

God and Happiness

Ministry Director Teaches College Course at Chesterton House

BY CATHERINE ELVY, STAFF WRITER



There are few topics more central to a personal worldview than the meaning and pursuit of happiness.

Jim Thomforde, Christian Union's ministry director at Cornell, is teaming up with Chesterton House, a Christian studies center affiliated with the university, to teach a credit course exploring the concept of happiness.



Jim Thomforde, Christian Union's ministry director at Cornell, will teach a credit course on campus probing the concept of happiness.

"We're going to consider the concept of happiness from various historical viewpoints, particularly the Christian perspective, and give students an opportunity to investigate this important theme in an academic, but practical, way," said Thomforde.

In the fall, Thomforde became an adjunct professor of biblical studies with Gordon College to serve as a Chesterton House teaching fellow for the project. In 2014, Chesterton began offering courses in biblical, theological, cultural, and ethnic studies in collaboration with the Massachusetts-based Christian college.

Students taking Thomforde's *God and Happiness*

course, which runs March 27 to May 8 inside Cornell's Anabel Taylor Hall, will earn two credits with Gordon College. Pending university consent, some students may be able to transfer Gordon credits to their Cornell studies.

"The course is a fantastic opportunity to see the Cornell academic culture influenced by the Christian worldview," said Thomforde. "The ultimate goal of the course will be for students to have a chance to understand their own view of happiness and be able to articulate this important concept from a Christian perspective."

Thomforde will address the ways philosophers and theologians of the Early Modern period and contemporary thinkers approach the topic.

After tackling some definitions of happiness, as well as popular paths to fulfillment, Thomforde will offer a Christian perspective on the subject. "One of the exciting things to realize is that — as opposed to most secular versions — Christian happiness from a Gospel perspective is a gift, rather than a goal," said Thomforde. "It is something we receive from God's goodness, rather than something we must achieve on the basis of our own goodness."

"Through the Gospel, we receive God, Himself, who is the greatest good and source of all joy and happiness."

Such an approach dovetails with part of Chesterton House's mission. The Ithaca-based organization helps promote the discovery of the intellectual riches of the historic Christian faith as part of an effort to empower faithful Christian lifestyles.

While the students enrolled in *God and Happiness* will tackle the subject in a serious academic setting, an understanding of the topic of internal satisfaction has significant implications for lifelong well-being and emotional health.

"Happiness is everyone's ultimate goal, but it is elusive and hard to define. American culture promotes versions of happiness that are largely based on personal success and the attainment of pleasure that ultimately prove futile," said Thomforde. "That

is evidenced by the recent rise in anxiety, depression, and even suicide."

Philosophical approaches to fulfillment date back thousands of years. The Greek philosopher Aristotle opined happiness is the "highest good," and he described it as the ultimate "end" for human endeavors.

"These themes carry on today and are very much a part of the ways that people think," said Thomforde.

More recently, author and lecturer Tal Ben-Shahar, Harvard PhD '04, taught two of the most attended classes in his alma mater's history. While an associate of the university, he served as instructor for *Positive Psychology* and *The Psychology of Leadership*, experiences that sparked extensive publishing, lecturing, and consulting appearances.

Ben-Shahar's interest in happiness is far from isolated as the topic dominates pop psychology, some social-science and neuroscience studies, and even modern polling research.

As for Thomforde, the doctoral candidate in systematic theology at the University of Edinburgh

eventually plans to compile a book on the intersection of the Gospel and the quest for fulfillment. Earlier, Thomforde played for a New York Yankees' minor league team and worked on Wall Street in institutional equities, giving him a wealth of perspectives. Thomforde, also a husband and father, serves as a chaplain to Cornell's football team.

Aspiring Christian leaders especially need to avoid the pitfalls of any ideology that would trap them in "never-ending cycles of chasing happiness in their achievements, reputation, money, and pleasure," said Thomforde.

Ultimately, "we have everything we need in Jesus. A Christian, or Gospel, perspective on happiness should be liberating, setting us free from the futility of pursuing ultimate satisfaction in the things of the world. Instead of having to chase happiness, we start with happiness received as a gift because of the Gospel," said Thomforde.

That, in turn, "liberates and empowers us to pursue the love of God and neighbor, and that for God's glory." | [CU](#)

Living out True Grace

Christian Union Ministry Hosts Winter Conference

BY JESSICA TONG, DARTMOUTH '17



Barely two weeks into 2017, more than 60 Dartmouth students left campus to attend the sixth annual Christian Union Winter Wonderland Conference at Singing Hills Christian Camp in Plainfield, New Hampshire.

This three-day conference, held each year at the beginning of winter term, is an opportunity for students to seek God and take advantage of the beauty that the otherwise harsh winters in the Northeast can offer.

This year's theme was "Tough Love: Living out True Grace in the Real World." The keynote speaker was Rev. Drew Matter of Christ Redeemer Church in Hanover, New Hampshire.

"Drew Matter brought three messages, each with a pastoral heart that engaged the students to think about their identity in Christ," said Zach Albanese,

Christian Union's ministry director at Dartmouth. "What Just Happened? Who Am I? What Now?—these were the sorts of questions the students wrestled with during the conference."

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The messages resonated with Ledane Ram, a freshman from Schenectady, New York.

"The story of Asaph [in Psalm 73] really hit home