

Discovering the Joy-Saturated Call God Has on Your Life

I firmly believe, as I'm sure many of you do, that every human life is created purposefully and for a purpose. Every soul is literally pulsating with calling, and the searching for our individual reason for being is a shared pursuit of nearly everyone on the planet. Discovering our purpose in God has sometimes been portrayed as a sort of quest, during which the treasure we are seeking is always just beyond our reach or hidden where, if we are honest, it seems only the lucky or "chosen" ever find it.

It need not be that difficult or mysterious. A compass of joy has been placed in each one of us from the moment of conception that will lead us, not only to the fulfillment of our destiny, but on a journey of abundant life that will serve as a beacon of heavenly light to an often broken, confused and distracted world.

We (followers of Jesus, the Christ) are to understand, pursue and exude joy. Because we all have our own definitions and understandings attached to words, allow me a moment to clarify what I mean when I say "joy." Joy is not a feeling; joy is not happiness. Joy is a raw power of God that resides in every person and functions as a guide, a motivator and vehicle of hope and healing in our lives. Joy, like love, peace, forgiveness, patience and generosity, is a foundational building block of the kingdom of God which we (as ambassadors/builders of the kingdom) are to utilize as a tool in co-laboring to see our oft spoken prayer answered, "... on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). Joy heals us, sustains us, enables and leads us.

"Can you ask God what I am supposed to do?"

“I don’t know how to find my purpose in life.”

Traveling around the world, these are two of the most common questions I hear when interacting with and praying for others. Although there are actually many ways that this issue of “feeling lost” can be addressed, I feel qualified to speak only of the path of realizing purpose that has proven most fruitful and useful in my own life.

We Christians tend to look for a spelled out (literally) answer to these questions, usually in the Scriptures, not realizing that in the experiences of life itself is where the resolution lies hidden, largely available only to those longing to *taste* and see (not memorize) the answer. Please don’t misunderstand me. Scripture is important and is a blessing for so many reasons, but it was never intended to diminish in any way the actual goal of religion and spirituality which is, quite simply, union with our Father.

Union with God comes through real-life discovery. It is realized not by reading about love, but through loving; not in speaking of peace but being and releasing peace; not in talking about miracles but in working miracles (Matt. 10:13, 1 Cor. 12:10). When I speak of joy as a compass, I’m referencing those moments in life when so much joy is stirring within us that we know we are doing the right thing, we’re on the right track—we’re touching our purpose.

We’ve all experienced joy in this manner. Remember a moment of intimacy with your children as they rested on your chest or the rush of excitement that accompanied seeing someone physically and miraculously healed for the first time. Think of accepting your “dream job” or embracing your spouse after weeks of separation. These occasions of deep contentment or elation (byproducts of joy) are meant to guide us on the journey of being conformed to the image of Christ. Just as we have been created to know and experience love (God) we have all been fitted with a capacity for knowing joy. The intent, I

believe, is that we should be touched by moments of joy so beautifully that they would motivate and entice us onward and upward into deeper union and experience of God. So what does this look like on a practical level?

In terms of the things I do, I'm a painter, speaker, rock climber, mentor, tattooist and writer. I offer much time and attention to these activities because they each affirm purpose within me every time I do them. I know there is purpose wrapped up in these things because of the joy they produce in me. I feel free when I paint, climb, minister and write, and if freedom is a mark of a Christian (John 8:36), it seems a trustworthy sign, continually directing me along the narrow way. I'm not on a rigid schedule in regard to how I distribute said attention.

Each morning, I wake up with a desire filling my heart, and although I may have a tentative plan for the day, the pull of what will bring the most joy usually takes precedent. There have been many times I was planning to paint but ended up climbing, or was wanting to climb but ended up writing. Those of us who are led by the Spirit are like the wind, Jesus said (John 3:8). I don't want you to get the impression that this pursuit of joy is in any way limited to these activities, either. A day's joyful living could include running, travel, meditation, gelato, talking with a friend (or stranger), reading, a beautiful meal with my wife, hiking and so on. Whatever we find ourselves doing, we should be present and careful to savor each moment because it was designed for us to partake of! This chasing after joy is not rooted in laziness or selfish living but is deemed necessary for my life based on the belief that if we are not doing those things which bring us joy (getting "filled up") and demonstrating rich, abundant life, then it is possible we have nothing to offer the world. A gospel message delivered by burned-out disciples lacking joy, peace and vibrancy of life is no gospel of the Kingdom as far as I can tell. If we have truly been set free by the

glorious good news of the unrelenting love of God toward us (toward everyone for that matter) then our lives should resemble and reflect the bliss of divine union that are claiming to have come to know!

If you think this idea of pursuing joy is a fluffy, unpractical, non-sacrificial way of living, then you have not actually tried it.! Don't forget, it was joy that led Jesus to the cross (Heb. 12:2). Existing in joy does not guarantee an easy path to trod, but does ensure that no matter the trials we face along the way, contentment (another fruit of joy) and peace will continue to reign in our hearts (Phil. 4:11). We do not currently live in a world that has been transformed by joy but that is contrarily fixated on problems, differences and fears. To live as a vessel of joy and to focus one's life in this way is to be counter-cultural and, may I venture to say, a son of God. To live a life of cultivated and sustained joy is to stand out in the world and to become a leader due to the simple fact that you are not conformed by situations but are continually transforming your surroundings to the likeness of heaven by intentionally carrying and releasing this element of the kingdom.

Living in joy is choice. Just as we choose whether or not to stay in continual communion with God, we likewise must make conscious decisions to live in and from the joy of the Lord, which indwells us. This is a supernatural lifestyle. Search your heart and life and allow the Spirit to reveal those things which bring you the most joy. Pursue and cultivate joy as if your marriage, life and spiritual wellbeing depended on it! Feeling secure in your calling as a child of God while in the earth is not reserved for the "chosen vessels" (unless you see yourself as chosen ... which you should). This assurance is available to anyone who would dare to believe that God is good enough and subtle enough to lead us by the simultaneously mystical and practical inner promptings of peace, joy, hope and love. Yield to these eternal signposts in your life! Drink

continuously of the beauty that surrounds you in all its forms, knowing that transformation comes by maintaining a soft heart and reverent gaze (2 Cor. 3:18).

See purpose in all you put your hand to and be ready to make sacrifices to pursue joy in the Holy Spirit, for increasing in joy means increasing the kingdom of our Glorious God (Rom. 14:17). {eoa}

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