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Really Living

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Living on a beautiful, lush tropical island with its white, sandy beaches, blue sky, cool breezes and delicious fruit sounds good, but it is not available for everyone. The keys for happiness actually lie within the grasp of everyone. And believe it or not, it is not wealth, beauty, youth or fame that makes us happy.

People with an inner joy live a healthier and longer life.

Every day the average American is bombarded by about 250 marketing messages that encourage us to buy things we don’t need and eat things that are not healthy. Hours spent in front of electronic screens instead of interacting with people face to face are unlikely to provide one with a lasting sense of well-being.

Dan Buettner, in his latest book, *Thrive*, describes the people who are happy and thriving in this world, how they focus their time and energy on developing a circle of healthy friends, work at meaningful and satisfying jobs where they engage their natural talents, participate in volunteer work, engage in enriching hobbies, stay in shape, belong to a faith-based community, and create an environment that enables them to live out their values. These thriving people are not rich but possess enough money to cover their basic needs. Results show that one’s income is a poor predictor of happiness.

What are the benefits for people who feel life has purpose and meaning? Those who report higher levels of enjoyment manifest lower rates of health problems, fewer sick days, less stress, sadness and anger. Research shows that if you are happy, you have more energy and better coping skills, you are more creative and have a greater work output, and live a healthier and longer life.

Having facilities for outdoor physical activities seems to be important. Boulder, Colorado, and San Luis Obispo, California, are reported to be among the happiest cities in the U.S. They both have preserved open space for parks, public gardens and recreational activities such as bikeways. In Copenhagen, Denmark, one of the happiest cities in the world, one-third of workers bike to work every day. In addition, outdoor family vacations are vital to rejuvenate you, allowing time to pursue a variety of interests and do things you feel passionate about.

Being around happy people impacts our well-being. We tend to mimic what we see in those we hang out with. According to one study, each additional happy friend we have boosts our cheerfulness by nine percent. Having friends that have a good sense of humor helps soothe stress and hardship. People are more likely to be happy when they are surrounded by people they can trust, who make them feel secure, and who listen to their opinions. Dan recommends setting up a display corner in one’s house where you can routinely be reminded of your achievements, and the people and events that make life worth living. Solomon says “there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good ... and find satisfaction in all their work” (Ecclesiastes 3:12, 13).

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