

Perfect Happiness

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By Kristyn Kusek Lewis

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Introduction

Charlotte McGanley knows happiness. Just ask anyone who's read *Perfect Happiness*, her bestselling book about how she, a busy mother and professor, used her no-nonsense positive psychology research to brighten her own life. She always pictured her career beginning and ending in the halls of academia, but now she's become a bit of a self-help guru. No one is more surprised by this than Charlotte herself, who has secretly never been more miserable.



Though her husband of many years, Jason, is her partner in all things, she finds more gratification most evenings in a glass (or three) of Chardonnay or another scroll through her Instagram feed. Meanwhile, their daughter, Birdie, is feeling the pressure of being her high school's star tennis player, keeping up her GPA, and having her first boyfriend—and Charlotte, despite all her expertise, has no idea how to help her.

As Charlotte preaches the gospel of happiness to her undergraduate students, audiences across the country, and her own online followers, she's faced with some tough questions: What is happiness when the family you've nurtured starts to fall apart in front of your eyes? When your daughter seems determined to self-destruct? When the man you thought you'd spend the rest of your life with—and took for granted because of it—gets fed up? When all of the tools that you push to your loyal followers just don't seem to work?

In this bittersweet family love story, Kristyn Kusek Lewis explores how easy it is to lose connection with the people closest to us, and what happens when we try to find our way back.

Questions for Discussion

1. What role does social media play in Charlotte's life? In your opinion, do the pros outweigh the cons? Do you use social media, and if so, is the impact of it on your life more positive or negative?
2. Kusek Lewis gives us a window onto Charlotte and Jason's marriage that includes both of their perspectives. Why do you think she chose to do this? Which character do you sympathize with more?
3. Have you ever read a book about happiness? What was the best advice you've heard about happiness?

4. Charlotte's academic view on happiness is "act first, feelings later." Do you agree with her?
5. Do you think it's ever advisable for a parent to discourage their teenager's romantic relationships or friendships? Could Charlotte have said anything to influence Birdie's opinion of Tucker?
6. By leaving her Southern hometown, do you think Charlotte able to escape one set of expectations for her life? Does she have another set of expectations in DC? Where do her biggest pressures come from?
7. Do you believe that Charlotte ever seriously considers rekindling her relationship with Reese? What does he represent to her? What about Jason and Jamie?
8. If either Jason or Charlotte chose to move forward with their extramarital relationships, do you believe that the other would have followed suit? Why or why not?
9. What are your thoughts about how Charlotte uses alcohol to cope with day-to-day stress? Have you ever turned to something unhealthy to cope with a problem?
10. What do you think is next for Charlotte, Jason, and Birdie?
11. Should happiness be our primary goal in life? What are some other goals you have for yourself and/or your family?