

Slide 1

How many of you would like to be happier? How many of you can think of at least one thing you wish was different about you or your life? How many of you can think of at least one thing you wish you had because you think it would make you really happy? If this wish came true, do you think it would bring you greater happiness? Would anyone be willing to share their answers?

People have often wished, and some have even thought, that there is some single thing they can do that will almost magically transform their lives. The solutions have ranged from self-esteem programs to food and nutrition supplements to many things in between. Although these things may have some benefits, their effectiveness is often not proven or their benefits have been overstated.

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Martin Seligman, a famous psychologist, and one of the foremost promoters of the study of Positive Psychology, discovered a glaring paradox within the field of Psychology. It occurred to him that for the last half century, psychologists have been consumed with the study of mental illness. And while they have gotten very good at identifying and treating many disorders, Seligman found that there was a gaping hole in the science and study of what makes people happy. He said that he wanted to know how to get from positive 2 to positive 7, not how to get from negative 5 to negative 3.

As a result of this discovery, Seligman and many other psychologists have dedicated the past 20 years to the study of positive psychology. And what they have discovered, as Sonja Lyubomirsky has said, **“Happiness isn’t a knock of good fortune that we must await, like the end of a rainy season. Neither is it something we must find, like a freeway exit or a lost wallet. I prefer to think of the creation or construction of happiness because research shows that it’s in our power to fashion it for ourselves.”**

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In other words, building happiness is like building a house.

- If you build based on a faulty plan, your house will be shaky and easily damaged.
- If you build based on a well-developed blueprint, your house will endure and enrich your life.

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Today we will talk about Seligman’s discoveries about how to build a happier, healthier life by applying the following five happiness principles to our lives.

1. Notice and appreciate the good in each day
2. Focus on the positives in our past
3. Look forward to tomorrow

4. Know and use your strengths
5. Serve others

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Just as with any building, your happiness must be built upon a solid foundation. The way we make sense of the world can either strengthen or undermine the foundation of the house we are trying to build. Let's consider the following story from the life of the great inventor, Thomas Edison.

Thomas Edison devoted ten years and all of his money to developing the nickel-alkaline storage battery at a time when he was almost penniless. Through that period of time, his record and film production were supporting the storage battery effort. Then one night the terrifying cry of fire echoed through the film plant. Spontaneous combustion had ignited some chemicals. Within moments all of the packing compounds, celluloids for records, film, and other flammable goods had gone up with a whoosh. Fire companies from eight towns arrived, but the heat was so intense and the water pressure so low that the fire hoses had no effect.

Edison was 67 years old—no age to begin anew. His daughter was frantic, wondering if he were safe, if his spirits were broken, how he would handle a crisis such as this at his age. She saw him running toward her. He spoke first. He said, "Where's your mother? Go get her. Tell her to get her friends. They'll never see another fire like this as long as they live."

At 5:30 the next morning with the fire barely under control, he called his employees together and announced, "We're rebuilding." One man was told to lease all the machine shops in the area, another to obtain a wrecking crane from the Erie Railroad Company. Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, "Oh, by the way, anybody know where we can get some money?"

Virtually everything you now recognize as a Thomas Edison contribution to your life came after that disaster.

What was Thomas Edison's focus?

How did he choose to interpret this experience?

As we discuss the first three objectives of this lesson, we will look at how our life focus and how we choose to interpret our life experiences can fortify our foundations.

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Many people believe that their circumstances determine how they feel. If the events of the day are frustrating, disappointing, or stressful, we assume it is inevitable to feel negative emotions—to not be happy with life. But, scientists who study human behavior have discovered that the happiest people aren't happier because they have better circumstances; they are happier because they have learned to look for and appreciate what is good about each day.

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Barbara L. Fredrickson, (give credentials) has said, **“Positive emotions—like all emotions—arise from how you interpret events and ideas as they unfold. They depend on whether you allow yourself to take a moment to find the good—and on whether, once you’ve found it, you pump that goodness up and let it grow.”**

Tell the story of Raising Adam or another relevant story.

Adam and shrubs

One day when Adam was five, I took all three of my children out to pick up a few household ns. I parked the car, extracted my children (two were in car seats), and began the process of herding them all into the store without getting killed by traffic. I had Lizzie by the hand, and the older children were following—at least until we reached the doorway. That morning the store was holding a sale on ornamental plants. Flowers and shrubs were lined up on benches and tables just outside the door. The display drew Adam like a moth to a flame. His eyes got round—well, as round as they ever get, considering—and he began to coo with delight.

“Come on, Adam,” I said, steering Elizabeth over to an empty shopping cart. “Keep moving, keep moving, keep moving.”

By the time I had lifted Lizzie into the cart, Adam had disappeared. I heaved that weary sigh—the one you remember your own mother sighing, the sigh that is sighed at least once a day by every parent of small children—and went back a few steps to look for him. He was over by the gardening display, walking away from me.

“Adam!” I hollered, trying not to sound too much like a child abuser. “Come here! Get back here!”

He looked up and blinked.

“Come on!”

Adam shrugged, and with a lingering look at the gardening display, trudged over to my grocery cart. I had the two older kids grab the bars of the cart, as usual, and we headed into the store. Just then I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned. A very tall, very craggy, very elderly man was standing behind me. He was wearing a baseball cap with the name of a cattle-feed company emblazoned on it. He had the huge, rough hands of a lifelong farmer.

“Excuse me, ma’am,” he said, doffing the baseball cap. “I was wondering if you noticed what your boy was doing just now.”

I felt a surge of apprehension. Adam had done some profoundly embarrassing things in his short lifetime. He had hidden his shoes in my mother-in-law’s microwave, crammed crayons into the baby-sitter’s heating vents to watch them melt, gone over to visit the neighbors, alone, wearing only galoshes and a bra. My bra. I couldn’t imagine what he might have done in this brief time I’d lost track of him outside, but his creativity in these matters always went well beyond my imagination. I answered the old man with a cautious no, trying to look harried and innocent.

The old man leaned down to speak softly in my ear. "Your boy," he said, "stopped to smell every single plant in that display outside." "Oh," I said uncertainly. "He didn't just smell the flowers," said the farmer. "He smelled the shrubs too. He smelled every bush they have out there. I think he even smelled the dirt.

I blinked at him, not altogether sure I was getting the point.

"Come with me." The farmer turned and gestured. He seemed very pleased, almost boyish. I turned my shopping cart around, children still attached, and followed him.

We went outside to the gardening display, the old man leading. I caught up to him next to a row of ornamental juniper bushes. He was leaning over, his eyes closed, inhaling deeply through his nose.

"Smell this," he said, pointing to the juniper. Katie and Adam had already begun sniffing. I put my face close to the shrub and smelled it. It had a tangy, sharp scent, somewhere between citrus rind and sagebrush. The smell brought back a sudden flurry of memories from my childhood.

"Huh!" I said.

"It's something, isn't it?" The farmer gave me a crusty grin. "Now try this one."

We went on smelling bushes for five or ten minutes, until we'd sniffed our way through the whole display. I was so relieved that Adam hadn't done anything illegal that I hardly even wondered why this gruff, practical-looking man was so invested in the whole thing. Adam and the girls thought it was wonderful; they snuffled through the two rows of plants like happy truffle hogs. As far as I was concerned, the bushes beat [fresh-baked cookies] hands down; if you want to stir your imagination and your memory, I recommend that you immediately locate and smell some shrubs—whatever kind grew in your neighborhood when you were younger and closer to the ground.

When we finished, the old man straightened up to his full height and tipped his hat at me again. Things aren't always what they seem, are they?" he said. "No," I agreed. It pays to look close," he said. Then he leaned over again, put his lips near my ear and whispered, "My boy's twenty-three. Then he turned on the heel of one enormous boot and walked away. Ah, I thought. No wonder. He's one of us. [those who have compassion]

Adam's mother learned a great lesson that day from her son, Adam. And that lesson was to take time to find the good, pump that goodness up, and let it grow.

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Now let's look at some ways we can make each day more enjoyable.

- Close your eyes and picture something you have already enjoyed today.
- Take a walk with a focus on enjoying nature and your surroundings.
- Explore your home. Notice and appreciate things in your home that are meaningful to you.
- Think of good people who enrich your life and list some of the ways they bless you.

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How can you make today more enjoyable and productive?

- Get a journal or notebook and write down at least two things that went well today. Make a habit of doing this every day.
- Think over your schedule each morning and anticipate the blessings in the day ahead.
- Review your day and see what benefits you can find in both common everyday experiences and difficult experiences.

We will stop here for today. Reflect on Happiness Principle 1 tonight and then join us for the second principle tomorrow.

Video Principle 2

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Welcome back to Your Blueprint for Happiness. Yesterday we talked about Principle 1- Notice and Appreciate the Good in Each Day. Today we will focus on the second principle-Focus on the Positives in Your Past. If you are following along in the handout, we are starting on page 3.

Everyone chooses memories to construct a unique life story. This story can be happy or sad depending on **how you choose to think** about these memories.

Take 2-3 minutes to write down some of the memories that define your life.

As you look over your list of memories, you'll likely notice that they fall into two categories: painful and positive memories.

Let's first look at the positive memories.

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Look at your list of memories that define who you are. How many of these memories are positive? How have these memories shaped who you are?

What I'd like to talk about now that we've identified your positive memories, is how to give them greater prominence (importance) in our lives.

Here are some things we can do to give our positive memories prominence:

Write it down: cute things your child has said, create a journal to capture your thoughts and feelings about positive experiences

Draw or take pictures and display them: Scrapbooks, framed pictures, shadow box

Share your favorite stories with others.

Positive Memories are those that make you the happiest and can have long-lasting effects in shaping your identity. Notice that when you relive positive memories, positive emotions naturally fill your mind.

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Painful memories are some of the most challenging to work with, but they are an important part of who we are. For example, you may have been deeply hurt by people in your life. Or you may have hurt others. These memories need to be rehabilitated to serve a positive role in your personal foundation.

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We can rehabilitate our painful memories.

1. We need to find positive meaning and growth that come from these memories. As you look back on the painful memories, identify lessons you have learned and ways you have become stronger as a result of these difficult experiences. Make some notes in the spaces on the handout on p 4 or on a blank sheet of paper. Pause the video while you record your thoughts and restart when you are ready.

2 Just like removing the poison from a snakebite heals the individual, forgiveness heals us. We can forgive the people who have hurt us. As part of your effort to forgive them, you can try to understand their motivations and struggles. You can choose to set yourself free of the pain. Make a note of the new way you choose to think about that person or situation. Pause the video while you record your thoughts and restart when you are ready.

3. If we have painful memories that are our own doing, we can seek forgiveness from others. This example was shared by a participant -Stealing money from my mom and dad...I was plagued for years until I finally told them what I had done. In those cases where you have hurt others, you can seek forgiveness from them in order to gain peace. Make a note of ways you can make amends. Pause the video while you record your thoughts and restart when you are ready.

Consider this story of transformation:

A young woman waited for her dad to awaken in the hospital after he had a stroke. She felt nothing but bitterness for this man who had deserted the family after divorcing her mother. After her parents' divorce, she rarely saw her father and never felt connected to him. She was angry at him for not being a part of her life. Now he was paralyzed from the waist down, and she felt no sympathy for his condition. She felt that it was his turn to do some suffering. Now she would desert him just as he had deserted her. But something — maybe a sense of duty or obligation — kept her coming back to the hospital each day. To her surprise, her father seemed grateful for her visits and even expressed an interest in her life. He was endlessly curious about her. He gave her small gifts. Over the months that followed, she visited him, shared stories and music with him, and helped him with his rehab. One day, she realized that she had grown to know and appreciate her once-absent father. As a result, resentment had turned into friendship. Seeing her father as a person instead of a source of pain enabled her to understand and forgive him.

Now reflect on your entire life story-including all of your defining memories- and consider which themes have been most important in shaping the person you are. Is your life a story of survival, friendship, growth, joy, exploration, perseverance, steadiness, etc? Pick the themes of your life and place them as the cornerstones in the foundation of your happiness. You can record your theme or themes in the lines on p 5 or on a blank sheet of paper. For additional tips on how to change your perspective on your past, look at the upper right hand portion of p. 5.

We will stop here for today. Please take the evening to reflect on ways you can rehabilitate your painful memories and give greater prominence to the positive memories in your life. Tomorrow we will discuss the third principle: Look Forward to Tomorrow!

Video 3: Look Forward to Tomorrow

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The third principle is to look with hope to our future.

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Many people drain themselves of happiness through worry and fear about the future. You might worry about decisions you face, the stability of your job, your personal short-comings, your children's safety, your health, the direction the world is going in... the list can be endless. Frequent worry and fear about the future can limit the happiness you enjoy in the present.

BUT, what do we do if we struggle to feel hope for the future because there are things that scare us? There are things we can do to help us manage our fears and worries.

First, we must ask ourselves two questions:

- **What is the chance that this will actually happen?**
- **Is this something I can do anything about?**

Consider this example: Test-taking anxiety.

What is the chance that I will actually fail?

What can I do to alleviate the anxiety I feel?

In other words, we need to manage our fears and worries. We can do this by having the courage to face challenges, accepting what we cannot change, managing what is in our control, and managing our way of thinking. Are you pessimistic or optimistic?

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In other words, if a pessimistic person fails at something, they make the failure personal. They might say, "I failed because I'm stupid." Whereas, an optimistic person would say, "I made a mistake, but I learned from it."

A pessimistic person might also attribute failure to being something permanent, "I've always been this way and always will be."

Whereas, an optimistic person would look at the failure and say, "Today was just an off day!"

Finally, a pessimistic person believes that problems are pervasive, "It will always be this way."

Whereas, an optimistic person looks at problems as specific, and if they failed at something, they say, "I'll do better next time!"

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In contrast to negativity, hope is energizing. We can infuse hope into our thinking by creating things to look forward to. These are things we enjoy doing, such as: planning family vacations, carving out time to read a good book, arranging a soccer game with friends, etc.

In other words, instead of spending energy on worrying about life's uncertainties, we identify something that will bring us happiness, and we can work to make it happen.

Create things to look forward to. Identify something that would bring you happiness and make it happen! Plan to read that book you have put off reading, do a project at home that you would enjoy. In the spaces on p 7, write down your thoughts of things that would give you something to look forward to and how you could accomplish these things.

There will always be uncertainty and challenges in life. You can manage your thoughts by spending less time on unproductive fears and worries. You can look forward to the future with hope and peace.

We will stop here for today. If you would like to share the something that you are looking forward to that brings you happiness, please feel free to share in the comments. Tomorrow, we will discuss principle 4- Know and Use Your Strengths.

Video 4: Know and Use Your Strengths

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The way that you think about yourself and your life is only the foundation for building happiness. The next task is to build the body of the house. You do this by identifying your strengths and designing your life to use them often.

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Each of us has personal strengths—positive characteristics that come naturally to us. Research has shown we will be more likely to thrive in life if we identify our unique strengths and design our lives to use them. We will feel encouraged and energized.

Here are some ideas for how you can discover what your personal strengths are:

1. List the activities you love to do or at which you excel. What do those things tell you about your strengths?
2. Interview people who appreciate you. Ask them what strengths they see in you. You may be surprised and delighted by the insights you uncover.
3. Complete an online personality assessment that will help you understand the ways in which you work best. Some people work best in large groups, some in small. Some like creative tasks, while others prefer more practical ones. You can search online for personality tests like Keirsey Temperament Sorter or the Myer-Briggs Type Indicator.
4. Read a book that helps you identify your strengths. Check at your local library or bookstore. For example, you might choose to read *Strengthfinder 2.0* or *Now, Discover Your Strengths*.
5. Complete the VIA Survey of Character Strengths (VIASCS) online at www.authenticchappiness.org. This assessment will help you identify your greatest strengths.

In your workbook, on page 8, you will also find a list of 24 character strengths, taken from the VIA Survey of Character Strengths. Take a moment to fill out the survey. Mark how well each description describes you. Then go back through and circle which five best describe you.

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Unfortunately, instead of valuing and acting on our strengths, many of us are inclined to minimize them. We see the strengths of others, and in admiring their strengths, we undervalue our own.

The truth is that everyone has different strengths, and each strength is valuable. It makes no sense to expect fish to climb trees, eagles to jog, or squirrels to swim. That doesn't mean they are failures. Fish are great swimmers. Eagles are amazing flyers. Squirrels are marvelous climbers.

It is the same with humans. Everyone is good at some things but not as good at others. When you try to be good at everything, you can lose your sense of peace. You can be happier if you focus on the strengths you have rather than your weaknesses.

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Just as physical exercise builds your muscles, acting on your signature strengths builds your well-being.

Consider Elena's story:

Appreciating different gifts: As a college student, Elena felt awe for one professor who seemed just perfect. She was knowledgeable, polite, kind, and helpful. Elena admired her immensely. But there was a dark side to her admiration: Elena hated herself for not being like her professor. Elena was mischievous, distractible, and fun-loving. Why couldn't she be more like her professor? It took more than a decade for Elena to realize that she and the professor had different gifts. The professor was the picture of dignity. Elena was enthusiastic. Rather than try to be like her professor, Elena learned to use her unique gifts to be a positive influence with her family, friends, and community

As Elena learned to value and use her unique strengths, her well-being and productivity increased. How many times have we felt the same way? Admiring someone else's gifts not realizing the beauty and value of our own.

Now let's consider how you can incorporate your strengths into your daily life.

If you are following along in the handout, p 9 has four questions to help you use the strengths you identified: Feel free to pause the video between questions to record your thoughts and restart the video when you are ready.

1. Have you ever taken on a challenging task you enjoyed so much that you lost track of time and became totally absorbed? This is what psychologists call "flow" and it is an important way to use your strengths. See if you can list several activities that have created flow for you. How will you design your life to create more flow?
2. Most people run on auto-pilot. They go thoughtlessly through life doing what comes easily. In contrast, when you design your life to use your strengths, you live life more fully. Take a few minutes for personal reflection, close your eyes and imagine your idea of a perfect day- not a vacation day, but a normal day. Where do you live? What kind of work do you do? With whom do you spend time? How will you change your life to make it match that perfect day more closely?
3. How can you build on your strengths? You might get further training or education. You might take an informal class within your community. You might find someone to mentor you. What will you do?
4. How can you design your life to use your strengths more? Maybe you could talk to your employer about ways to better use your strengths at work. Maybe you could develop a hobby or personal interest that involves your strengths. Perhaps you could use your strengths volunteering in your community. How will you better use your strengths?

Even though it helps you live better when you know your strengths, you may be tempted to dwell on your weaknesses. You may worry about them a lot. You may spend a lifetime trying to overcome them. In the meantime, you neglect your strengths. Psychologists say that people will never overcome all of their weaknesses. But your happiness and productivity depend more on knowing and using your strengths than on overcoming your weaknesses. The happiest and most productive way to live is by using your strengths while managing your weaknesses.

Dwelling on your limitations is not energizing.

That doesn't mean you should ignore your weaknesses. You need a plan for managing them. For example, if you struggle with budgeting, maybe you could recruit a family member or friend to help you create a plan. You could also find resources online. You might plan a specific day of the month to pay your bills and review your finances. What friends, family members, or resources do you have that can help you in areas where you are weak? You can record your thoughts on p 10 or a blank sheet of paper.

We will stop here for today. Tomorrow will be the last video in our five- part series. We will focus on the fifth principle: Choose to Serve

Video 5

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Welcome back to Your Blueprint for Happiness. This is our last session of the five part video series. Today we will focus on Principle 5- Choose to Serve. If you are following along in the handout, we will be starting on p. 10.

The crowning achievement or roof of your happiness is when you use your strengths to support and shelter your friends, family, and community. Life becomes rich and meaningful as you dedicate yourself to improving the lives of others.

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What can you do to serve in ways that honor your values and strengths?

- What are some ways you're already serving in your family? What other ways can you serve your loved ones?

Notice and be glad for the opportunities you already have to serve, including the service you give to family members. Service within families can seem draining at times, but families are one of the best places to make a difference. Take a few moments to record your thoughts on p. 10

- Focus your Service

There may be ways you are currently serving that are less meaningful to you. Maybe you belong to a service organization that doesn't serve in the ways you value most. Maybe you are asked to do things that emphasize your weaknesses. Prune away those activities that consume your time without giving you meaningful opportunities to serve. Instead, participate in service that honors your values and allows you to use your signature strengths. Take a few moments to record your thoughts under 2. On page 11.

- What can you do to serve in your community?

Notice or ask about needs in your community. Maybe you will discover a need to pick up litter in your neighborhood. Maybe you will learn about lonely people who would like to be visited. Take a few moments to record your thoughts in section 3. On p. 11.

- Who are some people who might join you in service?

If your strength is working in groups, consider drawing together other people that are interested in service opportunities identified.

Service can be a satisfying part of your life. You don't want to overload your schedule, but when you choose the right service opportunities, they will be energizing instead of draining.

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As you have worked your way through the ideas and questions in this workbook, some of them have probably stood out to you. You may have felt inspired by them. When you have such feelings, it's a good idea to take notes. Notice what things seem most important. Make a plan. Take action. We recommend that you occasionally reread this workbook. As you progress in life, you will find new ideas- they are your next opportunity for growth.

In conclusion-As you choose to focus on what is good, positive and meaningful; as you identify and use your personal strengths; and as you choose to serve, you will build a better life!

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Questions or comments? We would love to hear from you. Please complete the brief program evaluation survey by clicking on the link. Feel free to share comments. Thank you for participating and may you build a strong foundation in Your Blueprint to Happiness!