

8 Stop being negative.

Constant complaining, biting criticism, backstabbing, and gossip are like poisons that kill happiness. “Needing to talk badly about others indicates low self-esteem,” Pope Francis explains. “That means, I feel so low that instead of picking myself up, I have to cut others down.” It’s not easy to change from being negative to being positive. The first step is awareness that being negative or positive is a personal choice. The second step is making a concerted effort to stop ourselves from negative thoughts and words as soon as possible. “Letting go of negative things quickly is healthy,” the pope adds, and it leads to a more positive and a happier outlook on life.

What steps can you take to eliminate negativity in your life?



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9 Respect others’ beliefs. We all have family members, friends, and acquaintances who do not share our Catholic beliefs. Yet, nagging and pressuring will not bring happiness for anyone. “We can inspire others through witness so that one grows together in communicating,” Pope Francis explains. When we live as authentic witnesses to Christ, other people are attracted by the inner peace and joy that emanate from us. They want that peace and joy for themselves. Whether or not they ever come to share our beliefs, when we treat them with respect, we create a bond of happiness between us.

How do you respect others’ beliefs and at the same time witness to your own?



10 Work for peace. We are called to stand up for peace: “The call for peace must be shouted. Peace sometimes gives the impression of being quiet, but it is never quiet; peace is always proactive,” Pope Francis says. We may not be able to bring about peace on a global scale, but we can pray for world peace. We can also work for peace in our homes, neighborhoods, schools, and places of employment. When we take a stand against violence in any form, we become peacemakers. Jesus calls peacemakers “blessed” and gives them the distinction of being “children of God” (Mt 5:9).

In what ways do you work and pray for peace?



When we read between the lines of the pope’s ten secrets of happiness, we find the essence of the Gospel message. Indeed, living as authentic disciples of Jesus Christ will bring the kind of deep inner happiness and peace that nothing can ever take away.

Additional Resources

A Year of Mercy With Pope Francis: Daily Reflections, Pope Francis, edited by Kevin Cotter (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014).

Pope Francis and the Joy of the Gospel: Rediscovering the Heart of a Disciple, Edward Sri (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014).

A Catholic Parent’s Toolbox: Raising Healthy Families in the 21st Century, Joseph D. White, PhD (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014).

Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive, World Meeting of Families — Philadelphia 2015 (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014).

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Pope Francis’ 10 Secrets to HAPPINESS



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We all want to be happy, and in our world today there are many people telling us how to achieve that goal. Yet, many of these paths to happiness are based on false promises or superficial suggestions that offer fleeting moments of pleasure and quickly fade away.

The good news is that Pope Francis, who carries an aura of joy in everything he says and does, has now identified ten secrets to happiness that are time-tested and true.



1 Live and let live. Too many of us jeopardize our happiness by trying to control the lives of others. We become fixated on what other people are doing and lose sight of what God is asking us to do. Jesus said it a little more bluntly when he asked the question: “Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?” (Mt 7:3).

How would your life be happier if you stopped trying to change or control the lives of others?



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2 Be giving of yourself to others. Being open and generous with others — especially those in need — brings us into an intimate encounter with Christ, who is the source of all joy. Jesus assures us that whatever we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do for him (see Mt 25:40). Whenever we share material goods, offer emotional support, extend a helping hand, or provide spiritual sustenance, we not only ease someone’s burden, we also discover that the experience enriches our lives, too. Pope Francis warns that “if you withdraw into yourself, you run the risk of becoming egocentric. And stagnant water becomes putrid.”

How have you experienced happiness through reaching out to help others?



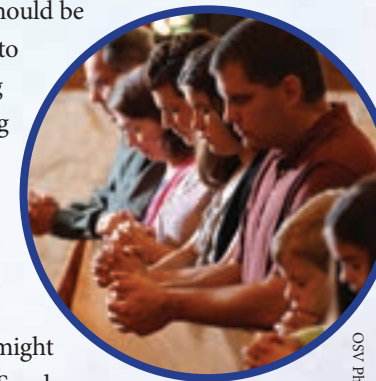
3 Proceed calmly. Happiness is jeopardized when our lives become hectic and out of control. The pope uses the image of a quiet pool of water and urges us “to move with kindness and humility, a calmness in life.” In trying to cultivate calmness in life, it is important for us to understand that life is not governed so much by what happens to us as it is by how we react to disruptive influences. One way to maintain calmness — no matter what is happening — is to establish a deep spiritual life. When we are centered on God, what happens on the surface of our lives may ruffle us a little, but it will not disturb our deep inner peace.

In what ways can you cultivate peacefulness in your life?

4 Develop a healthy sense of leisure. We live in a secular world that operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Many of us deal with stressful job demands and other commitments. Parents juggle work demands in addition to the busy schedules of children involved in school, sports, and other activities. Pope Francis notes the real fear that the pleasures of art, literature, playing with children, and spending time with family members are being lost in the busyness of daily life. Leisure activities give our bodies and minds a chance to refresh and renew themselves, and give us a chance to reconnect with one another. It is important to set aside time to turn off the television, communicate with one another, read together, engage in playful activities, and eat dinner together as a family, as well as explore the arts, culture, and nature.

How do you balance work and leisure in your life?

5 Make Sunday a holy day. Pope Francis suggests that a surefire way to find happiness is to reclaim Sunday as a holy day. He also suggests that Sunday should be a family day. You can start to make Sunday holy by going to Mass every week. Making the rest of the day holy will depend on your lifestyle. If you work indoors, outdoor adventures will allow you to enjoy God’s creation. If you’re active all week, you might build some quiet time into Sunday. Observing Sunday as a holy day offers us the opportunity to reflect on the spiritual side of our existence, appreciate the blessings of family, and discover true happiness.



OSV Photo by Jim Oliveira

What kinds of things would you have to change in your life in order to reclaim Sunday as a holy day?

6 Create jobs for young people. We find purpose in our lives through meaningful work; we are encouraged to take that one step further and ensure that young people have what Pope Francis calls “dignified jobs.” We can start the process early in our own families by assigning to our children household chores that teach them the importance of making a contribution to the family. We can involve preteens and adolescents in volunteer service projects where they can use their God-given gifts and talents. “We need to be creative with young people,” the pope urges, “in order to prevent them from slipping into drugs and despair. When we find ways to raise them up, we will discover in them and in ourselves a deeper sense of happiness.”



How can you help young people find dignity and happiness through meaningful work or service?

7 Respect and take care of nature. We are the stewards of God’s creation, and we have a responsibility to preserve and protect it — not just for ourselves, but for future generations — including clean air and water, wetlands and forests, and farm lands and natural resources. Pope Francis asks the question: “Isn’t humanity committing suicide with this indiscriminate and tyrannical use of nature?” We can start in our own homes, schools, and workplaces by recycling, reusing, and cutting back on pollutants and waste. Our personal campaign to respect and care for nature brings happiness, because we know that we are taking time and important steps to respect and preserve our environment.

What is something that you can do to become a better steward of God’s creation?