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Could This Really be the Secret to Happiness, Long Life, and Influence?

Could it be that a 2000-year old Bible verse actually contains the secret to happiness?

What about a longer, more fulfilling life? Or even influence and purpose?

It's true.

Nearly 2000 years ago, the apostle Paul wrote about the secret.

The one thing we need to live the kind of life that others admire. The one key to happiness, health, and living a life that has meaning and influences and impacts others.

Without it, he wrote that we are nothing. Without it, we could gain all the possessions in the world and yet we truly gain nothing. Without it, we could speak the most eloquent words and write the most inspiring lyrics and yet we would be nothing more than background noise.

That one thing is *love*.

The greatest of these?

Anyone who has been to a wedding or church or been to a craft store knows the words of 1 Corinthians Chapter 13. Love is patient. Love is kind. And so on. Paul, the writer, ends with this:

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Is it, though?

What about having faith? What about hoping for a bright future? What about success? What about education, money, possessions, and power?

Aren't those critical to happiness? Aren't they necessary to be healthy? Aren't those prerequisites for having influence on others and leaving a legacy?

Actually, no. And the science now backs it up. That's right, modern science proves that this 1st Century theologian was right.

Love - full stop

From 1938 to 1942, 268 men were chosen at random. The only thing they had in common were that they were sophomores at Harvard.

For seven decades, psychologists studied them. For *seven* decades! In other words, this was perhaps the longest-running psychological study of all time. It was certainly extensive.

And what did they find? What were the numerous factors that characterized the happiest, most influential people or who had the longest lives? What were the seven steps they'd taken to reach their state of happiness? Or the five routines? Or the nine books they'd read?

It was none of those. In fact, the entire study, seventy years worth, was summed up in one word:

"Love - full stop."

(For you non-British, "full stop" means "period.")

Love, period.

Love, that's it.

Love.

Really? That's it? That's what they found from a multi-million dollar study?

Yep.

The man who said that was George Vaillant, who had directed the study for its last 40 years. Here's what he said in defense of those words:

When I was interviewed as the director of the study for 40 years, I made two rash generalizations, "The only thing that really matters in life are your relationships to other people," and "Happiness equals love—full stop."

When I praised relationships, was I speaking from my heart and not from science? In order to find out, I went back to the data. (Source: *Yes, I Stand by My Words*, "Happiness Equals Love—Full Stop")

And what did the data show him?

That relationships, specifically loving relationships (love can be somewhat broadly defined, so consider close friendships along with family) are the number one factor in determining:

- Happiness
- Leadership ability
- Resiliency (Ability to cope with stress, failure, etc.)
- Health
- Income

- Occupational success (See how that works? Love precedes happiness. Happiness precedes success)

And the list could go on for days, I'm sure.

Let it be love

So yes, the greatest of these is love.

The secret to your happiness lies in the number and strength of your relationships. It lies in your network. It lies in the love you receive and the love you give.

It's been right in front of you all this time. Have you missed it?

As the band Family Force 5 says in their song, *Let it be Love*:

*I've never seen a soul set free
Through an argument
I've never seen a hurt get healed
In a protest
It's not about the stand we take
But the grace we give
It's not about the name we make
But the life we live
Stronger than every fear
Comfort for all the tears
It's where the war is run
And it has overcome
Louder than the loudest shout
Deeper than the deepest doubt
Let it be love, let it be love
It's love that lights the way*

It's love that lights the way to your happiness.

It's love that lights the way to your success.

It's love that lights the way to increased influence and impact.

It's love that lights the way for you to change the world and leave a legacy.

Today, what will you do to work on making one relationship in your life better or more meaningful?