

# A Philosophy for Living

by Roland Foster

We can find truth in unlikely places.

In 1988, Bobby McFerrin had a Number One hit with his first single, a song titled "Don't Worry, Be Happy." This seems like a silly little song. Its entire message is, "In every life we have some trouble, but when you worry you make it double," followed by a lot of "ooh ooh ooh"s. But, for me, both of the admonitions in its title make solid good sense. "Don't Worry. Be happy."

## Don't worry.

At the age of twenty I had an ulcer, caused by worrying. I got some good advice from a man who had been through a similar experience. He told me, "Don't waste your time and emotional energy worrying about things that are out of your control. If you can do something to improve the situation or remove the threat, do it. If not, try to ignore it." I have made this a rule for myself since that time.

Worry can cause worse things than ulcers. A WebMD article says that worrying can cause:

- elevated heart and breathing rate;
- muscle tension, leading to migraines or tension headaches;
- breathing problems, for those with lung conditions;
- elevated blood sugar, leading to heart disease, strokes, or kidney disease;
- impairment of the immune system;
- excess stomach acid, leading to acid reflux or ulcers;
- hormone imbalances for both men and women.

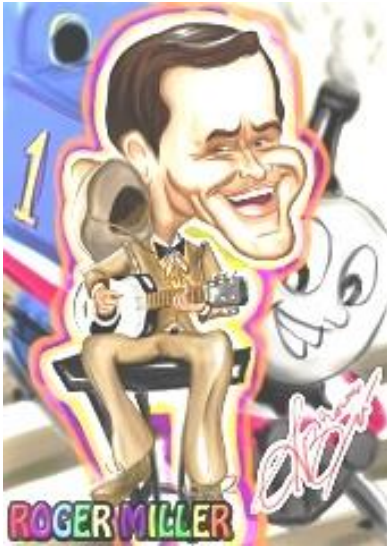
Of course there are things that make us worry whether we want to or not. But I try to keep my "optional" worrying under control, and I do.

## Be Happy.

I occasionally amuse myself by mentioning, half-seriously, "my two favorite philosophers" — Mammy Yokum and Roger Miller.

Mammy Yokum was a character in the Li'l Abner comic strip of yesteryear — she was Li'l Abner's mother, to be exact. She was short, scrawny, prickly and tough, but she had a heart of gold. She had several wise sayings, but one that she repeated fairly often, as I remember, was, "**Goodness is better than evil becuz it is nicer!!**" Which, of course, is an amusing tautology.





Roger Miller was a popular singer and song writer who had several hits during the 1960s. One of them, "King of the Road," became sort of an instant classic. Another song, a less famous one, started out like this:

**Ya can't roller skate in a buffalo herd  
Ya can't roller skate in a buffalo herd  
Ya can't roller skate in a buffalo herd  
But you can be happy if you've a mind to.**

The song continues with several other things that "Ya can't" do, but after each one it admonishes that, to be happy,

**All ya gotta do is put your mind to it  
Knuckle down, buckle down, do it, do it, do it.**

In a similar vein, President Abraham Lincoln has been quoted as saying, "**Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.**"

I think there are two ways to be unhappy. The first way is to choose to be miserable. Too many people in our society spend a lot of time and energy looking for something to be unhappy about, something to criticize or complain about or be angry about. They are overly concerned about "their rights;" they have little gratitude for anything good that happens to them or for them; they are by nature suspicious and judgmental; they know how to assign blame, but not how to appreciate anything or forgive anyone.

This is a slippery slope. Disappointment easily turns to anger; and anger, when encouraged as it often is in our society, quickly becomes outrage, leading to abuse or violence. And unresolved anger, according to WebMD, is as damaging to one's health as worry, or more so.

Probably without really intending to, habitually angry people have gotten into the mode of choosing to have a lousy day every day.

The other way to be unhappy is to make it conditional. "I'd be happy if I had more money," or "I'll be happy when I've lost fifty pounds." Those who depend on circumstances for their happiness are riding an emotional roller coaster.

But I'm convinced that chronic unhappiness is not necessary. It's avoidable. Along with Roger Miller and President Lincoln, I believe that happiness can be chosen, learned, and practiced.

A few years ago, a TV commercial for a retirement facility featured an elderly woman who said something like this: "When I get up in the morning, I can decide what kind of a day I'll have. Today I'm going to have a good day." She is a wise woman.

How does one intentionally have a "good" day? I think these are the key elements:

1. Be intentional. Decide ahead of time that each day will be as good as you can make it.
2. The Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians says, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done."
3. It also says, "Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise." Focus on the good and lovely, rather than the bad and the ugly. You can always find something negative, if that's what you are looking for; but if you look for goodness, for something positive, you can usually find that, too.
4. Try to build up, rather than tear down. Be a giver, rather than a taker. Look for ways to make someone else's day better. As my favorite radio Bible teacher, Dr. Bob Cook, used to say at the end of each program, "Walk with the King today, and be a blessing."
5. In fact, try to be like Jesus. Be scrupulously honest, kind, and generous. Speak the truth in love; be slow to anger and quick to forgive. God is watching; try to please him.
6. Finally, evaluate your attitude and your behavior. Make sure you're sticking with the program. Make corrections as necessary.

I'm having a good day today, the very best day I can have. By God's grace and my own choice and determination, I am not worrying, and I'm happy. And I say to you,

**"Don't Worry. Be Happy."**