

Text: [Matthew 16:24-26 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: June 29, 2024

Title: “Will Purpose Make Me Happy?” > On Purpose Series

Theme: Purpose is about something larger than happiness – its about the joy that comes from serving.

1

Jesus must have failed his marketing class

“All who want to come after me must say no to themselves,
take up their cross, and follow me.

All who want to save their lives to lose them.”

Jesus really knew how to offer an invitation to discipleship, didn't he?

I feel like we hear that and have one of two reactions:

Either we dismiss it entirely as too strenuous, too difficult

Or we go into a mode where we want to soften it somehow

To interpret it in a more generous, less demanding way

Because Jesus can't possibly mean we need to take up crosses, right?

Jesus can't possibly be asking us to deny ourselves *anything*, right?

But what if there's a different way of understanding this scripture?

What if I told you that what I hear Jesus saying isn't anything different than
a truth we all already know?

It may be one we don't like to admit, but I'm firmly convinced it's something
we all already know

2

So: Will purpose make me happy?

Let's think first about things that make us happy

First, happiness is a temporary state

When you're listening to a favorite song, it lasts only until the song ends

When you're looking at a beautiful sunset, it's only good until the sun sinks
below the horizon

If someone compliments your outfit, it may last a little longer – maybe until
you get home and change clothes

But still, these things have a shelf-life

Happy is what happens when something good is going on around you
In your environment, in your circumstances

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Have any of you seen the movie *Inside-Out 2*?
I loved the first one, and I love the second one too
It brought me to tears more than once
I don't want to spoil the plot, I know it's new
But its about our emotions – personified as little beings in our head

Joy, as you might expect, is always perky, always upbeat, always positive
Joy is constantly trying to manage and curate the vibe – even going so far
as to suppress the storage of any negative memories

But central to the movie is a truth that touches on what Jesus is saying:
You can't build a life just based on the easy things
Just based on the happy things
We're called to live on a deeper level

Now, I know in this context – in a church context
I can easily sound like I'm making an argument in favor of suffering
But that's not my point here

My point is to say that if we want to know purpose
We're going to have to get over the idea that we're meant to be happy all
the time

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Let's take a day in our lives
Think about a time when you've celebrated a graduation – your own or
someone else's
That's happiness, right? Celebration!
Balloons, streamers, walking across the stage
But what are you celebrating, exactly?
You're celebrating someone having *accomplished* something
And accomplishment and happiness don't always walk hand in hand

I watch friends in doctoral programs

I see them putting in late nights, early mornings, operating on 4 hours sleep
To finish readings and papers

Or, think about the young person who just graduated college
Even before they got there, they put in years of hard work, taking the tough
classes in high school

Then there was the stress of college applications and decisions and
figuring out how to pay for all of it

And then you get to the work itself – maybe even while holding down a job
or competing at a high level to keep an athletic scholarship

No one gets to the happy day of graduation without first going through a lot
of days that feel something less-than-happy

Days of struggle, pain, and stress – even days of wanting to give up

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And we can say the same thing about anything that's worth doing

Will having a child make you happy?

Yes, of course. Also, sometimes it's hard.

Will being married make you happy?

Yes, it will. Also, sometimes it's hard.

And that's true of any relationship.

Jesus, when he says, "Take up your cross and follow me,"

Isn't telling us anything that we don't already know from every other sphere
of life

Things that are worth doing are not always easy.

So, will following Jesus make you happy?

Yes, it will. Also, sometimes it's hard.

Will finding your purpose make you happy?

Yes, it will. Also, sometimes it's hard.

Just like it's a mistake to imagine there's any vocation where you'll get up in
the morning every day and be like, "I absolutely love my job."

Now, I know someone will email me later and say, "I do"

Good for you! But I don't think that's typical

You can find your purpose and still experience days and even seasons of
deep frustration
I certainly have. That's just real.
Some days feel a lot more like losing our lives than finding them

6

We might ask ourselves on hearing all of this:
so does God *want* me to experience happiness?

I certainly think God would never want us to turn away from a sunset or
change the radio when our favorite song comes on
God wants us to have those moments

But more importantly, I believe that God wants us to experience joy
Not the kind of shallow happy feeling that comes from the external

But the joy that comes from persevering
The joy that comes from overcoming
The joy that comes from accomplishing our purpose even when it's difficult
The joy of showing up and making a difference in someone else's life
Because I'm in tune with God's purpose for me and serving out of it

7

Look, if I do what will make me happy, I'll eat all the chips in the bag
I'll order the cheesecake
I'll skip the gym and stay home to watch Netflix instead

But if I want to find joy – and life – I'll deny myself
I'll eat a salad
I'll have some fruit
And I'll go out walking after dinner
Because to find life, that's what it takes

A cheeseburger is happiness, but health is joy

And that's the aim
That's all I hear Jesus saying today
That life is bigger than mere happiness

And so we shouldn't be afraid to aim higher
Even if we experience some challenges along the way

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So, to wrap up, I guess what I might tell you is this:
If you want to find happiness, then pet a dog
If you want to find something greater
Then don't be afraid to pursue your purpose

Don't be afraid to spend some time with God figuring out what your gifts are
And where God is calling you to use them

You'll know your gifts by the good things people have said they've seen in
you
And you'll know where God is calling you by the things in the world that hurt
your heart

And if you don't know how to start figuring that out,
I'd be more than happy to have a conversation with you about it
Because this is important

Obviously, Jesus did too
And he called us to take up our crosses and follow

Not for the sake of our happiness
But for the sake of our joy – and the world's joy
And I'm convinced we'll find it - when we live out of our purpose

Amen.

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