

Interview Questions for Dr. Christopher Kaczor

The Gospel of Happiness: Rediscover Your Faith Through Spiritual Practice and Positive Psychology

Dr. Kaczor, can you give us a brief summary of what this book is about?

In this book, I am trying to answer important questions about how to be happier, including: What is true happiness? How can you experience it? And can you live it wholeheartedly in your day-to-day life? Every thoughtful person asks such questions. Thoughtful Christians ask a few more questions such as, Can Christian practices enhance happiness? If so, how? And does Christianity provide happiness in a way that other paths, like psychology, cannot?

Focusing on empirical findings in positive psychology that point to the wisdom of many Christian practices and teachings, I try to provide not only practical suggestions on how to become happier in everyday life but provides insight on how to deepen Christian practice and increase love of God and neighbor in new and bold ways.

And can you expand a bit more on this new catch phrase or term of “Positive Psychology?”

Positive psychology began in 1998 when the President of the American Psychological Association, Martin Seligman, challenged psychologists to look at the full range of human experience. Of course it is important to examine and try to alleviate depression, anxiety, hopelessness, and sadness. The “negative” in life is certainly part of life, but it is not the whole of life. Seligman challenged psychologists to investigate more fully the positive in life. Why do some people have post-traumatic growth? How can we increase joy and optimism? What are the signature strengths of human beings? Seligman suggested that psychology should try to more fully understand and enhance happiness, joy, flow in life, and human relationships. Since it began, positive psychology has flourished and grown prompting books, conferences, and even master’s programs dedicated to it.

How does Faith intersect with Positive Psychology? Can one exist without the other?

I definitely think you can have faith without any understanding of positive psychology. Positive psychology is a fairly recent invention, but billions of people through the centuries have had faith. I also think you can practice positive psychology without faith, as do many agnostic or atheist psychologists and their clients. Nevertheless, faith and psychology are related in interesting ways. For example, many of the findings in positive psychology confirm the wisdom of spiritual practices advocated by the saints, such as practicing gratitude and forgiveness. Psychology can also provide tools to help us strengthen our willpower to better love God and neighbor.

What thoughts can you offer on those who, especially in the field of science, believe that Faith in God and Religion are ludicrous and psychologically detrimental?

Many of the most important scientists of all time were people of faith, so there is no contradiction between scientific investigation and religious practice. As I note in [The Gospel of Happiness](#), psychologists have found that people who practice a religious faith are more happy on average than people who do not.

What do you say to those who deduce the positive effects of Prayer and the Virtues to merely a psychological benefit without any real validity to a belief in God? “Oh, people just pray or say they believe in a God because it makes them *feel* happy?” Is it just an emotional state of being?

Some people used to say that religion was false because it made people unhappy. The idea was that religion made people miserable and kept them in misery by promising them heaven later. Now some people are saying that religion is false because it makes people happy. Both views, I think, are mistake because whether one's belief makes people more happy or less happy is irrelevant to whether or not the belief is true.

Part of happiness, I believe, is positive emotion, and prayer is linked to positive emotion as well as relieving negative emotion. The fact does not undermine belief in God's existence. Indeed, one would expect a loving God to link positive benefits to us with communicating with the Divine.

In your experience, and as you share in The Gospel of Happiness, what are the main ways Faith works *together* with Positive Psychology to help people feel happy?

One way Christian faith and positive psychology work together is by showing false ways to happiness. Unless we are so poor we lack the basic necessities, increases in money do will not make us happier. What will? Both Christian faith and positive psychology teach that forgiving other people makes us happier. Both Christian faith and positive psychology teach that practicing gratitude and thanksgiving makes us happier. Both Christian faith and positive psychology teach that serving other people makes us happier than just 'having fun.' Both Christian faith and positive psychology teach that we can strengthen our willpower through doing small acts of self-denial. The overlap of Christian faith and positive psychology is huge.

What is one or some of you main hopes and goals for your readers as they read *The Gospel of Happiness*?

I hope readers find the book practically helpful. For example, many people would like to have greater willpower. I know in my life, I can be my own worst enemy, sabotaging my own happiness. We probably can all identify with Oscar Wilde, who said, "I can resist anything but temptation." Educated Christians seldom do the wrong thing because they had no idea it was wrong, or because they couldn't care less about doing wrong. The most common cause of lack of love of God, neighbor, and self is weakness of will. In recent years, psychologists such as Roy Baumeister and Kelly McGonagle have focused on the causes and remedies for weakness of will. The last chapter talks about many ways of strengthening willpower so that we can better love God and love neighbor.

Where and When can they get a copy of your book?

Copies are already available September 8 is when it releases on Amazon. The book can be ordered right now [on Amazon at this link](#).

I hope people can find the book at fine bookstores everywhere!

Anything else you'd like to add?

Jesus came so that we might have life and have it in its fullness. In other words, the revelation of God in Christ is for our benefit and flourishing. The Gospel is good news, and good news for human beings is always connected to happiness. Happiness, of course, is defined in many ways, and I have explored the understanding of happiness proposed by Martin Seligman, the founding father of positive psychology. He defines happiness by the acronym PERMA: positive emotion, relationships, meaning understood as making a contribution to others, and achievement of goals. I suggest that the Christian way of life enhances positive emotion, engagement with life,

relationships with others, meaning, and achievement. Indeed, Christian belief and practice transcends the happiness offered by positive psychology. That is good news indeed.