

7 Joys of Taking Up Your Cross

The popular notion of “following your bliss” has gained substantial traction, primarily due to the influence of philosopher Joseph Campbell. Campbell’s philosophy, while appealing, suggests that discovering and pursuing personal happiness is the key to fulfillment in life. Many Christians have adopted a version of this, assuming that God’s will always aligns with their passions and desires.

While there is certainly value in understanding how God has wired us with unique talents and inclinations, this idea must be balanced with Christ’s command to “take up your cross” (see Matt. 16:24). There is a profound difference between following our passions and following Christ, and as believers, we are called to the latter—even when it means sacrifice.

Jesus’s countercultural message stands in stark contrast to the individualistic, self-focused ethos of our time, especially in both secular culture and the therapeutic-driven segments of modern evangelicalism.

Below are seven key reasons why taking up our cross must come before pursuing our bliss.

1. Self-focus vs. serving others. One of the major pitfalls of following our bliss is that it encourages a self-centered worldview. The phrase itself suggests that the primary goal in life is personal happiness. However, Scripture calls us to something much deeper. In Philippians 2:3-4, we are admonished, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.” The call of Christ compels us to live for others, to consider their needs before our own, and to see

our joy in serving them.

When we pursue only what makes us happy, we risk missing out on the joy that comes from serving others—a joy that often requires sacrifice and self-denial. Following Christ demands that we let go of self-focus and embrace the needs of those around us.

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2. The deceitfulness of the heart. Another reason we must be wary of the “follow your bliss” mentality is because the human heart is deeply flawed and prone to deception. Jeremiah 17:9 warns, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” Our hearts are not reliable guides when it comes to discerning what is truly good for us. Left unchecked, our desires can lead us away from God’s will and into dangerous territory.

It is tempting to trust our instincts and passions, but the cross-shaped life calls us to question our desires, weigh them against Scripture and align them with God’s will. Self-denial is not about suppressing all desires but about discerning and denying those desires that conflict with God’s purposes for our lives.

3. Our desires vs. God’s desires. Jesus’ experience in the Garden of Gethsemane provides a powerful example of the conflict between personal desire and God’s will. As He faced the imminent reality of the cross, Jesus prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Even Jesus, in His humanity, expressed a desire to avoid suffering. Yet He ultimately submitted to the will of the Father, showing us that following God’s will often requires the denial of our own.

When we follow our bliss, we risk prioritizing our desires over God’s. The path of the cross, however, calls us to

surrender our will in favor of His, trusting that His ways are higher than ours and that He knows what is best for us.

4. The danger of sensual pleasures. One of the major flaws in the “follow your bliss” mantra is that it can quickly become a justification for pursuing sensual pleasures. While not all passions are inherently sinful, unchecked pleasure-seeking can lead us away from God. Romans 8:13 reminds us that “if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”

The call to take up our cross means putting to death the sinful desires of the flesh that stand in opposition to God’s will. This doesn’t mean we are to live joyless lives, but it does mean our joy must be rooted in God, not worldly pleasures.

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5. The cross-shaped life brings true joy. Paradoxically, we often find our deepest joy in the act of self-denial. Jesus said in Matthew 16:25, “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.” True bliss, or joy, is not found in chasing after fleeting passions but in embracing the life Christ calls us to—a life of surrender, service and sacrifice.

The world teaches us that happiness comes from getting what we want. The gospel, however, teaches us that joy comes from giving ourselves away. The cross-shaped life leads to joy, but it is a joy that comes through sacrifice and surrender, not self-indulgence.

6. Jesus calls us to follow Him, not our bliss. Jesus never once said, “Follow your bliss.” His invitation has always been, “Follow me” (Matt. 4:19). Following Christ requires us

to lay aside our ambitions and desires to pursue His purposes. This often means stepping into difficult, uncomfortable or sacrificial situations. But in doing so, we are walking the path that leads to eternal life (Matt. 7:13-14).

The Christian life is not about finding ourselves; it's about losing ourselves in Christ. When we make Him the center of our lives, we discover a joy far greater than anything we could find on our own.

7. When we seek first His kingdom, everything else follows.

Jesus assures us in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." When we prioritize God's kingdom over our desires, He provides for our needs in ways we never could have anticipated. Our desires align with His, and we find He fulfills our hearts' deepest longings.

Rather than chasing after personal happiness, we are called to pursue God's kingdom. When we do, we often find that the joy and fulfillment we sought through personal ambition come as byproducts of living for Him.

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