves. Feeling Good is all about Self-Care-Right sleep, eating well, right exercise and movement; and mindfulness and meditation. What a delightful and happiness producing treat. Dalai Lama says: “If you don’t love yourself, you cannot love others. You will not be able to love others. If you have no compassion for yourself then you are not able of developing compassion for others.” **You can’t give what you don’t have**. So, each of us must cultivate love and compassion for ourselves so that we can give these in full measure to others.
4. Two of the greatest practices that we can do to feel good are: Savoring our positive experiences and reflecting on those things and people in our lives that we are most grateful for. In savoring our positive experiences, it is as simple as trying each day to recount several positive experiences of our day and more that we can describe these positive experiences the richer and more impactful they are on increasing our positive feelings and happiness.
5. The other practice is in reflecting daily about what we are most grateful and appreciative of and then if possible to take share this goodness by expressing it to others. A friend of mine who is going through a very difficult time in her career shared with me the other day that starting her day in the practice of gratitude and appreciation has been life giving and life changing. And while she initially resisted it, she stayed with it and noticed how it was generating resilience to support her amid great challenges. When you are thinking about what is good, what is positive and noble, it is impossible at that moment to think about the bad and the negative. What we nurture and feed grows.
6. Finally, the last practice and perhaps the most powerful practice of all is in deepening our relationships with others. My dear friend Peter Chatel shared with me several years ago that one of the most powerful ways to move from illness to wellness is in changing the “I” to “We”. We too often are fed this myth about the rugged individual who overcomes adversity in achieving greatness. Yet there is no real story of the one that doesn’t contain the story of the many. We are meant for community and relationship and in any meaningful, productive community and relationship there is a willingness to give up a part of what I want so that we can belong and gain the safety and support of beloved community.

I recall as the director of a musical being performed at the Harvard Business School on opening night the cast and crew had pulled together to put on a spectacular evening of entertainment for our audience and we had united under a simple purpose that at the end of each performance that our audience would be so moved by our musical that they would give us at least a 2-minute standing ovation. Yet, I sensed before the curtain lifted that there was much anxiety and concern about our capacity to deliver….and so I chose to share a part of a song that came from a Catholic Monk, “Wherever We Go” to remind everyone what was most important. I asked that we all gather in a large circle, hold hands as I read:

“I want to say something to all of you who have become a part of the fabric of my life. The color and texture, which you have brought into my being, have become a song and I want to sing it forever. There is an energy in us, which makes things happen; when the paths of other persons touch ours, and we have to be there and let it happen. When the time of our particular sunset comes, our thing, our accomplishment won't really matter a great deal. But the clarity and care with which we have loved others will speak with vitality of the great gift of life we have been for each other.” At the end of this, there wasn’t a dry eye among these “type A” Harvard Business School students who were still holding hands…and we believe the standing ovation on opening night was even longer than 2 minutes.

There is something in all of us that seeks to belong and we have an opportunity in continued building of our beloved Emerson Community to nurture that sense of belonging and to live out our vision statement: “To be a radically inclusive, open minded, Beloved Community that is a vibrant source of peace, hope and healing.” And I might add….and great Happiness!

So, my dear friends, remember it is what we nurture and cultivate that grows; it is by free will that we choose every day what story we tell ourselves about our world. Please choose carefully, as the story we tell, most often, looks an awful like the lives we are living. The happiest people in the world are those who have figured out that seeking happiness can be quite elusive but being happy is about choice and intention and creating supporting practices that help us to love ourselves and when we feel good, we do good and in doing good we engage as fully as possible with our one wild and very precious life.

**1. GIVING: Do things for others**

Caring about others is fundamental to our happiness. Helping other people is not only good for them and a great thing to do, it also makes us happier and healthier too. Giving also creates stronger connections between people and helps to build a happier society for everyone. And it's not all about money - we can also give our time, ideas and energy. So, if you want to feel good, do good!

**2. RELATING: Connect with people**

Relationships are the most important overall contributor to happiness. People with strong and broad social relationships are happier, healthier and live longer. Close relationships with family and friends provide love, meaning, and support and increase our feelings of self-worth. Broader networks bring a sense of belonging. So, taking action to strengthen our relationships and create new connections is essential for happiness.

**3. EXERCISING: Take care of your body**

Our body and our mind are connected. Being active makes us happier as well as being good for our physical health. It instantly improves our mood and can even lift us out of a depression. We don't all need to run marathons - there are simple things we can all do to be more active each day. We can also boost our well-being by unplugging from technology, getting outside and making sure we get enough sleep!

**4. APPRECIATING: Notice the world around**

Ever felt there must be more to life? Well good news, there is! And it's right here in front of us. We just need to stop and take notice. Learning to be more mindful and aware can do wonders for our well-being in all areas of life - like our walk to work, the way we eat or our relationships. It helps us get in tune with our feelings and stops us dwelling on the past or worrying about the future - so we get more out of the day-to-day.

**5. TRYING OUT: Keep learning new things**

Learning affects our well-being in lots of positive ways. It exposes us to new ideas and helps us stay curious and engaged. It also gives us a sense of accomplishment and helps boost our self-confidence and resilience. There are many ways to learn new things - not just through formal qualifications. We can share a skill with friends, join a club, learn to sing, play a new sport and so much more.

**6. DIRECTION: Have goals to look forward to**

Feeling good about the future is important for our happiness. We all need goals to motivate us and these need to be challenging enough to excite us, but also achievable. If we try to attempt the impossible this brings unnecessary stress. Choosing ambitious but realistic goals gives our lives direction and brings a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when we achieve them.

**7. RESILIENCE: Find ways to bounce back**

All of us have times of stress, loss, failure or trauma in our lives. But how we respond to these has a big impact on our well-being. We often cannot choose what happens to us, but we can choose our own attitude to what happens. In practice, it's not always easy, but one of the most exciting findings from recent research is that resilience, like many other life skills, can be learned.

**8. EMOTION: Take a positive approach**

Positive emotions - like joy, gratitude, contentment, inspiration, and pride - are not just great at the time. Recent research shows that regularly experiencing them creates an 'upward spiral', helping to build our resources. So, although we need to be realistic about life's ups and downs, it helps to focus on the good aspects of any situation - the glass half full rather than the glass half empty.

**9. ACCEPTANCE: Be comfortable with who you are**

No-one's perfect. But so often we compare our insides to other people's outsides. Dwelling on our flaws - what we're not rather than what we've got - makes it much harder to be happy. Learning to accept ourselves, warts and all, and being kinder to ourselves when things go wrong, increases our enjoyment of life, our resilience and our well-being. It also helps us accept others as they are.

**10. MEANING: Be part of something bigger**

People who have meaning and purpose in their lives are happier, feel more in control and get more out of what they do. They also experience less stress, anxiety and depression. But where do we find 'meaning and purpose'? It might be our religious faith, being a parent or doing a job that makes a difference. The answers vary for each of us but they all involve being connected to something bigger than ourselves.