

STRATEGIC STEWARDSHIP

Guiding You Through Life's Transitions



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Thoughts on Happiness from Sanjiv Chopra by Terry Ford

Harvard Professor Sanjiv Chopra gave a TED Talk (available on YouTube) earlier this year, giving his thoughts on what brings true happiness. While I recommend listening to the whole talk, here are four points he made about what brings true happiness. And it is not money.



He cited as examples those who had won \$20 million in the lottery. While they may have purchased many expensive items, within short periods of time the things they bought no longer brought a level of happiness. He calls it 'hedonic adaptation'. Whatever we have becomes the norm and it takes 'more' or 'new' to further stimulate our feelings of happiness.

The studies he cited reflect that the only time that lottery winners (or others in sudden money situations) are happier a year later is if they have partaken in meaningful experiences and given away substantial amounts to causes they support and believe in.

Dr. Chopra links happiness directly to living with purpose, listing four areas that give a sense of purpose:

1. Surround yourself with a cadre of family and good friends, quoting Robert Lewis Stevenson, "A friend is a gift you give to yourself."
2. Cultivate the ability to forgive. Carrying bitterness and unforgiveness increases your stress and can have negative health impacts. He attributes this quote to Nelson Mandela, "I have no bitterness, I have no resentment. Bitterness is like drinking poison and hoping it will kill your enemies."
3. Seek how to serve others and how you can give of yourself and your resources.
4. Practice gratitude daily. An anonymous quote: "If you don't know the language of gratitude, you will never be on speaking terms with happiness."

Success is not the key to happiness; rather, happiness is the key to success in your life. Deciding what is important to you and those in your close circle, what gives you purpose, where you can invest your life, will allow you to experience happiness that is more than transient. Dr. Chopra again quotes an ancient philosopher, Socrates, "Happiness (human flourishing) is gotten by human endeavor." It will be your intentional efforts to incorporate the four areas above into your daily life that will have a significant impact on your ongoing happiness.

Dr. Chopra referenced a study done around the world that linked how happy people feel based on genetic predisposition (some would say personality), living conditions, and the voluntary actions they take. Consistently, only 10% of the weighting was to living conditions whether the people lived in a western country or in a third world country.

Happiness has more to do with the choices we make than with our circumstances. Some good words to contemplate.



Terry Ford*, CFP®, CKA
tford@strategicsteward.com



Ed Fortier*, CFP®, CKA
efortier@strategicsteward.com



Lee Penland*
lpenland@strategicsteward.com



Michael Pemberton*, RICP, CKA
mpemberton@strategicsteward.com

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6 Principles for Financial Success

Principle #2: Avoid Accumulating Debt by Michael Pemberton

This is the second of a six-part series by our own Michael Pemberton on Six Principles for Financial Success that all of our advisors emphasize repeatedly (with ourselves and) with our clients.



Photo credit: Google images

“The borrower is a slave to the lender,” says Proverbs 22:7. Have you ever felt like a slave when you’ve been in debt? When I got out of college, I didn’t have a spending plan and my spending got out of control. At the same time, I was transitioning from a salary position to building my financial planning practice. This was not a good combo. I ended up amassing over \$11k in credit card debt. I remember feeling trapped that I could only make the monthly payments, wondering if I would ever get out from under this. I was a slave to debt.

Over time, by God’s grace, I was able to develop a spending plan and pay off my credit card debt. But the lesson about debt has stood with me. God wants us to be free to serve Him.

Whenever we take on debt, we’re putting ourselves in position to limit our freedom in serving the Lord. In my opinion, mortgage debt is acceptable if your home was bought with a good down payment and the home expenses come in at 35% or less of your income.

Debt is a major cause of stress and friction in marriage. One of the best things you can do financially is to get out of consumer debt (car loans, tax debt, credit cards, etc.). Below is an excerpt from a blog post by author and teacher Randy Alcorn. Before taking on debt, pray and ask yourselves the questions Randy lays out. I think you’ll find that most of the time the Lord wants to provide in ways that don’t include taking on debt.

It’s one thing to trust God to provide for our present needs (Matthew 6:33). It’s another to presume upon Him by dictating (via a decision to incur debt) the terms of His future provision. By choosing to go into debt, we twist God’s arm to provide not only for our needs, but also our wants.

Do we believe God knows best what our needs are? Debt spends money we don’t have. So isn’t our decision to go into debt proof that we believe we need more than God has given us? If we don’t have the resources to buy something, and if we feel such need for it that we’re borrowing to get it, aren’t we saying God has failed to meet our needs?

If God knows best, and if He knows what we need, then why hasn’t He provided sufficient funds? Is He encouraging us to pray for provision rather than take things into our own hands by borrowing? In this age where we seem unwilling to wait for anything, does God want us to learn what it means to “wait on the Lord” (Psalm 27:14; Isaiah 30:18)?

Before we go into debt, we should ask ourselves some questions:

<http://www.epm.org/blog/2016/Jan/27/questions-debt>

Please follow the link above to find Randy Alcorn’s 11 important questions to ask about debt.

Social Security 101

Social Security is complex, and the details are often misunderstood even by those who are already receiving benefits. If you're looking forward to Social Security, whether in one year or 30 years, it's important to understand some of the basic rules and options and how they might affect your financial future.

Full retirement age (FRA). Once you reach full retirement age, you can claim your full Social Security retirement benefit, also called your primary insurance amount or PIA. FRA ranges from 66 to 67, depending on your birth year (see chart)

Claiming Early or Later

Year of birth	Full retirement age (100% of PIA)	Worker benefit at age 62: % of PIA	Worker benefit at age 70: % of PIA	Spousal benefit at age 62: % of spouse's PIA*
1943-54	66	75.00%	132.00%	35.00%
1955	66 and 2 months	74.17%	130.67%	34.59%
1956	66 and 4 months	73.33%	129.33%	34.17%
1957	66 and 6 months	72.50%	128.00%	33.75%
1958	66 and 8 months	71.67%	126.67%	33.34%
1959	66 and 10 months	70.83%	125.33%	32.92%
1960 & later	67	70.00%	124.00%	32.50%



*The spousal benefit is based on the primary worker's PIA; the maximum spousal benefit at FRA is 50%

Claiming early. The earliest you can claim your Social Security worker benefit is 62. However, your benefit will be permanently reduced if claimed before your FRA. At age 62, the reduction would be 25% to 30%, depending on your birth year. Your benefit may be further reduced temporarily if you work while receiving benefits before FRA and your income exceeds certain levels. (When you reach FRA, an adjustment is made and you will regain any benefits lost due to excess earnings.)

Claiming later. If you do not claim your benefit at FRA, you will earn delayed retirement credits for each month you wait to claim, up to age 70. This will increase your benefit by two-thirds of 1% for each month, or 8% for each year you delay. There is no increase after age 70.

Spousal benefits. If you're married, you may be eligible to receive a spousal benefit based on your spouse's work record, whether you worked or not. The maximum spousal benefit, if claimed at your full retirement age, is 50% of your spouse's PIA (regardless of whether he or she claimed early) and doesn't include any delayed retirement credits. If you claim a spousal benefit before reaching your FRA, it will be permanently reduced.

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Dependent benefits. Your dependent child may be eligible for benefits after you begin receiving Social Security if he or she is unmarried and meets one of the following criteria: (a) under age 18, (b) age 18 to 19 and a full-time student in grade 12 or lower, (c) age 18 or older with a disability that started before age 22. The maximum family benefit is equal to about 150% to 180% of your PIA, depending on your situation.

Survivor benefits. If your spouse dies, you can claim a reduced survivor benefit as early as age 60 or a full survivor benefit – 100% of your deceased spouse's PIA and any delayed retirement credits – if you wait until your full retirement age. If you are eligible for a survivor benefit and one based on your own work record, you could claim a survivor benefit first and switch to a benefit based on your work record at your FRA or later, if it would be higher.

Divorced spouses. If you were married for at least 10 years and are unmarried, you can receive a spousal or survivor benefit based on your ex's work record. If your ex is eligible for but has not applied for Social Security benefits, you can still receive a spousal benefit if you have been divorced for at least two years.

These are just some of the fundamental facts to know about Social Security. For more information, including an estimate of your future benefits, see ssa.gov.

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No Bake Oatmeal Cookies

For a quick bite of something sweet

- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 2 tsp unsweetened cocoa
- 2 Tbsp milk
- 2 Tbsp crunchy peanut butter
- 1/2 tsp vanilla
- 1/2 cup quick-cooking rolled oats



Stir together sugar, cocoa and milk in 4-cup glass measure or medium microwave-safe bowl. Microwave on HIGH 1 to 1-1/4 minutes or until boiling, stirring once.

Stir in peanut butter and vanilla until blended. Stir in oats until combined. Drop by the spoonful onto a waxed paper-lined plate to make 6 cookies. Cool in freezer 10 minutes before serving.