The Art of Unlocking Happiness

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Guest: David Lowry, Don Drew

Resources:

David Lowry: 0:29

Hello everyone and welcome to Peaceful Life Radio, your home on the internet for cultivating a more peaceful life as you get rid of interpersonal drama and conflict. And with me in my studio is my good friend, Dr. Don Drew. How are you, Don?

Don Drew: 0:44

Great, David. Let's our program for today.

David Lowry: 0:47

Okay. Have you ever wondered what truly makes you happy? Most of us chase happiness like a butterfly, hoping it will land on us someday. But what if happiness wasn't so much a destination, as it is a journey that we cultivate within ourselves?

Don Drew: 1:04

In today's episode of Peaceful Life Radio, we'll delve into the world of inner happiness. We'll explore how self-reflection, living authentically, and letting go of resistance can unlock a deeper sense of contentment and joy.

David Lowry: 1:17

Join us as we unpack research on happiness, explore practical strategies, and discover how to find lasting happiness, no matter your circumstances.

Don Drew: 1:27

But before we do, please like, follow, download, and share our Peaceful Life podcasts with friends, family, and anyone who could use a helpful hand. It only takes a moment, and it would be really great help to us.

David Lowry: 1:39

We really do appreciate all of you who do this. Let's begin our program, which we've entitled, The Art of Unlocking Inner Happiness. Don, I'll begin the program by asking do

you believe that happiness is something that happens to you beyond your control, or is it something you can learn how to become a happier person?

Don Drew: 2:00

David, I'm guessing it's probably a little of both, but if I had to choose, I'd say there's a lot we individuals can do to develop a happier life. Here's a couple of quotes that might be helpful. This first one's from David C. Hill. Happiness is largely a choice, not a right or entitlement. And then the Dalai Lama said, happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions.

David Lowry: 2:23

If you're quoting the Dalai Lama, we might as well just stop right here. What can we add that this guy hasn't already? Actually, it's really true that it's not ready made. It's something we have to do. Let's give our definition of happiness. What do you say?

Don Drew: 2:39

For the moment, let's define happiness as a state of deep contentment and joy. And you may notice that it sometimes arises seemingly out of the blue. Perhaps you've heard the statement, happiness is not a matter of circumstance, but of temperament. And we agree because there really is something to the idea that happiness isn't dependent on external circumstances and that with practice, we can learn to uncover it. Have you ever had a moment when it seems you uncovered happiness?

David Lowry: 3:06

Yeah, I have. Let me think. Now, I don't know about you, but this is a small thing, but I've learned to look for happiness in very small places, Don. And yesterday, we had the most magnificent clouds in the sky. And in fact, I just looked up and blurted, Wow, look at those clouds. And for a moment, I mean, it's really fleeting, right? These things happen in a flash. But it was a moment of joy just looking at how amazing those clouds were. We don't get those every day here in Oklahoma.

Don Drew: 3:38

David research has told us a little bit about the psychology of happiness. It is suggesting that happiness is influenced by a combination of factors. Some of these factors are genetics, roughly 50 percent are intentional activities and circumstances. So, while some happiness is pre wired, there's room for growth through practices like gratitude or mindfulness.

David Lowry: 3:59

Yeah, we can do that.

Don Drew: 4:01

And there's another counterpoint to consider, the situational impact, for instance. Even if we cultivate inner happiness, external factors can still have an impact. A major loss, chronic illness, or extreme poverty can be difficult to overcome. Happiness may not be a constant state, but rather a baseline that fluctuates with life's situations.

David Lowry: 4:20

Sometimes, I think oh, I'm going through a downtime and people say, well, how's it going? And I'm wondering if we're letting the situation call the shots on our happiness. Is it possible we can tease out happiness from the situation we may be in? I know it's harder when we've got trouble in our life, but is it possible to find happiness even in those times, you think?

Don Drew: 4:42

So, just as I said here about the counterpoint and situational impact, we have a baseline of happiness. If we start with the idea that happiness is a way of being as opposed to a state of existence, then from that point we will have happier and less happy times and so on. The point is to try and raise the level of the baseline. And there are some definite things we can do to raise that baseline.

David Lowry: 5:08

That makes sense to us because sometimes we think we should be happy all the time. And we know that's just not going to happen. And sometimes we think that if we're not happy, then what's wrong with us? But maybe it's just that we're varying from the baseline from time to time. And as you said, if we can learn to move the baseline further through some of the things we will talk about today, we'll find a greater degree of happiness than we're currently experiencing.

Don Drew: 5:37

Yes, and as we start thinking about inner happiness and what that means, I think we need to remember this statement by Nathaniel Hawthorne, happiness is a butterfly, which when pursued is always just beyond our grasp, but which if you sit quietly may alight upon you. The beauty of that statement is that when we go chasing happiness. If our goal is to capture happiness, then it's going to become a rather elusive subject. But if we can raise our awareness of what we need to do or be or have to be happy then we could actually make some real difference and move the mark.

David Lowry: 6:14

It's hard for us not to pursue happiness. In fact, I think our constitution says the pursuit of happiness. And I'm not going to say that we can't go do those things that we think will make us a better person or feel more joy in our lives, because we definitely want to encourage people to take action and not just wait for something to happen to them. But at the same time, we might be surprised to learn that it's more to be discovered within than it is to be pursued without. Let's look at a few things, Don, we might try that will raise that baseline of happiness you were just talking about.

Don Drew: 6:51

The first one being know what makes you come alive. Knowing what makes you come alive can make a real difference. Maya Angelou wrote to know what makes you come alive and then chase it with all your heart. Reflection is a powerful tool for cultivating happiness. By taking a step back and examining our lives, we can gain valuable insights into what truly brings us joy. If we set aside time to pause and reflect on our lives, we can uncover many things in our lives that make us happy. Thus, if we want to bring more happiness into our lives, we need to spend time reflecting over things presently in our life that makes us happy and think about how we can use or leverage those things for more happiness. What are some areas of your life that you find particularly joyful? What reflective practices have you tried? Did any of them bring you closer to a sense of inner peace?

David Lowry: 7:44

When I think about the things that make me particularly joyful, I always start with the grandkids, right? And I'm not too proud to reach out to my sons and daughters in law and say, Hey, you got any pictures I should see? Ha ha ha ha

Don Drew: 8:00

And then you show them to me. Yes, yes, I know.

David Lowry: 8:03

Well, you know, what makes me happy may not make you happy. But, the thing of it is that when we know what makes us happy, or brings a smile to our face, it's okay for us to try to get more of that in our life. I know this is going to sound so basic and simple, but in a psychologist's chair, it had to be pointed out to me. But, you know, I had never thought of it this way. He said, David, when you find something you enjoy and like, do more of it. And when you find something is causing you pain, do less of it. And all of us know some of those things. Now, sometimes we can be surprised by happiness and joy. We didn't know we'd enjoy something. We have to extend ourselves a bit, Don we have to stretch ourselves sometimes and be surprised by the things that can make us happy and bring us a little bit of joy.

Don Drew: 8:53

And it takes some time and effort to reflect and identify the specific activities, relationships, or achievements that they're actually sparking joy in our life. And this self awareness allows us to prioritize them and weave them more intentionally into our lives. I think that's what you're trying to say. Use those things that bring happiness and then leverage that for good. Perhaps scheduling some out time for hobbies or spending time with loved ones. I found since I retired from teaching full time that one of the things I'm enjoying is I'm chasing some art projects that I've wanted to work on for years now. And I just kept putting them off cause they took time and energy. And now I'm, I found the other day I carved out about three hours where I just focused on that project and I was receiving great joy and happiness from doing that.

David Lowry: 9:40

You know, as we're talking about that, Learning to practice gratitude for everyday joys. I always think it's important to look for some things that are in your life every day that you probably do that have become rote to you that you forget. I would really miss these if they weren't in my life. Maybe it's your morning cup of coffee, the very first cup you have. Maybe it's sitting on your back porch for a moment. If you've got a place where you can just greet the day. A good meal that you've prepared. Instead of saying, Oh, I've got to fix dinner. say, Oh man, what can we fix tonight? Let's, what can we do to make it a little more special?

Don Drew: 10:16

And of course there's always going to be challenges, right? That challenges to our happiness. But one of the things we can do is learn to view difficulties as opportunities for growth and learning and, happiness can also arise from taking action. And trying new things, sometimes unexpected experiences can bring us more joy than we anticipate.

David Lowry: 10:34

My sister out of the blue, I mean, she had never done this before. She's a widow. But some ladies of her church says, why don't we go to London? And I can't believe she said, yes. I mean, this is so out of character for her. But she had the greatest time and has come back telling story after story about all the things that she got to do. And good for her for doing that, stretch yourself. Here's another one. And this one is easy to say, harder to do. It's be authentic, live your truth and find your bliss. Now sometimes, and by the way, I believe that everybody has something that they consider freaky deaky. Sometimes you have to fly your freak flag. You know, you just have to be who you are. If you think, oh, I don't know if I should wear white, it makes me look big, wear white if you want to, right? If that's what you like, do it. Or, if you speak the truth plainly, that's who you are. Speak the truth plainly. That doesn't mean that you go around insulting

everybody, but be who you are. Live authentically. Stop hiding the truth of who you are. Stop hiding your feelings, hoping that you won't hurt somebody or make somebody upset, walking on eggshells around everybody. Be you.

Don Drew: 11:49

Yeah, imagine living in complete harmony with your core existence. What would that look like for you? When your actions and desires are in sync, there's a sense of internal peace and harmony, and can be a significant source of happiness. Then also understanding your core. Authenticity requires self awareness, reflecting on your values, passions, and what brings you meaning is crucial. Journaling, personality tests, or seeking guidance from a therapist can also be helpful tools in this journey. One counterpoint to consider. Our core selves aren't static. We evolve through experiences and self discovery. In fact, this alone can add to our happiness. Authenticity might involve embracing this growth and being open to becoming the best version of yourself, even if it means changing some aspects of your life.

David Lowry: 12:34

Don, some people are very careful about what they say around other people because they're worried about what other people might think, and we're always protecting maybe family members or in laws from the truth of who we are. I think that's a mistake. I think it's better to lay it out there who you are, what you believe and let the chips fall where they may. You know, there's probably going to be some discomfort being the truthful person, living authentically in the beginning. There could be some fallout from that, but once it's over, it's over. And. then you can move forward. It's so important that we learn to live authentically. And of course, the flip side of that is, is when somebody begins to live authentically, we have to somehow find our peace with that's their life, not our life.

Don Drew: 13:22

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, the only person who you are destined to become is the person you decide to be. Living a life true to your values and inner self can be incredibly fulfilling and there's a strong connection between the two. If you need to explore what that might look like, download a list of values on the internet and find the five values that most resonate with you. Then take steps to explore what that might look like as you move forward with your life.

David Lowry: 13:48

I heard a funny statement too, that went something like this, stop being everybody else. They're already taken.

Don Drew: 13:54

Yeah. I've heard that too. It's true. It's very true.

David Lowry: 13:58

Here's a happiness hack and that is ditch the resistance and embrace the unexpected. Sometimes to be happy, Don, you just have to stop resisting and let go for a while. For instance, let's say you're on a vacation and you're going to do something you don't normally want to do. Maybe you don't even enjoy. You're at the ocean and the beach, but you'd rather be in New York City. But you agreed. You committed. And you showed up. Now, you're on vacation. You got to be happy. You got to find a way to be happy in situations where sometimes you'd just soon not be there. You didn't want it. You didn't get your way, but when you don't get your way, that doesn't mean that you have to run it for everybody else, right? So we have to learn how to be true to who we are. We just talked about that. But at the same time, when you're in situations, where you are there and this is the situation it is learned to find happiness in those and it means that you learn to surrender to the situation you're in. If you're at a dance and you don't like to dance. Get out on that dance floor because that's where you are and that's what you're there for, right? Don't be the curmudgeonly person who never goes along with what everybody else is doing just because.

Don Drew: 15:16

Great point. We oftentimes will shipwreck our own happiness by focusing so much on what we don't want and not so much on what we do want. And sometimes what we do want isn't available to us. So then we have to reflect and reassess and change our attitude, our way of looking at things. Things. But all of that is internal work. It is a result of the circumstances you find yourself in. Now you can put yourself in circumstances in which you're more likely to have happiness, but life isn't that simple. And we are all put in situations where what we want to happen isn't going to happen. So then, we have to work internally.

David Lowry: 15:51

I have a friend who took his family to a restaurant and it was a very nice restaurant to celebrate his parents anniversary. And maybe the person should have inquired more about where they wanted to go and so forth, but he arranged a very nice restaurant. What he wanted to do is to show them a very nice place that they couldn't afford to normally go and be lavish with them on this meal. And the whole time they were there, the mom talked about how she'd eaten at other places the food was better and ran down the whole experience. And I remember hearing from the friend about how disappointed they were. They had spent a lot of money and time and energy and effort in the planning and felt it wasn't appreciated.

Don Drew: 16:30

You're so right about that. And resistance can create tension and negativity, hindering our ability to enjoy the present moment, but not just our ability, everybody else's. So by letting go, we open up ourselves to the possibility of finding joy in unexpected places. And it may not at the start be what we want or the situation we want, but we might still find joy in it.

David Lowry: 16:51

I guess that leads really nicely into the power of now, right? Finding happiness in the present moment.

Don Drew: 16:57

Elbert Hubbard wrote, Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why they call it the present. To be happier, we should focus on the present and not dwell on things we can't control or that are in the past. Living with regret won't bring happiness and worrying about the future won't help either. But we do have opportunities to make the most of our present moments while we have them. You think about a time when you were unhappy because you were focusing on things you couldn't control past or future? How were you able to practice letting go and accepting the present moment? Well, here's a couple of ideas. We talk a lot of here about mindfulness and that's for a very good reasons because mindfulness is very important to understanding peace and happiness and not just mindfulness, but savoring the moment, the experience. So, focusing on the present, which is whatever it is that is in front of us right now, allows us to practice mindfulness, which involves paying attention to the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings of the current moment. This appreciation for the here and now can significantly enhance our happiness.

David Lowry: 18:01

I so agree with that. And we've always heard of our five senses, right? Learn to find joy in your senses. Learn to be expressive of the senses you encounter If you taste something and it's like, Oh, that's really good. I really like the way that taste. Acknowledge what you're experiencing sensory wise. Learn to be expressive because that feeds into the happiness that we're talking about. It moves the baseline a bit. And if you're having a good time, tell your friends, I am having such a good time tonight. Thank you for inviting us over. Or this is really a great time. Be expressive. Not only will that bring joy to you, but others as well.

Don Drew: 18:44

About a year ago, I'm referring to your comment about the napkins, cloth napkins and so forth. About a year ago, we were grabbing paper towels for dinner and Christy decided to start using our cloth napkins. Heaven knows we've got I don't know, 40 of them probably, but we started using those and it just sort of upgraded the quality feeling

of the dining experience we were having, and we both loved it. Actually, I, would argue that something as simple as that raised the baseline of happiness just maybe ever so slightly and made the dinner experience better.

David Lowry: 19:15

Absolutely. That is a perfect example of how a small thing that you probably already have, and were just waiting for the right time to bust those things out when company comes over, you say, well, why not use them for ourselves?

Don Drew: 19:29

So not only is mindfulness and savoring the moment important, but also it's important that we learn from the past and embrace the future. While dwelling on the past isn't helpful, reflecting on past experiences can be valuable for learning and growth. Similarly, while excessive worry about the future is unproductive, some future planning is essential for setting goals and feeling a sense of direction.

David Lowry: 19:49

Learn from the past. And by the way, all of us have past lives. And most of it, we just need to let it go. But even when they were wonderful experiences, Hey, that's in the past. You're in the present moment now. What are you going to do to enjoy the present moment? And the future can be very anxiety producing for a lot of us.

Don Drew: 20:09

We really need to work on cultivating a positive outlook and a sense of optimism. It helps us cope with challenges and setbacks and allows us to become more resilient. Many aspects of life they're just challenging. So, finding a balance within ourselves, within our lives and our situations that allows us to recognize the happiness that we can have and when possible elevate that, we're on the right track.

David Lowry: 20:32

I always think that the best use of the past is to have it inform your present moment so that you can make it better. So if you've have a great experience from the past, bring it up and use it as a way of reinforcing your loved ones who are around to say, remember that time we did this and that, and we all had such a good time? Or if you didn't have such a good time, then think about what was it that we could have done better so that when this thing comes up again, we don't face it in quite the same way? Living in the present doesn't mean completely ignoring the past. It's about finding a way to engage the past with the future that supports your overall happiness. Our next one is letting go of expectations.

Don Drew: 21:15

I think we're talking about here in letting go of expectations is learning to ditch disappointment and embrace the unexpected. Bernard de Fontenelle wrote, a great obstacle to happiness is to expect too much happiness. And that's very true.

David Lowry: 21:31

Set your expectations low.

Don Drew: 21:34

But in order to be happy, we do need to manage our expectations, particularly those we have of others because we can't control them. Just because we strongly relate to our thoughts, feelings, and experiences doesn't mean we should focus them on others. The truth is none of us can meet the high expectations we set for ourselves every day, let alone those we set for others. Unrealistic expectations, especially of others, can lead to disappointment and frustration. So you might be able to think of some unrealistic expectations that you've had in the past. Sometimes when we expect others to behave or think in a certain way and they don't, it can lead to feelings of anger, resentment, disappointment. This can damage relationships and hinder our own happiness. Have you ever seen something like this happen, David?

David Lowry: 22:17

I have. Here's one of my pet peeves that. interferes with my serenity and happiness. When I go to a restaurant, wherever it is,

Don Drew: 22:24

Now go slow. I'm writing this down. Okay.

David Lowry: 22:27

So, we act like every meal we have must be equivalent to a Michelin star restaurant or something. And the person will say, well, I've had better. I remember when Enjoy the food that's in front of you. Don't make everything I guess what I'm saying is comparative. Always comparing something with another thing or creating an expectation. Well, I would have thought that this would have been at least as good as that. Is a real buzzkill for the present moment. Sometimes you're dealing with people in a supermarket, for instance, and people will throw their happiness away because they're waiting in line. There's only two checkouts at Target or something like that. And I understand the feeling of frustration, but that's just the way it is in today's world, folks. And you can throw your happiness away, or you can ditch the expectation. You can throw a fit if you want, but it's not changing a thing.

Don Drew: 23:22

Yeah. I could get pretty frustrated on interstate 35 driving sometimes because people are driving rather insanely at times. But for me to expect them to always drive right is totally unrealistic. So instead of striving for unrealistic perfection, cultivating self compassion allows us to accept our flaws and flaws of others. And to learn from those mistakes.

David Lowry: 23:43

Here's another perspective to consider on all of that, and that has to do with healthy communication. It helps you bridge the gap between expectations and reality. So, share your desires and needs with others understanding they sometimes just can't meet those needs or your desires and needs aren't on their agenda, right? You have to understand that people will do what they can for you but sometimes they can't. So managing expectations doesn't mean that you don't have any. It just means that you're realistic about your goals for yourself and for others. And sometimes it's all about having self compassion and open communication.

Don Drew: 24:21

Let's talk about some little things that actually can make a difference about cultivating happiness in everyday moments. If you want to experience more happiness, we should learn how to find enjoyment in simple things. None of us has unlimited resources, but all of us have many simple pleasures that we may not have considered. Perhaps it's learning to enjoy your morning coffee or taking walks on a beautiful day. If we take time to notice, we will find an abundance of simple pleasures all around us.

David Lowry: 24:49

I love to walk in my neighborhood. It's very fun for us to walk in the neighborhood and to think about what you could do if you own that house or how that house might look if they tried this thing or that thing. We just love walking in our neighborhood and it's sort of a little ritual for us early in the morning and we find so much happiness. And when we come back, we're ready to start the day just a little bit better. Our baseline has been moved a bit.

Don Drew: 25:16

Simple pleasures can be unique to each person. It could be anything from reading a good book or spending time with loved ones or enjoying a delicious meal or listening to your favorite music. The key is to be mindful and identify what truly brings you joy in everyday moments. Focusing on simple pleasures encourages gratitude for the little things in life. This appreciation can significantly enhance our overall happiness.

David Lowry: 25:38

Our last one for today we're going to call it the happiness trap. You're not going to be happy until you resign yourself to being happy without knowing why. John Stuart Mill, a philosopher, said that. And basically, in order to be happy, we have to stop thinking that we'll be happy if or when something specific happens.

Don Drew: 25:57

We need to stop that kind of thinking. We often believe that we'll be happy if we have certain possessions or experience certain things, meet the right person and so on. However, when we do attain these things, we realize that they don't bring us happy, the happiness that we expect. Do you have any examples of a time when you achieved something you thought would bring you happiness, but didn't quite live up to your expectations, David?

David Lowry: 26:18

All the time. I buy stuff all the time. I'll stop in at Ross or Marshalls like the hair products aisle or something like that. And I think, Oh, this looks like great stuff. And I bring it home. It's like, nah! These are very small things, but it also could be like taking a job. You think, Oh, this is the job that's going to be really great for me. But when you take it, you discover that I was really better off where I was. I shouldn't have taken this job. Things don't always deliver, do they? If you're doing something because you think, oh, this is the thing that's gonna make me happy, there's an old saying in AA that, you are the common denominator to all of your problems. Whether it's with another person or an event, a people, place, or thing, you are always there. You are the person that was always at those places when it didn't work out. And the unsaid part of that is, is if you want to work on your happiness, you have to work on yourself,

Don Drew: 27:14

Research suggests that external achievements like getting a new car or a promotion often lead to short term spikes in happiness, but don't necessarily create lasting fulfillment. There's a famous actor, all of you know him, Jim Carrey. One of the funniest people that ever lived in my opinion, Jim Carrey said, I wish everyone could have all the money and all the nice things that I've had because if they did, they'd realize that while these things are nice, they don't bring happiness. Instead of fixating on achievement or specific goals for happiness or things, focusing on the journey and the experiences along the way can be more fulfilling. This approach allows us to appreciate the present moment, and the process of growth.

David Lowry: 27:54

As we bring this program to a close, Don, I think it's so very vital and important that we remember what Jim Carrey said. Happiness really isn't so much about the things that you have, as it is appreciating the things you already have and to open our eyes and allow ourselves to enjoy the sunrise and the sunset, the change of the seasons, the flowers, the animals that are around you, the parks, the wildlife. As we become more sensitive instruments, there's so many ways to bring joy and cultivate happiness.

Don Drew: 28:28

Remember, happiness is a journey, not a destination. By incorporating these practices into your life, you can build a foundation for lasting joy and contentment. So, take a deep breath, embrace the present moment, and start building your own path to inner happiness. Thanks for joining us today on Peaceful Life Radio. We invite you to visit our website at peacefulliferadio. com for additional resources.