

Perception

Well, the Games of the XXXI Olympiad are officially underway in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 11,000 athletes are competing for 306 sets of Olympic medals.

Dr. Vicki Medvec, a professor of social psychology at Northwestern University, has dedicated her life to studying Olympic medallists and specifically how they feel about their achievement.

What Dr. Medvec has discovered may surprise you. Though it may sound counterintuitive, according to Dr. Medvec's research, bronze medallists tend to be happier than silver medallists. According to Medvec's study, silver medallists have a tendency to focus on how closely they came to winning gold. Their silver medal is a reminder of how they failed to win. On the other hand, bronze medallists usually focus on how closely they came to winning nothing at all. They are simply grateful to have a medal.

Dr. Medvec's study reveals an interesting facet of human nature. How we feel isn't determined so much by our external circumstances, but rather by our internal attitudes. The happiness of the Olympic medal winners didn't depend on which medal they won. If that were the case, the silver medallists should have been happier than the bronze medallists. Instead, their happiness depended on how they perceived the medal they won.

The same is true in our lives. In order to find happiness, most people look to change their outward circumstances. "I would be happier if I made more money or if I had a different husband or if I lived in a bigger house." If our happiness depends on those things, what happens if we don't get them? Are we then going to live unhappy, bitter lives?

Even when people do get what they want, they often find those things don't actually make them happy. True joy, true happiness, begins on the inside.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in the Greek city of Philippi,

"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation."

Paul had learned the secret to being happy. Do you know what it is?

He tells us, "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength," (Philippians 4:13). In other words, "I can handle any and every situation in life with a happy heart through my God who gives me strength."

God changes our perspective. Through His Word, He points our eyes to the cross and the gold medal of heaven Jesus won for each of us. Through His Word, He shows us that our lives have meaning and purpose. Through His Word, He helps us see that even the difficulties of this world are actually blessings in disguise.

God changes our perspective. Look at your life. Look at the blessings God has showered upon you. Look at His love and forgiveness. Understand that even the pains you are suffering God will cause to turn out for your good. See the glory and perfection and happiness which are waiting for you in heaven. When you have that perspective, it doesn't matter what medal you win. It doesn't matter what happens to you or around you. You can truly be happy.