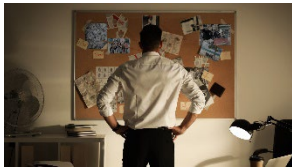


Happy Hunting

The Christian Quest for Joy

May 21, 2023

Today we're hunting for that elusive heart condition that's supposed to be part of the spiritual signature in every authentic Christian: **happiness**. Not the fleeting *emotion*, but the deep *joy* of a life *well-lived*. And to see where we stand, ponder *this*: **Are you living your best life?** And that *doesn't* mean merely grinning and giggling all the live-long day – I'm asking when you step *back* and take *stock*, are you *pleased* with the part *you're* playing in the big picture? **Are you fully fulfilled?**



Well to start, let's get *physical*; how many of you are 100% happy with your present *body*? **Would you prefer a perfect one?** You don't *really* have to answer cuz the desire *isn't* just *universal*; it's *Biblical*:



We [that means *all of us*] grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. – 2 Corinthians 5:2 NLT



Don't forget, *you* don't have a *soul*, *you are* a soul, who has a body. And *down here*, **life is just a 'dress rehearsal'**. Cuz just as *your body* outlasts a pair of pants, your *soul* outgrows your *body* as its temporary attire.



[Look how Paul puts it:] Now we know that if the *earthly* tent we live in [aka *your bodysuit*] is destroyed, we have a building from God, an *eternal* house in heaven, not built by human hands. – 2 Corinthians 5:1 NIV



Talk about living your *best* life! We're *designed* to go from *earthly* tent to *eternal* house; from *temporary* to *permanent*, from *vulnerable* to *invincible*. So no wonder we're not *fulfilled* – **we instinctually anticipate our upgrade – and that makes it hard to tolerate what we're working with right now**. Just like being a kid. And I *hated* being a kid! I couldn't stand being told I *had to wait* or *wasn't ready* for the things I wanted just cuz I was too young. So I tried to skip ahead and paid the price!

And **a lot of us, try to push the process to prove we're as adult as any parent**. But the truth is, we won't grow up without living out each important step from the start. **We gotta get our minds right and act our actual age**. And in the *spiritual* scheme of things, you better believe we're still kids. And accepting *that* identity happens the *moment* we *treat* God as our superior authority and *trust* Him as our perfect parent. Cuz we don't *DO* a thing to make that true. Being God's child isn't something we undertake, it's something we understand. **We don't attain it, we just accept it.**

He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the *world* did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His *own* did not receive Him. Yet to *all* who *did* receive Him, to those who *believed* in His name, He gave the right to become children of God. – John 1:10-12 NIV

So **have you accepted your role as His kid?** Or **are you still pushing for parent status?** Well let's see if we can slow *your* roll so you can accept *God's* role. Y'see, last week when Bruce was teaching us to appreciate *mom*, he hinted at how Disneyland hits different for *kids* than it does *parents*. And after he put up this picture, I found my motivation to keep my kid status; just ask yourself:



Would you rather go to Disneyland as a kid, or a parent? And before you answer, I want to do a little forensic investigation of each experience. Study this picture for a moment – and then consider this. This is a picture of the first time my wife and I went to Disneyland as *the parents*. And here's what I want you to notice; we're *different* families in *different* decades, but the *differences* between parent and kid are still the *same*. And when we unpack the parts that both sides *play*, it's clear **it wouldn't work any other way!**

Exhibit A: Burdens. Notice *both* children are only carrying an absurdly large soon-to-be-sticky candy baton while I've got cargo pants and a backpack full of supplies almost *entirely* centered on *serving* these two.

Exhibit B: Comfort. Notice how both my wife and I are awkwardly posed to accommodate whatever space these precious VIPs naturally need so they can feel free to be their adorable selves.

Exhibit C: Safety. It's no accident that we're flanking our children, because this is the standard procedure for the whole trip – as though we're active members of a secret service protecting these little presidents.

Exhibit D: Guidance. Notice how Cameron is subtly staring at me to take his cue for what to do; cuz they know we've put in the work to anticipate their every need, so these powerful players won't have to worry about a thing!

Exhibit E: Sacrifice. It's hard to see in the photo, but our wallets are significantly thinner since we spent all *our* savings to finance all *their* fun.

So, now let's be honest, **in the spiritual sense, which role are you ready to take on?** And based on *that*, **which role would bring you more joy?** *It's being a kid by a mile!* And not because we don't desire to provide like parents, but because we haven't grown enough to give what the role requires.



Just think what it would truly take **to spiritually bear burdens, create comfort, secure safety, give guidance and sacrifice yourself.** That's beyond our ability! And **trying to live a life beyond our ability is a recipe for disaster!** Cuz until we accept our identity as the kids who are supposed to grow with the *help* of a perfect parent, we'll pay the price for pushing the process; **feeling unfulfilled.**

Humble yourselves, therefore, under *God's* mighty hand, that *He* may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. **[And He takes care of you. Not the other way around!]** - 1 Peter 5:6-7 NIV

So you want the big secret to living your best life? It's **harmony in your identity.**

To feel fulfilled, you gotta know your role and then play that part! You're *God's kid*, not His *equal*! Cuz everything only *works* when things are where they're supposed to be. And in perfection, there's a place for everything and everything *is in* its place. And the Jews called that **'Shalom'**.

And though it's often translated 'peace', it actually means *perfection, wholeness, and completion* – **it's when everything is as it ought to be and behave**; it's operation in the original *godly* perfection.

And nothing, *including us*, is ever *fully* fulfilled until it's put in its *perfect* place. Which means, **you gotta do the true you before you live your best life**. You gotta find your *fit* and then be *put* in your place. Cuz *all* of life's *anxiety, sorrow, and frustration* comes from the *conflict of being mis-fit*. And **mis-fits are made when there's conflict between who you are and who you're meant to be**. That's why *teenagers* are the way they are! They're mis-fit! But then again, so are most of us. Because it's hard to accept the kid role when you start to see where your growth is going.



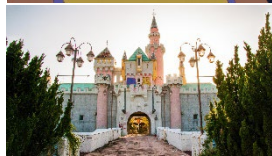
Remember the first Matrix movie? It came out when I was 17, right at the height of my own confusion and conflict – and I'll never forget how it nailed down a common frustration we can all feel about *feeling* our fit:



"What you know you can't explain, but you feel it. You've felt it your entire life, that there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad."



That mysterious misery was spot on and since Keanu got his answer, I started searching for the source of frustration in *my* fit. And I eventually found the cause of my conflict in the Bible of all places:



[God has] set eternity in the human heart; yet *no one* can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. – Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV



And how do you like that?! Once again, a heart set on something *beyond* our ability created the conflict! Oh how I hated being a kid! Cuz **that inner struggle to accept or reject our child identity splits us each in two**: our impatient flesh wants to push for parent status *now* while our God-given spirit knows its place and is willing to wait.

[And the battle between the two you's keeps raging:] What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? – James 4:1 NIV

But just think about what would happen if the flesh won without going through the growth... it'd be just like a trip to Disneyland where the kids ran the show, a hot mess before a painful death!

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. – Romans 8:5-7 NIV

So here's the moral of the story: **we gotta give in and give the Spirit complete control if we want to live our best life**. We gotta accept our role as God's kid and then we gotta play *that* part, by letting Him lead us through the steps that grow us until we're ready for what He wants to show us. And the path to being *that* person and living our *best* life comes from following Jesus as *THE* life.

Because when you know *you* as a child of *you-know-Who*, you know His Son is the picture of what *you* do! Which is why **God gave Jesus as our example to explain exactly who we are.** Jesus is the role model that reveals the full *potential* of living out our true *identity*. He's the picture of a perfect fit and the proof that any and all *unfulfilled mis-fits* are fixed by merely playing the parts God gave us *as His kids*. And as John excitedly explains, living as God's kid *is* our best life, cuz that's all we're supposed to do now to get ready for everything else later!

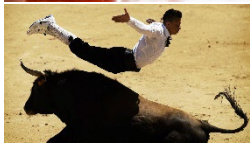
See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that *is* what we are! ... now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him – 1 John 3:1-2 NIV



The more we accept and act out the role Christ modeled, the more we'll start to see and feel our fit in Shalom. And **fulfilling our role is what makes us feel whole. And having that wholeness makes us feel happiness.** And when Jesus is praying to the Father for all His present and future followers, He makes it clear that He's teaching us all we need to overcome our angst, accept our identity, and play our part – in other words, to live happily ever after!



I am coming to You now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of My joy within them. – John 17:13 NIV



God knows His kids and how hard it is for us to overcome our impatience, so He sent His Son, His Spirit, and His Word to give us a glimpse of how it feels when we finally find our fit and get fully fulfilled. Because **a tiny taste is a great way to stay hungry without ruining our appetite.** And God's creation is full of the fun flavors to keep us kids excited for what's to come!



You ever hear people yell Olé at things like bullfights? You know what it means? *God*. Comes from *Allah*. Cuz down here, when we see something so spectacular that it seems beyond our ability, we suspect the Source and sense the shalom! And God is constantly giving us those exciting glimpses of the coming world that's worth waiting for – and each *OLÉ* is an appetizer that keeps us hungry *and* happy until we're ready and willing for the full measure of God's full joy! But until then, **living in the Ole' spirit leads us to the Holy Spirit!** So maybe we should start calling out *HOLY* moments! It'd sure be a great perspective reminder the same way we say "*Bless you*" after a sneeze! Imagine it: get a hole in one – *HOLY!*, eat an incredible meal – *HOLY!*, parallel park perfectly – *HOLY!*

Earthly pleasures were never meant to permanently satisfy, but only to suggest and awaken our desire for eternal fulfillment. And each glimpse of the godly ought to remind and encourage us that **living our best life means accepting the best is yet to come.** So c'mon kids, settle down and:

Take delight in the Lord **[by trusting everything He has planned while you play this part]**, and He *will* give you the desires of your heart. – Psalms 37:4 NIV

Because when you know Dad's running the show, **you can enjoy this trip the way we're supposed to; without worry or whining!** So what do you say we stop pushing the process and start taking the time to appreciate the treats God planned and packed for all us kids? **Now can I get a HOLY?!**