I’m happy to be with all of you who happen to have joined this happy event. I trust you also will be happy when you leave this gathering, as a result of what you experience here.

We use that word all the time, meaning several different things. In English, happy means a state of well-being, pleasant emotion, or good luck or fortune. There are other words of similar connotation we often use interchangeably – glad, fortunate, joyous, blessed. I’ll look briefly at the origins of the idea of happiness in English, and then move on to the biblical background and what happiness means in the Christian tradition.

*Happy* in English originally meant convenient, fitting, successful, or suitable. That has something to do with luck, chance, or fortune, and you can hear those connotations in the verb *to happen*. A happy fault, this happy event – we’ve had the good fortune to show up in time to receive pleasure from it. There’s a sidebar to this kind of happiness – somebody who’s recklessly or irresponsibly happy, perhaps for chemically induced reasons: *slap-happy* or *trigger-happy*. We’ll be glad not to experience that today.
There’s another word that’s often substituted for happy, *blessed*. The two words are used interchangeably in many English translations of the Bible. That word blessed has its roots in blood (*blut* or *blod*), because in the ancient world something sacred was blessed by being sprinkled with blood – a *blood sacrifice*. *Blessed* also shares its roots with *bliss* and *blithe*. To be blissful is to experience great happiness. Heaven is often spoken of as eternal bliss. A blissful state can also be ecstasy, literally something that takes one outside of oneself – a transcendent experience. That other cognate, *blithe*, connotes being carefree, unafraid, unconcerned with the humdrum – happy.

An additional alternate for happiness is *joy*. It comes from Latin and Greek roots that mean rejoice, which also gave rise to the Middle Irish *guaire* which means *noble*. That elevated connotation shapes much of the biblical understanding of happiness. Joy is more than the happiness you feel on seeing a puppy; it has a sense of the eternal or transcendent as well.

So this word happiness includes something about good fortune or luck, positive emotion, sacredness, and rejoicing. The biblical connotations include all of those, to some degree or other, although there is a strong tendency in both Judaism and Christianity to understand happiness as having less to do with luck
than with choice – choosing God and God’s ways of wisdom. Despite Job, one can experience a degree of happiness even in the face of pretty unpleasant realities.

A brief aside. In American context, pursuing happiness has some of those connotations but not necessarily all. The rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are enshrined in our Declaration of Independence, and in the centuries since, our national understanding of just who is included in that vision has widened considerably, but incrementally. The right to pursue happiness may be theoretically open to all, but there are still phenomenal practical barriers to happiness for many sorts and conditions of human beings. At times in our history happiness has even been equated with pursuing one’s own good fortune to the exclusion of others’. Some in this capacity understand happiness as sacred, and some see it as outside of religion, divorced from the divine. Our current cultural norm for happiness often seems closer to being slap-happy than true blessing, and that lack of that deeper, joyous happiness can lead the hopeless and desperate to substitute the chemically fueled forms of trigger-happiness and slap-happiness, or the evanescent kinds of happiness based on good luck. As a resident of Nevada, I can tell you that there is something deeply haunting about the sight of human beings attached to gambling machines hour after hour after hour, hoping to find happiness in a run of luck.
Let me say a bit more about how I’m going to proceed. The title of this presentation indicates a tension between the goal of happiness and the journey toward it, and I will say something both from a historical perspective, that is, the developing Christian understanding of happiness, and out of the spiritual and/or ascetical teaching about happiness as the end of existence and eternity in individual human lives, and beyond the mortal coil.

We’ll move from the biblical connotations of happiness to its theological treatment in the Christian tradition, exploring how the political or cultural understandings of happiness are underlain by both the Judeao-Christian tradition and the Greek philosophical tradition. We’ll end with a limited survey of current ways in which Christians approach happiness.

The scriptural understandings of happiness. I’m going to treat both Hebrew scripture in the manner that Christianity has appropriated it and the later Christian scripture written in Greek, as Christian theologizing is based on both. You will hear some overlap of what Rabbi Sacks said this morning.

There are several Hebrew words that are translated as happy, blessed, joyful, glad, or fortunate. Ashar and its cognates mean blessed or happy, and also connote guidance – going or setting straight, or leading in the right way.
1 Kings 10:8  Happy are your wives! Happy are these your servants, who continually attend you and hear your wisdom!\(^1\)

Psalm 1:1  Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers;

The word that appears so frequently is tov, the basic meaning being good or blessed. Most of us know it today in yom tov, a good day, a holiday or blessed day, or mazal tov, good fortune.\(^2\) There is a connection here to yom Yahweh, the day of the Lord, the consummation of God’s reign.

Isaiah 52:7  How lovely on the mountains are the feet of one who brings good news, who announces peace [shalom] and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, “Your God reigns!” [New American Standard – NAS]

Third word: yatab means to be glad, joyful, or pleasing; to do good, to do well, or to do right.

Deuteronomy 12:28  Be careful to obey all these words that I command you today, so that it may go well with you and with

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\(^1\) Bible translations from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

\(^2\) literally, “may you stand under a good constellation”
your children after you for ever, because you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.

1Kings 21:7  His wife Jezebel said to him, ‘Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food, and be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.’

Fourth, Shalah has connotations of prosperity, or a state of quiet, peace, or rest. There are connections to the great understanding of shalom, about which more later.

Psalm 122:6  Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May they prosper who love you.’

Jeremiah 12:1  You will be in the right, O Lord, when I lay charges against you; but let me put my case to you. Why does the way of the guilty prosper?

The last word, samach, means rejoice, exult, or gladden, in a whole range of contexts.

Psalm 118:24  - This is the day that the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Deuteronomy 24:5  When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be charged with any related duty. He
shall be free at home for one year, to be happy with [give happiness to] the wife whom he has married.

**Jonah 4:6** The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush.

We can summarize these uses of words for happiness, blessedness, and joy in just a few categories.

- right relationship with God
  
  **Psalm 84:12** O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

  **Psalm 119:1** Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.

  **Sirach 34:17** Happy is the soul that fears the Lord!

- wisdom, which also implies right relationship with God and living righteously.

  **Proverbs 20:7** The righteous walk in integrity - happy are the children who follow them!
**Sirach 14:2** Happy are those whose hearts do not condemn them, and who have not given up their hope.

**Sirach 14:20** Happy is the person who meditates on wisdom and reasons intelligently,

- wise living also brings some very earthly blessings, fulfillment and happiness

**Sirach 25:8** Happy the man who lives with a sensible wife, and the one who does not plow with ox and ass together. Happy is the one who does not sin with the tongue, and the one who has not served an inferior.

**Psalm 127:5** (speaking about sons) Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

**Psalm 128:2** You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.

**Sirach 31:27** Wine is very life to human beings if taken in moderation. What is life to one who is without wine? It has been created to make people happy.

**Ecclesiastes 10:17** Happy are you, O land, when your king is a
nobleman, and your princes feast at the proper time - for strength, and not for drunkenness!

- right relationship with neighbor – what we might call more broadly, justice

Psalm 106:3 Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times.

Psalm 41:1 Happy are those who consider the poor; the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble.

Psalm 49:16-19 Do not be afraid when some become rich, when the wealth of their houses increases. For when they die they will carry nothing away; their wealth will not go down after them. Though in their lifetime they count themselves happy - for you are praised when you do well for yourself - they will go to the company of their ancestors, who will never again see the light.

- right relationship with creation

Isaiah 32:20 - Happy will you be who sow beside every stream, who let the ox and the donkey range freely.

- Happiness in terms of a good death

Sirach 1:13 Those who fear the Lord will have a happy end; on the day of their death they will be blessed.
Sirach 11:28  Call no one happy before his death; by how he ends, a person becomes known.

- What looks like revenge (perhaps looks like a restoration of wronged relationship)

Psalm 137:8-9  - O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!

The Christian scriptures of the second or new testament use primarily the word *makarios*, which carries a similar constellation of meanings: happy, blessed, fortunate. Its usage has some parallel with and some difference from the Hebrew scripture.

- right relationship with God

Luke 11:28  But He said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."

- the particular understanding of the kingdom of God, and readiness to embrace it. I want to discuss the parallel with *yom tov* or *yom Yahweh* – the good day of the Lord, the coming of the reign of God.

Luke 12:40,43  You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour... "Blessed is that slave whom his
master finds so doing [feeding other members of the household] when he comes.

**Revelation 19:9a** Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'"

- wisdom, also implying right relationship with God and righteous living

**1Corinthians 7:40** [widow remarrying] But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

- a good death

**Revelation 14:13a** - And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'"

- right relationship with neighbor – again about justice

**Luke 14:15** When one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" [after a teaching about inviting the poor to your feast]

- What I think is parallel to the use of revenge in the Hebrew Bible; but also implies a restoration of wronged relationship (here, as apocalyptic reversal)
**Luke 23:29** "For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.'

We have seen parallels to most of the Hebrew scripture usages – right relationship with God and neighbor, living wisely, a good death, the restoration of wronged relationships. We haven’t yet seen specific examples of happiness as the enjoyment of earthly blessings or about right relationship with creation. *Makarios*, the Greek word, is not directly associated with those, although blessedness is, but it translates a word with a somewhat different constellation of meanings.

Blessing or blessedness in the Christian scriptures more often uses the words from the Greek root *eulogo*ō, meaning a good word, to speak well of, or praise, especially in contrast to a curse. In Greek, it’s often used to translate the Hebrew *barakh*, meaning to kneel, bless, praise, or curse. There is a deeply implicit connection between blessedness and happiness, even though there is a tendency in some strands of Christian thought to see blessedness limited to its literal Greek meaning of word and words. More about that later.

I want to look a bit more deeply at happiness as *makarios*. There are two extended passages that speak of what it is to be happy or blessed, one in Matthew,
the other in Luke, more familiarly known as the beatitudes. Both speak of happiness in much more internal terms, and profoundly downplay the significance of earthly blessing. Both likely reflect the experience of early Christian communities in a time of anxiety, persecution, and want.

**Matthew:5:3-12**  ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Luke’s version is much shorter, but it expands the commentary by describing those who will not enjoy happiness:
Luke 6:20-26  ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ‘Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. ‘Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. ‘But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ‘Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. ‘Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. ‘Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

The beginnings of some of the later developments in Christian theologizing about happiness are rooted in the different emphases that we’ve just explored. It’s abundantly clear that a central Jewish understanding of happiness means right relationship with God and neighbor, and also includes the experience and appreciation of earthly goods – enough to eat and drink – and abundance for a feast – peace in the land, just rulers, and life-giving family relationships (remember the downcast, weak-kneed husband?).
Let’s go back and explore the blessedness or happiness of earthly pleasure in the Christian scripture. The beginning of Jesus’ public work is associated with a visit to his hometown synagogue, where he reads from the prophet Isaiah. He chooses a passage about shalom, a vision of deep and transcendent happiness:

Luke 4:18-21  ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’

This passage is widely understood as Jesus’ own mission statement, and as a vision of the kingdom of God, or the reign of God, or in more popular language, what heaven on earth looks like. It’s very much focused on people who understand themselves made in the image of God, and on the healing of human deprivation and woundedness in all aspects – physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Jesus’ ministry, his public work, is most essentially focused on feeding, healing, and teaching people – in that order. The goods of this world are essential
to happiness and blessing. His contemporaries criticized Jesus for what was perceived as his inattention to the law. They charged him with being a glutton and a drunkard. Most of the alleged ways in which he violated religious law have to do with purity – not paying enough attention to who he eats with or talks to, or healing on the sabbath. His general response is that the law is made for improving human relationships (with God, self, neighbor, and creation) – and by implication, human happiness.

Jesus himself gave evidence of the ancient prophetic visions of “heaven on earth.” The charges of gluttony and drunkenness are related to his prophetic enactment of the heavenly banquet. A short piece from Isaiah captures that vision:

**Isaiah 25:6-8** On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever.

Oddly enough, this passage is frequently read at funerals, as though this vision of shalom is only possible in the afterlife. It’s an interesting commentary on the
tension felt over this-worldly or other-worldly happiness in many strands of the Christian tradition.

Jesus’ rebuttal to the charge of partying came this way, “how can the wedding guests not feast when the bridegroom is with them?” (Matt 9:15). He speaks of himself as bridegroom, in a marriage or remarriage between God and humanity – reuniting the creator with created – and the rich bounty that that brings. It is a profound and ultimate vision of happiness.

Much of the Christian debate around happiness today, and in the centuries since Jesus, has been about the locus of happiness – both physical and temporal happiness – and what is required to achieve happiness. One strong strand in the tradition has largely insisted that happiness is only possible in the afterlife, in the full and unmediated presence of God. At least in its extreme versions, that is only a caricature of who Jesus was and what he taught. It rejects much of the Jewish basis of Christian life, thought, and worship, and is a distortion of the root meaning of Christianity.

Happiness does have something essential to do with the direct experience of God’s presence, and it also has to do with the experience of God’s blessing in the form of this-worldly “goods.” Those goods include food, drink, shelter, clothing, liberty, peace, family, meaningful work, community, and a general state of well-
being. *Shalom* is still one of the best shorthand ways of speaking about this vision of a restored and ultimately happy world. Shalom includes the happiness of all members of the community.

We’ll look at the influences on this other-worldly concept of happiness, as well as the continuous, though at times muted, tradition that insists on a this-worldly possibility for happiness, in the presence of God and in the enjoyment of God’s created blessings.

I think it would be useful to make a couple of background points. Many western philosophical traditions understand happiness as the goal of human existence, the ultimate good of life and living. There are two sorts of happiness that are the frequent subject of philophizing, and I’ll use the Greek words for the sake of clarity. *Eudaimonia* literally means *a good spirit* and it refers to right ways of living – in other words, virtue, and the ways in which right application of virtue in ethical living produces a happier society. The wisdom tradition of the Bible which we explored briefly above is about eudemonic aspects of happiness.

*Hedonia* is about pleasure – the root means *sweet* – and it includes the kinds of earthly blessings that we’ve just touched on. In English we know this root word
in *hedonism*, but the modern connotations of excessive pleasure-seeking are a later development.

Greek philosophy had a significant influence on the developing Christian tradition, and happiness was linked with virtue in a broad strand of that tradition.³ The Stoic tradition taught that happiness was a function only of virtuous character and life, that it was within the control of an individual, and simply a matter of will. Stoics believed and still believe, that happiness comes in living in accord with nature – in the sense that one accepts or adapts to what nature provides, and they deny that happiness has anything to do with *hedonia*. To be a stoic in common parlance means to be unmoved by pleasure, pain, or grief, and that connotation is an apt reflection of the basic philosophical understanding.

The Stoic concept of virtue has to do with passionless existence – Christian scholars will recall the patripassian controversy about God’s nature being unmovable or impassionate. This is one clear instance in which Stoicism shapes an early and developing Christian theology. The 13th century theologian Thomas Aquinas, for example, insisted that ultimate Christian happiness consisted solely in the intellectual contemplation of God.

³ David Naugle, *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives* is a helpful introduction.
The understanding of God as apathetic, in the technical sense of unmoving or impassionate, is one of the results of stoic influences on early Christian theologizing.\(^4\) It is not characteristic of all strands of later Christian theology, and it is at some odds with Hebraic understandings of God as the one who hears the cries of wanderers in the wilderness, and being moved, responds. We could point to the parallel story of Abraham arguing with God about the divine intention to destroy the city of Sodom for its lawlessness (Gen 18:22ff). You may remember Abram demands of God, “will you withhold your arm if I can find 50 righteous persons in the city? How about 45? 40? 30? 20? Ten?” God finally agrees not to destroy the city if even 10 righteous human beings can be found.

There is another strand of early Christian theologizing that tends toward this understanding of happiness as having to do with rejecting or overcoming the passions. The varieties of Gnosticism, some of them Christian, have somewhat different emphases, but all are more or less ascetic, rejecting the value of \textit{hedonia}. Many full-blown versions offer a radically dualistic understanding of reality. The goal of life becomes escape from material reality, in favor of spiritual reality, which is the only possible locus for happiness.

In contrast, the Aristotelian understanding of happiness includes both virtue and sufficient physical or external goods. It’s a good deal closer to the Hebraic view, and it comes to undergird much of the medieval theologizing about happiness.

Greek philosophy understood happiness as the goal of human existence – and there are not many western systems that would deny that premise.

We looked initially at Greek systems that speak of eudemonic and hedonic sorts of happiness. There is another division that would also be helpful to explore, particularly the Aristotelian distinction between *theoria* and ethics. Theoria means intellectual effort, ratiocination, or rational contemplation of goods (not physical substances, but concepts or ideals). Ethics has to do with the application of virtues to social and political systems. One is about individual thought, the other is about living in community. Aristotle believed that the highest end of human life was contemplation of the good, and he wasn’t talking about God. In some expressions of Aristotelian philosophy, it’s thought possible to achieve true happiness without attention to the moral virtues of daily living. That may verge on caricature, but it’s clear that the happiness associated with *theoria* does not require ethics in the sense of political or social engagement. But Aristotle himself does not exclude the importance of affect – pleasure is indeed a component of *theoria*. We might
compare that to Jesus’ summary of the first commandment – love God with all your heart and soul and mind (Matthew 22:37).

These Greek philosophical traditions began to confront Christian theology again in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries after centuries of oblivion. There are parallels between the Greek and Christian traditions, as well as radical distinctions. I’m going to use Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1166) as an exemplar of this period of Christian theologizing – his discussion of happiness is exceedingly well-developed, and it resists any tendency toward over-simplification.5

Aelred insists that human beings are created for good, expressed in happiness and fulfillment – that is their natural and intended condition. He starts from the Genesis stories of creation, noting that human beings have both bodies and souls, and are both thinking and social creatures. He reads the second creation story to insist that human beings are created for friendship and equality, as the second human being was created from, or alongside, the first. God is the ultimate source of human happiness, and all human experience of happiness is ultimately God’s good gift.

5 This section draws from John R. Sommerfeldt, Aelred of Rievaulx: Pursuing Perfect Happiness
Like many of his other contemporaneous theologians, Aelred distinguishes between a kind of ultimate or true happiness that is only possible in the afterlife, and the happiness that is possible in this life. But Aelred is noteworthy for the positive value he places on mortal happiness, and his understanding that kind of happiness can be achieved and experienced. For him, happiness is fundamentally a matter of choice. Despite the despoiling of human happiness in the Fall, the great sin of separation told in the second creation story about Adam and Eve, restoration is possible and has indeed been accomplished in the incarnation of Jesus as the Christ. Yet human beings must participate, willfully and intentionally, in order to experience happiness in this life.

The memory, vision, and intent to recover that initial happiness in the garden remain in human beings, but they cannot restore themselves to that garden on their own. They require the love of God, God’s influence and aid, to choose the good and move toward greater happiness.

Aelred develops a remarkable framework for discussing happiness and the road home for that original happy, prelapsarian state in Eden. As I said, much depends on human choice, divinely guided. The elements of his explication begin with creator and creature, body and soul, the soul being the seat of memory, intellect, and will. The body provides sense data, the soul perceives reality through
those sensations, organizes them into patterns and compares them with earlier experience, and then distinguishes what is experienced from what it knows and remembers of truth. Finally the soul chooses and the body acts. Virtue, and ultimately happiness, result from choosing truth and good. In all of this, God is at work, having created the human being capable of choosing the good, luring toward or encouraging the good choice, and giving the power or grace to choose well in the face of temptation. Sin results when the power of choice is ill-used, justice results when choices are well made.

Aelred repeatedly refutes ancient theological tendencies to error what we are technically calling heresies. He insists that the body isn’t intrinsically evil or sinful (this is in contrast with many gnostic or dualist positions), that it is the soul, tasked with the responsibility of choosing the good, which is the seat of sin or of blessing. Bodily impulses may be inadequately regulated, or memory may be tainted by previous experience of wretched choices, but the will is the biggest problem. Paul of Tarses’s lament about conceiving the good, but being unable to choose it, is probably familiar to most of us, whether we’re faced with a second helping of a gourmet dessert (Death by Chocolate), an exquisite bottle of wine (one of my favorites is a California Cabernet called Rapture!), or the sensual allure of intimacy
with another person who is not your vowed partner. He’s explicit about this not being a matter of thinking, but rather of will. He says in Romans:

**Romans 7:15; 18b-20** I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

When the will is functioning well, and we’re making good choices, the result is justice. And those good choices and works, encouraged and made possible by God’s grace, eventuate in happiness. Ultimately, happiness is a gift, and unachievable without God.

What keeps us from happiness has to do with the results of the fall. Human intellect is marred, often assuming that happiness lies in inadequate or impossible things, people, or places, rather than in God. Classically, this is to be the sin of pride or idolatry – believing that one’s own solitary knowing is the fullness of the truth, and that something other than God can be worthy of our complete intention and attention. The answer to this lapse is humility – the proper understanding of oneself as creature, yet also bearing the image of the divine, and capable of choosing relationship with ultimate Good.
The ability to love rightly is also affected by the fall. Our bodily sensations lead us to seek fulfillment in lesser goods, or our memories fail to recall us to the larger good. Aelred understands that loving well is about perfecting the will, learning to choose to apply our emotions in an effective, happy, perfect, or blessed direction. He notes the traditional distinction of loves – self-centered love, and other- or God-centered love. One leads to misery, the other to happiness.

A brief mathematical excursus, admittedly an exercise in *theoria*: we often think about happiness as a scalar, a number – maybe from 1 to 10, in the sense of an answer to the question, “How happy are you today?” We can also think of happiness as a vector, a directional quantifier – “how does happiness increase when you move Godward?” The deeper understandings of happiness move into at least a four dimensional tensor field, and it’s probably appropriate to think of ultimate reality and ultimate happiness as participation in a multi-dimensional field of the good, particularly if we can conceive of God as infinite dimensional love. Human beings generally experience happiness in 4 or fewer dimensions, but we do get glimpses of the more. We participate in that more as we choose to move more deeply into interconnectedness. A cosmic understanding of that interconnectedness is called love in the Christian tradition, or sometimes compassion.
The capacity to love, and its experience, are ultimately about choice, rather than primarily about emotion. Love in this sense has a volitional and intellectual content; choosing well leads to good (loving) deeds, that eventuate in happiness. Notably, the body is an essential part of accomplishing those loving deeds – the whole person is called into happiness.

The emotional content of what is popularly called love is important in Aelred’s understanding, but it is not required for loving, happy choices. He notes that affection can increase our connection to the object of love, and to God, and indeed increases our happiness. The ultimate end of perfect happiness includes our feeling capacity as well as our rational and volitional functions.

The tradition holds up three loci for love and loving expression: self, God, and neighbor. Jesus summarizes the law of love thus:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Matthew 22:37,39

Together these foci of loving lead to happiness. And Aelred says of loving thus, “This is peace, which is a kind of foretaste which will feed you on the way, and fill you completely in your homeland.”⁶ He speaks of the vision of perfect happiness, the goal toward which human beings labor, ultimately fulfilled in God. As the 4th

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⁶ Sermo de oneribus, Patrologia latina, Migne 195:422C; cited in Sommerfeldt, p 68
century theologian, Augustine of Hippo, put it, “our hearts our restless, O Lord, until they find their rest in you.” It’s clear that heart, mind, and soul all participate – though it’s important to note that the traditional understanding of heart is not as the seat of emotion but of volition. Aelred speaks of ardent in loving both God and neighbor – a burning passion for and toward the beloved – and he invokes a great deal of sensual imagery. Yet one more insistence that bodies and incarnate existence are essential to happiness.

Human beings seek happiness in this mortal life and beyond it. Aelred’s vision of happiness transcends and includes both: he envisions heaven, perfect bliss, as community, engaged in the banquet which satisfies all human want, souls engaged in contemplation of, or communion with, their creator. In that state, all that was deformed or wounded in the fall is healed: the intellect, memory, and will function as they were created to do, the body is healed of all infirmity, senescence, and mortality through the saving work of the incarnation and resurrection; and the blessed, beloved community is gathered in friendship with each other and God. “The happiness of each belongs to all, and the whole of the happiness of all
belongs to each.”⁷ Those bodies individually and communally become a body of justice and happiness.

That sort of existence in justice and perfect peace is another way of speaking of shalom or the reign of God. The ancient prophetic vision of restored humanity, living in right relationship with God, other human beings, and all of creation, is what the Christian tradition calls happiness. It signals the restoration of dignity to all creatures, a perfection of creation. That perfection is mandated in Jesus’ words, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

The pursuit of perfection is the path to happiness:

**Matthew 19:21** If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

**Romans 12:2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**James 1:25** But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing.

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⁷ *De spirituali amicitia*, 3.79, *Ascetic Works of Aelred of Rievaulx*; cited in Sommerfeldt, p 116
Wisdom 6:15  To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding, and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care...

Getting wisdom, learning the mind of God, loving neighbor as oneself, these are the pathways home.

There are aids on the journey, and Aelred points to friendship as one significant help. Friendship in his understanding is love expanded by intimacy. One can love one’s neighbor, treat him or her with justice, and do so without affection or much internal vulnerability. We do so when we cast a ballot that may raise our own taxes in order that others might have enough to eat. There is not much intimacy in that act.

Friendship builds intimacy – and ultimately intimacy can be a taste of divine relationship. This despite the American tendency to assume that all intimacy implies sexual intimacy. Knowing and being known, as gifted and flawed, fearful and courageous, warty and luminous – that ongoing process of revealing one’s being builds friendship.

The second creation story begins in the need of the earth creature (adham) for a friend and companion. Indeed, the other creatures also need friends suited to their capacities. Creation cannot flourish without partners and fellow participants in the dance of life. Rational creatures are capable of greater intimacy with their
companions, and with their creator. Happiness is not possible without the intimacy of friendship. Jesus speaks of his own intimacy with God as father and his intimacy with his earthly community:

I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. **John 15:15**

Friendship with other human beings fosters and encourages friendship with God – the loci of love and friendship are mutually supportive and interpenetrating. Happiness is not possible without it. Aelred is pretty blunt about it:

“I should call them beasts, not humans, who say that one ought to live without being a source of consolation to anyone. **Beasts** even those who say that one ought not be a source of burden or grief to anyone. **Beasts** too those who take no delight in the good fortune of another or bring before no other their own bitterness at misfortune, caring to cherish no one and be cherished by none.”

This understanding is in marked contrast to the Stoics, who assert that perfect happiness is possible through private contemplation of the good, without resort to the political or social spheres of life.

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8 Aelred, pp 78-79 [note 46]
The central threads of the Christian tradition understand happiness as the ultimate goal of human existence, perfected in the eternal, and also possible in this life. Perfection is understood as the way of living as a follower of Jesus, a process as well as a goal (be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect – Matthew 5:48). Perfection is closely linked to the orthodox concept of divinization, becoming “like God.” The 4th century theologian Athanasius put it this way, “God became human in order that human beings might become divine.” This concept is most often called *theosis* or divinization, and comes to be a foundation of Eastern Orthodox theology.

Theosis or divinization is developed in a variety of streams, from an eastern search for something much like *theoria*, the direct experience of God in contemplation, to sharing in, or cooperating with, the intent and activity of God in prayer and action. That monastic ideal later works its way into teaching about the lives and possibilities of more ordinary Christians.

Theologians of happiness devote considerable energy to the process of perfection – in virtue, as the loving way to live in the world, and in contemplation of the divine, that the divine will and mind might be better known. Aelred is one exemplar, but later theologians like Thomas à Kempis and Jeremy Taylor also strive to teach the ways of perfection.
The tension between this-worldly perfection in happiness and other-worldly is constant, even though some seek to resolve the tension. This is essentially a matter of eschatology, as some insist that the eternal perfection can only be met in an afterlife, while others insist that we have glimpses (or more than glimpses) in this life. A traditionally centrist understanding holds both in tension: ultimate perfection and happiness is possible only in direct experience, communion, or contemplation of the divine, but that real and important experience is possible as mortals, and should be the focus of justice-seeking in a godly human society. In other words, communion with God may be imaged in just relationships among human beings, and between human beings and the rest of creation.

There are other polarities to be managed, rather than resolved, in an orthodox Christian exposition of happiness – and moderate theologians understand that resolving those tensions usually results in heresy. We briefly noted earlier the tension between the goodness and sinfulness of creation. There are two creation stories in Genesis for a reason – neither one tells the full story. We need both an understanding of the ultimate goodness of creation, reflecting the goodness of its creator, and we need an understanding that humanity is not self-capable of restoration to ultimate goodness. The particular Christian understanding of God become human in Jesus (the Incarnation) is a way of explicating the latter.
Jesus’ incarnation means that the created order is now capable of receiving or becoming the divine (divinization or *theosis*), and any theology that rejects that possibility soon becomes un-Christian. The other pole of classically Christian theology includes the understanding that even though creation is initially good, it has suffered a departure from the divine intent – classically called *sin* – and that the healing of that departure has been, or begun to be, healed in the incarnation. That restoration happens through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus – and indeed, the fall is sometimes called “o happy fault” because it is understood as leading to the Incarnation, the presence of God in human flesh.

Other tensions also challenge Christian definitions of happiness. We’ve already explored the stoic rejection of pleasure and worldly (bodied, physical) goods as essential contributions to human happiness. The Gnostic deformation goes in the same direction, and in extreme form results in a wholly unchristian definition.

The opposite pole is equally troublesome. If we equate happiness solely with external or physical goods, we lapse into hedonism, and in a biblical sense, commit idolatry. We deny the desirability of God as a partner in human happiness, in substituting the material creation for God – and this is certainly one understanding of what the fall is all about. Throughout history, it’s been a
common narrowing or blindness. Today’s consumerism is a good example, as is seeing the market or a particular form of government as the end of human happiness. In the Christian understanding, locating human happiness in anything which does not include and acknowledge the divine, represents major error.

Managing all these tensions implies an understanding of happiness in which God befriends human beings and human beings live in community together with God. Worldly goods are dually important, for as part of good creation they reflect the creator, and they are a necessary element of true happiness for corporeal beings. The Christian focus on divine incarnation and the divine possibility of human creation makes corporeal happiness significant and essential. It also means that the happiness of individuals is impossible outside community. This leads us back to the ancient prophetic vision for which *shalom* is the byword: human beings living together in friendship with God and one another, having food and drink in abundance, and in whom all sorts of illness and brokenness are healed. God is known as friend, more directly in friend Jesus, reflected in human siblings and in other forms of creation. Justice prevails.

That focus on justice is the fruit of loving and befriending God and neighbor; it is perfected on the virtuous road, uses every resource available to human creatures – mind, body, heart, soul, spirit, affect, inspiration, cooperation –
love in all its forms and parts. The result is the beloved community, the community of friends who know themselves beloved of God.

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