

# Finding True Happiness

by Fulton Sheen

St John the Evangelist Church Study Guide

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# Study Guide Purpose and Format

Reading a good book is like going on a journey from New York to Florida with the author. Some people want to drive straight thru, sleeping in shifts, stopping only for the barest of necessities

The purpose of this study guide is to help readers delve further into the book by exploring personal reaction and application. It can be used by either small faith groups or individuals for personal reflection.

The study guide comprises six sessions. These sessions could take place once a week or once a month, at the discretion of the group.

Each session follows the same format:

Opening Prayer

Discussion Questions

Closing Prayer

We recommend that a group meet for sixty to ninety minutes, but that the group agree upon a fixed length of time and adhere to that time.

It is assumed that participants will have completed the reading assignment before attending each session.

## **Getting started**

Individual reading session

## **Opportunities to share**

small group discussion

on-line discussion

## About Finding True Happiness (Paperback)

### Are you perfectly happy, or are you still looking for perfect happiness?

Most people are still actively searching for true and lasting happiness, but are looking in the wrong places. It's easy to be misled into believing that happiness is found in money, rank, or prominence. While these things are not inherently bad, and can in fact be used to do much good, they will, in the final analysis, not bring a happiness that endures.

Once we realize that nothing less than a complete union with God will satisfy our souls, we will not let transitory things distract or disappoint us. This is because then, according to Fulton Sheen, "you put no more hope in things than they can bear. You cease looking for first-rate joys where there are only tenth-rate pleasures."

In addition to addressing the topic of joy vs. pleasure in *Finding True Happiness*, Fulton Sheen also helps us gain the right perspective on things such as loneliness and the secret of sanctity. This brings us to our ultimate purpose, which is found in God alone. Only by losing oneself in God, will we find our true selves-- and true happiness along with it.

The introduction to this book provides insight from different perspectives,

- Fulton J. Sheen (born in 1895, the eldest of four boys who was the first American to earn an *agregé en philosophie*, a distinction of the highest honors like obtaining a "super – doctorate")
- Bella Dodd (pg.9-10) a lawyer for the Communist Party
- Trent Dean, the narrator of the Introduction
- St. John Neumann (1811-1860) a clergyman and Bishop

Both Sheen and Neuman shared a common perception of happiness, “that you find it by stopping the search for it.” He wrote, “I no longer look for comfort from either heaven or earth. You, Divine Master, can judge whether such are necessary for me. I promise to worry no more over the aridity You send me. You, my God, are the font of aridity and grace.”

Decades later Sheen spoke with similar concepts, “It is one of the paradoxes of creation that you gain control by submission.” Only by truly letting go are we empowered; “as long as we hold on to things, those things have power over us, but if we let go of having things our way, we are freed to be happy.”

The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit; **Knowledge, Courage, Understanding, Wisdom, Right Judgement, Fear of the Lord** and **Reverence** can be correlated into the passage below (pg.17)

*“There seems to be a small piece missing out of the side of every human heart. That may be to symbolize a piece that was torn out of the Heart of Christ which embraced all of humanity on the Cross. But I think the real meaning is that when God made your human heart, He found it so good and so lovable that He kept a small sample of it in Heaven. He sent the rest of it into this world to enjoy His gifts, and to use them as stepping stones back to Him, but to be ever mindful that you can never love anything in this world with your whole heart because you have not a whole heart with which to love. In order to love anyone with your whole heart, in order to be really peaceful, in order to be really wholehearted, you must go back to God to recover the piece He has been keeping for you(r) for all eternity.”*

## **Reading and Review Session Schedule**

### **Introduction and Part 1- “Pleasure is of the body; joy is of the mind and heart”**

#### **Session One Reading – pages 7 - 26**

Chapter 1 – Finding Perfect Happiness

Chapter 2 – Philosophy of Pleasure

Chapter 3 – Silence

### **Part 2 – Contemplation – Humility the pathway to...divine wisdom**

#### **Session Two Reading – pages 27 - 38**

Chapter 4 – Repose

Chapter 5 – Self-Inflation

Chapter 6 – Egotism – The Enemy of Inner Peace

#### **Session Three Reading – pages 39 - 49**

Chapter 7 - Desire

Chapter 8 – Sadness

Chapter 9 – Moods

#### **Session Four Reading – pages 51 - 61**

Chapter 10 – Mental Cases Are Increasing

Chapter 11 – Loneliness

Chapter 12 – Truth – Forgotten Ideal

### **Part 3 – Finding Contentment in a Hurried Life**

#### **Session Five Reading – pages 63 - 69**

Chapter 13 – Patience

Chapter 14 – Contentment

#### **Session Six Reading – pages 71 - 78**

Chapter 15 - Joy

Chapter 16 – The Will – The Secret of Sanctity

## Session One

PRE-READING: pages 7 - 26

PRAY TOGETHER THE OPENING PRAYER:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

How many times have we imagined something that we felt was our hearts desire only to learn over a period of time; that wasn't the case? Think of an example....

Now think about the "disappointment" was the quest for pleasure what you had hoped?

"Pleasure is of the body; joy is of the mind and heart" (pg.14) Joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit; think about a good conscience, Holy Eucharist, these examples never turn into disappointment or pain. When we begin to realize the thing we need to find is God, as He is the giver of all that is good in our life. The "gifts" He freely gives us are often represented in a non-spiritual way, or symbolized and built into cities that forget to remember the *Giver*. When this happens people can tend to rebel against God and become cynical and disillusioned as they made the case for perfect happiness dependent on earthly circumstances.

1. Can you share an example you have with each other?
2. How can you offer encouragement when exposed to this type of situation?
3. What gifts do you have that you share with others?

The "cross" we bear in our life on earth is a gift that helps us to become a better version of ourselves, like gold tested in fire we are purified.

4. How have the crosses you have experienced caused you to grow closer to God?
5. Discuss the gift you believe you have and one that you are working towards

**Closing thought:** Self-discipline brings us back in a way to our childhood, especially if our parents "rationed" our pleasures

**Pray together the Closing Prayer:**

## **Session Two**

**PRE-READING: pages 27-38**

**PRAY TOGETHER THE OPENING PRAYER:**

We have more “time-saving” devices than at any other point in history, yet find the least amount of time to actually enjoy relaxation. Have we fallen victim to advertising and marketing messages that create a sense urgency to engage in all the activities of living? True repose is found when spirituality is included; for the first purpose of repose is contemplation of the good. Repose allows us to contemplate the little things we do in relationship to the vast things that give them meaning (pg.29) Self-inflation and egotism can be the enemy of inner peace. Humility isn’t popular in today’s standards.

Common ways to express humility aren’t just being humble with others; but rather recognizing how insignificant we actually are in the scheme of things. Humility can be the pathway to knowledge, scientific facts can often misrepresent one’s intention. Careful consideration and discernment is necessary even in the simplest tasks.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- 1) How do you practice repose or true leisure?
- 2) What ways are effective for you to overlook the faults of others?
- 3) What life experience can you draw from that would demonstrate how you were humbled by a situation?
- 4) How do you define purpose in your work?
- 5) How is your work “made divine” to better glorify God?
- 6) Have you ever ended your busy day by asking; what did you accomplish?

**PRAY TOGETHER THE CLOSING PRAYER:**

## Session Three

PRE-READING: pages 39 - 49

### PRAY TOGETHER THE OPENING PRAYER:

When we examine our conscience mind, it's easy to admit that we received more than we morally deserve. Our trials and disappointments, what we can call "our cross to bear" can often be the healthful discipline that leads us to greater virtue. Human virtues, as defined in the *CCC.1810 and 1811* speak to the difficulty which man has, who "wounded by sin, to maintain moral balance" but continues with, "Christ's gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues. Everyone should always ask for this grace of light and strength, frequent the sacraments, cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and follow his calls to love what is good and shun evil. (2015)"

Many wouldn't argue the strength of the European mind, how would we, as American's, respond to the last paragraph and statement at the bottom on pg. 41.

If our disposition is the reflection of the world we see, how and why do we color our glasses rather than see the reality.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The talents that you have been given must be put to work, give some examples of how you use your talents to grow in your own holiness and contribute to the holiness and happiness in others?
2. What is the first thing we must do to have the courage to freely give more of our self?
3. Describe how you found joy in life "in the recesses of a broken heart."
4. Do you look for the sin in another to deflect what you see in yourself? Does that bring you joy or sadness? Why?

### PRAY TOGETHER THE CLOSING PRAYER:

## Session Four

PRE-READING: pages 51 - 61

### PRAY TOGETHER THE OPENING PRAYER:

Are mental cases the stepchild of civilization or is the generation we have lived in or through creating the disturbances which lead to and create instability? This perception is the million-dollar question; should we look at the distractions, information overload or bias views that can be found in our quest to be all-knowing. We are mere humans; our frailty is evident especially when told through the eyes of mental health professionals. If contradictions from others are first admitted by us the severity is lessened. "The hand that is calloused will not pain as much as the soft hand, on catching a hard ball." ...

"No better law for inner peace has ever been given than that of the Divine Savior: "If anyone will come after me, let him take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

The period of time when the content of this book was written, loneliness was said to be more prevalent than in any other period in history. "One wants to be the master of one's ego, but one is so lonely with it."

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. If God knows us better than we know ourselves, He's closer to "us" than we are to ourselves. Have you experienced times when you felt you didn't even know yourself or wondered why you allow yourself to be persuaded by ego?
2. Crosses are inescapable, how are they different. Why is it important to know the difference?
3. How often do you become cynical about a person or situation; what is a new approach you could consider?
4. Where should a line be drawn between ego and "self-expression" that correlates with the inferiority versus superiority complex?
5. What can be done to restore the lost sense of vocation and sense of purpose in life?
6. What is your truth?

### PRAY TOGETHER THE CLOSING PRAYER:

## Session Five

PRE-READING: pages 63 - 69

### PRAY TOGETHER THE OPENING PRAYER:

Patience defined: A form of the moral virtue of fortitude. It enables one to endure present evils without sadness or resentment in conformity with the will of God. Patience is mainly concerned with bearing the evils caused by another. The three grades of patience are: to bear difficulties without interior complaint, to use hardships to make progress in virtue, and even to desire the cross and afflictions out of love for God and accept them with spiritual joy. (Etym.

Latin *patientia*, patience, endurance; from *patiens*, suffering.) Often we think of the pink candle and the third week of Advent when our faith calls us to a deep sense of well-being, not dependent on circumstances. Contentment brings with it a sense of equilibrium, having *faith* in knowing our purpose of life and its trials come from the hand of a loving Father. A good conscience and the ability to delay or limit gratification are just as important.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How often do you find yourself in a quest with a perception that there is a limited time in which to satisfy our many wants?

Page 64 speaks to the four areas of our lives in which patience is learned.

2. How could our patience be improved in our home, as well as in society as a whole?
3. What is an example you can share as to how you deal with disappointment mirroring the love of Christ?
4. How do you foster your “inner calm”?
5. What makes it easy for you to overcome an injustice or wrong; share an example.

Page 67 speaks to discontentment and the four main causes; egotism, envy, covetousness and jealousy. Contentment is relative to our present state...

6. What do you believe is the best resolution for moral failures and unatoned guilt?
7. What can you do to support or evangelize others who express their limitations of delights?

### PRAY TOGETHER THE CLOSING PRAYER:

## Session Six

PRE-READING: pages 71 - 78

### PRAY TOGETHER THE OPENING PRAYER:

Spiritual joy is a serenity of temper in the midst of changes of life...but how we get to spiritual and natural joys is the journey of a soul. A cheerful heart always finds a yoke easy and a burden light. The trick is to find it in the adversity and prosperity that life throws into our path. Courage is a Gift of the Holy Spirit where we learn to overcome our fear and are willing to take risks as a follower of Jesus. “A person with courage is willing to stand up for what is right in the sight of God, even if it means accepting rejection, verbal abuse, or even physical harm and death.”

*(Catholic Faith Handbook, pg.131)*

Actually, our only limitation is our “will” to begin the journey; a song comes to mind; “Jesus remember me, when I come into your kingdom” when we meet our loving Father our story written on our heart He already knows. Which thief at the Crucifixion will we be (pg.75) hopefully the one who changed the direction of his soul. Now is the moment for us to better understand our Mother of God and the gift our cross, “It is only when a log is thrown into the fire that it begins to sing. It was only when the thief was thrown into the fire of the cross that he found God. It is only in the pain that some discover Love...”

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can you incorporate spiritual joy into your life?
2. Do you have periods or outbursts of anger; if so after reading this book what is a take-away you can share with the group that you will incorporate?
3. How can you embolden others to join you in spiritual and natural joy?
4. Can you think of “little” steps to take; can you share some thoughts with the group?
5. If a bird praises God by singing, a flower by blooming, clouds with their rain, sun with its light; what can you do?

### PRAY TOGETHER THE CLOSING PRAYER:

## **Opening Prayer**<sup>1</sup>

Loving Father,

Open our hearts and minds

and allow us to see the beauty of our faith.

Show us what is possible and fill us with the grace, strength,  
and wisdom to live all the good things

we explore here together.

Send your Spirit upon us so that we can discover your dream  
for us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves,

and have the courage to defend and celebrate this true self  
in every moment of our days.

We ask you to bless in a special way the hungry, the lonely,  
the sick, and the discouraged. Remind us of our duty toward them and inspire us to be  
filled with a profound gratitude.

We ask all this through your Son, Jesus.

Amen.

## **Closing Prayer**<sup>2</sup>

Loving Father,

I invite you into my life today  
and make myself available to you.

Help me to become the person you created us to be  
by seeking your will and becoming a living example  
of your love in the world.

Open my heart to the areas of my life that need to change  
in order for me to carry out the mission  
and experience the joy you have imagined for my life.

Inspire me to live the Catholic faith in ways that are  
dynamic and engaging.

Show me how to best get involved in the life of my parish.

Help us to grow in our appreciation of Jesus  
present in the Eucharist and in the Sacrament of Mercy.

Give me courage when I am afraid,  
hope when I am discouraged,  
and clarity in times of decision.

Teach me to enjoy uncertainty and lead your Church  
to become all you imagined it would be  
for the people of our times.

Amen.