



I Want Happiness Now!

By Dr. Henry Brandt with Phil Landrum

LESSON 1: THE INDESTRUCTIBLES

WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE ALWAYS HAPPY?

A line of research concerning a group of young people called “indestructibles” was reported recently in a leading psychological journal.

These indestructibles lived under extreme poverty, and came from very bad home conditions which were located in slum neighborhoods.

Yet, they were well adjusted and good students.

The researchers wondered if we haven't erred in the past by studying maladjusted people in order to draw conclusions about good self-images. Why not study well-adjusted people instead?

That question got me to thinking of some people I've met in my life who fit the description of indestructibles.

It is true that we cannot prevent troublesome or sorrowful events from intruding into our lives. But some people live heartily, joyfully and considerately one day at a time. They rely on their power of choice, whether their problems are solved today or not.

PHYLLIS AND JIM AREN'T WORRIED

I recently saw Phyllis and Jim weather a storm that would destroy most people.

They had been married sixteen years, and had three children--ages fifteen, thirteen, and ten. The family often did things together...hiking, playing tennis, boating, attending church, entertaining friends, skiing.

In the home, Phyllis had her duties and Jim had his. She was proud of his progress on his job and his civic and church activities.

He admired the way she kept the house, managed the family, got along with her friends.

THEN IT HAPPENED

Then, without any advance warning, the company Jim worked for suddenly ceased operating.

Just...sudden unemployment...at a time when they were building a new house. Yet, there was no panic.

Phyllis trimmed the food budget, and reassured Jim that she was trusting God to help them in this crisis.

They prayed together and patiently waited as Jim looked for another job. They used his free time for family fun—inexpensive activities, of course.

They went on picnics in the park, hiked over trails, played tennis at the public courts, and went bicycling.

Jim reassured Phyllis that he wasn't afraid—or worried. His faith was in God, and he was enjoying this time of watching an uncertain future unravel.

In a few months, he found another job.

Phyllis and Jim look back on that period as one of the best of their lives.

They are among the indestructibles. They had a faith and hope that enabled them to live above their depressing circumstances.

Now, meet another indestructible.

MEMORIES OF A DITCH DIGGER

He was one of our next-door neighbors when I was a teenager. It was during those turbulent years between 1930 and 1933—the height of the Depression.

People by the droves were out of work; they were losing their life savings as a result of bank failures and were being evicted from their homes. Suicides were frequent. Nervous breakdowns were common.

Strangely enough, the depression years were happy, positive, relaxed ones for me, partially because of that next-door neighbor.

He was a highly skilled (and highly paid) tool-and-die maker. Suddenly, he was

without a job or a paycheck.

The best he could do was to get a job with the WPA, a governmental agency which gave menial jobs to as many people as possible.

His assignment: dig ditches.

WE WERE SHOCKED

This seemed a terrible thing to me. Imagine this top-flight craftsman digging ditches!

Without complaining, he went to his job every day. At night he returned, his attitude as positive as if he had his old job.

We had a big front porch on our house, and many nights the people from the neighborhood would gather on our porch. This man was one of them.

One night he got to talking enthusiastically about the fine art of digging ditches and how he was enjoying the opportunity of working outdoors and using his strength to accomplish a task.

“I’ve never felt better in my life,” he commented.

WE VISIT THE WORK DETAIL

We boys were so fascinated by his enthusiasm that we went to watch him. Most of the men who worked with him were leaning on their shovels, looking miserable.

Not our neighbor.

When he saw us, he stopped to take us on a quick tour. He told us how to dig a ditch. Then he showed us his handiwork. His ditches were straight...uniformly deep—with firm sides.

“Aren’t they beautiful?” He was proud of his ditches.

EVENINGS ON THE PORCH

Another night “our group” was sitting on the porch, watching the sun go down. The sunset was beautiful, and this neighbor was overtaken with enthusiasm.

I mean really excited! About a sunset.

“What a beautiful sunset!” he exclaimed. “What a miracle to watch!” Even though he had experienced a letdown that would have depressed many, he could get excited about a sunset.

A PROMOTION

One night, he announced that he had been made foreman. He was filled with compassion and pity for his men. They refused to accept their lot in life and spent the day moaning and complaining.

Our neighbor now had a new zest for his job—the challenge of lifting his men out of despondency and showing them how to be thankful they had some work to do.

HE HAD LEARNED AN IMPORTANT LESSON

As I watched this highly skilled craftsman who could find a challenge and satisfaction in anything he did, I realized he had mastered a pivotal principle: it was not the task that was important, but the spirit he brought to that task.

He brought an undaunted spirit to every task and experience. As a result, he was happy and successful.

GARDEN DAYS

The next spring he made a garden. He was equally thrilled with the garden and worked in it every evening. The entire process fascinated him.

“What a miracle,” he would say. “Look at everything grow.” To others, a garden was so much dust, mud, and hours of bending over. To my neighbor, it was a miracle.

This man had a faith that sustained him. His faith could be summed up in this paragraph from the Bible:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).

OTHER INDESTRUCTIBLES

There were other men in the neighborhood who lived by the same faith. Many nights the conversation on our front porch turned to what to do about unpaid taxes, unpaid bills, postponed car repairs or house repairs, because there was no money.

They would talk about someone who had had his car repossessed or who had lost a home, or about standing in line for welfare checks. Frequently, they would pray together, expressing their faith in a guiding God, asking Him to comfort their friends.

They prayed for each other, too, reaffirming their own faith and asking God for peace and wisdom.

Those prayers seemed to settle everything—nothing to worry about. Everything was in God's hands. At least, that's the way it seemed to me.

A NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECT

One night one of the men suggested: "We don't have any money, but we've got lots of energy. Let's build a tennis court." Men and boys together built a clay court.

I spent many hours pulling a heavy roller. Others used rakes, hoes and shovels. After many weeks, we were done. What a day—when the men and the boys lined up and looked at the brand new lines made of white lime.

Weren't we proud!

We spent many happy hours playing tennis on the court made by our own hands.

These were men of faith. They didn't know what their future held for them. But they trusted their God. These people were indestructibles. They had an optimism and a hope that carried them past the Depression, through World War II, the Korean War, various recessions since then, past the Vietnam War, and through the Energy crisis.

ANOTHER CRISIS

My neighbor, the toolmaker, had another difficult experience to weather about ten years ago. He was working for a firm that went bankrupt. In one day, he had to face up to two hard facts: his job was gone and so was the retirement plan he had contributed to for twenty years.

He met this problem with the same faith he had shown in front of us back in the '30s. Other neighbors have faced many difficult problems since, but their faith and hope did not rest on changeable circumstances or the mistakes of other people. They also were among the indestructibles. Their source of faith and hope could best be described by another Bible quotation:

...for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity... In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need (Philippians 4:11-12).

My family and some of my neighbors had found that secret.

MANY PEOPLE HAVEN'T

Many of my neighbors during the Depression were not indestructible.

One of my playmates would come running breathlessly over to our house about once a week. His mother and father were drunk again, and were beating each other.

His dad would break furniture and throw pots and pans through the window. No one could help them because they were so bitter. Their lives and property were in shambles.

Another playmate had a mother who would sit all day, stare out of the window, and cry. Her husband had run away. No one knew where he was. There were many such stories.

In my early teens, I saw people respond in different ways to the same circumstances.

HOW DO YOU BECOME AN INDESTRUCTIBLE?

How do you join the ranks of those unusual people who are contented no matter what their situation is?

How can you have a great time on a "rotten" vacation? How do you enjoy life in the face of a financial failure, a negligent husband, an unresponsive wife, or job setbacks?

Or...even how do you cope with success?

How do you handle maddening daily schedules? Little, everyday irritants? A room full of screaming children?

Also, how do you handle the lonely moments or decisions when no one stands with you—not even your family and friends?

In other words, how can you find contentment—right now?

There is a way.

Review Questions

1. Is it possible for us to prevent all troublesome or sorrowful events from intruding into our lives?
2. When something troubling happens to you, how do you normally respond? Examine both your outward reactions (what other people see), and your inner reactions (the way you feel inside, but people cannot see).
3. When people live heartily, joyfully and considerately one day at a time, regardless of their circumstances, they are relying on their power of _____.
4. The author's neighbor had mastered a pivotal principle: it was not the task that was important, but the _____ he brought to that task.
5. The "indestructible" people the author described were people of _____. They didn't know what their future held for them. But they chose to trust _____.

Permission to Reproduce and Distribute

Publisher grants permission to reproduce and distribute this material without written approval, but only in its entirety and only for non-profit use. No part of this material may be altered or used out of context without publisher's written permission.

©2014 Biblical Counseling Insights

See www.BiblicalCounselingInsights.com for additional life discipleship resources. Download a free Bible or other spiritual growth resources at www.GodResources.org.