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JOY

The Art of Finding Hope, Healing, and Happiness

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Chapter Two:

Hope in a Consistent Source of Power

“When we make other people or things our only source of power, they don’t help us. They control us.”

Hold on tight! Similar to strapping yourself in before a roller coaster ride, you should also make sure to do the same before tackling life’s issues and goals. I would be lying if I said that happiness lies only with you, because it doesn’t work that way. As humans, we need a power that is greater than our own. If we could handle life alone, then we would be the only human on the planet. We would do everything by ourselves in the best mood at all times.

In reality, we are limited. We may have some control over how we choose to respond and what we expose ourselves to daily, but full control is impossible. Humans are wired that way, and that’s okay. The important step is to realize we need this inner power or we will be constantly fighting unnecessary battles. When we exhaust ourselves doing so, we take away the strength or ability to tackle the problems that we can handle.

If you want to know how to push through when times get rough, you must accept that you can’t do this on your own. There will be times

that seem hopeless. There will come a time when you see no possible way out. There will come a time when you are giving one hundred percent and it's still not enough. You will find yourself sitting there with nowhere to turn. That is when the acknowledgement or hope in something or someone stronger than you comes into play.

The 12-step program used by many addiction support groups emphasizes this important point in living a well-balanced life; the first step states that you must consider a power greater than yourself. You must accept that your willpower is not enough to beat your addiction. Why would this be the first step? Why couldn't they just list a higher power as the tenth step instead?

Simply, acknowledgement in a higher power is a constant reminder that we can't make it on our own strength. Taking on all the other steps toward fulfillment requires power outside of us. We can't get past the first step until we understand that it takes something bigger to make it through the remaining steps.

Thus, the first thing that needs to happen to gain strength is to lose some control. We need to let go of the notion that we can handle everything on our own power. We need to submit that control to a higher power that can guide us when we start to feel all is lost. Realizing that there is a greater force at work when we fall short makes all the difference.

This book is meant to be for those from all backgrounds, but I will share that my personal faith in the Lord has come to my rescue many times. I know it may sound cliché, but you are going to have to find the higher power that helps you when you can't help yourself. It can be

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God, Jesus Christ, a general knowledge of a higher power or a power greater than yourself, the universe, destiny, or your guardian angel. You can rely on whatever power you are comfortable relying on.

The only requirement is that your power source remains “on” or consistent at all times. Think of it as a light to help you see your way to joy and peace. When other lights turn off, the higher power in which you believe becomes the backup generator that permits you to continue when you feel there are no options left. It is your fuel.

The tips in this book are helpful, but I would not have accomplished so much in the past two decades of being depressed by relying on my own strength. For me, it’s just not possible. Many others will tell you the same thing about their experiences. I’m convinced that social support is important for battling mental distress and maintaining good emotional health. However, I am also convinced that outside power is needed when that social support system can’t fulfill every need.

Say you are up at 2:00 a.m. You may have friends who tell you it is okay to call anytime, but it’s often hard to do that when you already feel like a burden. What if you are going through a problem that you don’t feel comfortable telling anyone about? What if you want to talk and all of your friends are busy?

I state that this power should be constant because if we put our hope and strength into inconsistency, then we are setting ourselves up for extreme disappointment. Consequently, when we make other people or things our only source of power, they don’t help us; they control us. It’s like giving someone the keys to your car. They decide where you

go, when you leave, and how long it's going to take to arrive. As they take our happiness and do whatever they want with it, we actually lose power. If they leave, our happiness goes with them.

It's so easy to do, but we have to be careful about whether that source is going to be there for us 24/7/365. That means that this higher power cannot be our parents, spouse/significant other, children, friends, etc. That means that it is not found in cosmetics, clothes, cars, money, technology, food, or alcohol. All of these sources are temporary. There's no long-lasting feeling of fulfillment. Our parents aren't there all the time, and our significant other can't be emotionally supportive every day. You will also rack up a ton of debt chasing after things that make you feel good now in exchange for misery later.

Those who experience joy know not to put their hope into things that come and go. They know that if they do, that hope will be tossed about in every direction. That is because while you think these things help, they actually weigh you down as you try to hold on to them. Similar to the roller coaster example, you can't ask your friend two cars behind you to hold your hand when riding along, but you will grip the handle bars because they are something you can count on to always be there. You will hang on even when it's just you and those handlebars, waiting for the ride to slow down.

You get through because you aren't looking every which way to calm your nerves. You simply stay strapped in and know that no matter what you can always grab the handlebar in front of you. You can stop using your energy to find anyone and anything to assist you. You can

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focus on using that thing front of you that constantly keeps you locked in. That's what a constant belief source does: it keeps you locked in to hope even when there appears to be none in sight.

You see, we are so quick to throw in the towel when the pain hits or when the uncertainty creeps in, because we look to ourselves to fix the situation. This causes us to feel powerless and leads to feelings of helplessness or hopelessness (which are some symptoms of depression). You get this feeling of emptiness that you can't seem to fill. Our first response is, "I can't do this anymore," or "I don't see a way out." However, sometimes, it's not up to us to fix the situation or find a way out at that exact moment. Quite possibly, it may take more than just the little strength that we have to keep fighting.

We are humans, not the energizer bunny.

When moments of despair creep up on us, we need to trust that higher power to complete what we can't do. We need to let God handle our problems. We need to let destiny or the universe work things out. Therefore, we need to see those opportunities not as a reason to quit, but as a change to recharge so we can keep fighting.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF EXISTING?

“Asking yourself if this is all there is to your life is the equivalent of asking a realtor if the hallway you are standing in is all there is to see to the house.”



A lack of hope often leads us to believe there's no point to life. We ask questions like, "Why do I even exist?" This is why I believe there's a need for a source outside of our own power—some of the deepest, most pressing questions we pose can't be answered on our own limited knowledge of how life works. Self-reflection is good, but we only hold a piece of the puzzle.

Don't confuse right now with why you are on this earth entirely. Your reason for existing isn't a straightforward answer. It's usually a collection of experiences, people, and events that determine why you are needed. Some of those experiences you haven't even discovered yet. Some of those people you haven't met yet. Some events aren't prepared for you at this time, but that doesn't mean they aren't scheduled to occur.

Let me put it this way: it's like walking into a house and deciding not to move in based on what you see from the front door. Suddenly, you make the decision you shouldn't be there based on what you see from where you are standing rather than taking a tour of the house.

You can't say, "Oh, this house isn't for me. Nice hallway though."

Similarly, you can't say, "Oh, this life isn't cut out for me."

Deep down, you know that the miracle of you being here was no coincidence. So, asking yourself if this is all there is to your life is the equivalent of asking a realtor if the hallway is all there is to see in a house. You usually make the decision to walk around before forming an opinion. You make a decision to buy the home based on many factors.

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You are here for a reason, but you have to go through experiences or take a tour of your life to know that. I know some of you are thinking that you've been on a tour of your life and find there are many factors leading to nowhere. That's not true. You are touring each day. You are learning and experiencing things with every moment. If you've ever purchased a home, you know that you are still discovering things about your house years after you buy it. You are aware of the ability to transform or remodel. You also understand how the neighborhood or the environment can change at any moment.

Life works in the same way.

So, why are you basing your existence on where you are standing right now?

I would have highly disagreed with you at the age of 25 if you told me there was more to life. Then I moved out-of-state, received a doctorate, joined a sorority, and met my best friend. All of this happened when I was certain that everything I would experience in life had already occurred. I was obviously wrong.

Therefore, your existence isn't based off pure emotion. It isn't based off what you feel or believe at the time. There are people who need you now. There are people who are going to need you in the future. You exist for many reasons, and those reasons will be revealed to you at the appropriate time. However, if you aren't here, then you will never know those reasons.

Trust me, they are waiting to be revealed.

WHAT'S MY PURPOSE?

**“Your being uncertain at the moment doesn't mean
your purpose is uncertain.”**

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As we seek our purposes in life, a loss of hope can often lead to major frustration. We often ask why we exist, but we also ask what we should do while we are here. I've learned that finding your purpose isn't necessarily the frustrating part; it's the waiting. It's really the time between picking up clues to your purpose and actually seeing those ideas become a reality. The in-between time is when we start to second-guess ourselves. It's when we start to doubt our ability. It's when we refuse to believe the advice of others when they tell us that things will get better. It's when we question our talents or struggle with our faith.

All of that is normal.

Therefore, we don't struggle with our sense of purpose. We struggle with the unknown. Uncertainty scares us. It's the reason why people who fear the future develop anxiety. It's the reason why those who dwell on the past become depressed. You don't know the future. You don't know how your past will affect that future. You also don't know if what's ahead will be better than the present moment. As long as you can't see it, it remains unknown. However, your being uncertain at the moment doesn't mean your purpose is uncertain. Your purpose is rather secure.

Just like questioning the point of life, your purpose is also not so straightforward. It unfolds over a period of years or decades. In fact,

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you may have multiple purposes depending on when you decide to question it. That is because when you question your purpose you are really asking:

What should I do during this time?

What's my significance to those I meet?

What's my contribution to the world?

That's really not a one-time deal, and your purpose doesn't just involve you at any given moment. Think of the house example we used for exploring our existence. Imagine that the purpose of that house is for a family to create memories every Christmas. Someone in that family could take those experiences to establish a career that could help someone else. It may even cause the family to adopt a child who otherwise would not have a home.

Yet the architect doesn't know that he's part of that purpose when he's designing the house. The contractor doesn't know that when he's pouring concrete to construct the basement. The interior designer doesn't know when picking out the color of the dining room walls. The realtor may have some idea when handing over the keys, but really he or she wouldn't know until that family settled in.

A collection of rather small events that we would deem unimportant creates a domino effect. Thus, your purpose is performed in simple acts that often go unnoticed but have the potential to change the lives of those around you. It's a chain of events that add up to more than we can imagine. The full extent of your impact is not just the effects of

what you see or the things within your reach. Your purpose is not solely based on your job title, relationship status, bank account, material possessions, or random achievements. Your purpose is summed up in this mystery: You never know whom you are influencing, what kind of impression you make, and how you can change a life without any intention of doing so.

That's why we become frustrated when we try to narrow down our purpose to one event or underestimate the roles we play. By narrowing down, I mean we base our purpose on one long-lasting, specific event, talent, or personality trait. We want a purpose that makes us popular or famous. We want a purpose that will show up in our bank account or appear while we are in front of a sold-out crowd. While that is the purpose for some, it is not the purpose for all.

I hear so many people say they don't make a difference because they are just a mother or just a small business owner trying to pay the bills. They think it doesn't matter that they are just cashiers. However, within those roles is the powerful ability to change lives. For instance, being a parent requires someone to raise a child to be a respectable, loving human being. Being a cashier allows you to affect every person who comes in to buy groceries.

About four years ago, I had a conversation with a shuttle driver. His job was to take customers home while their car was being serviced at the dealership and then pick them up when their car was ready. However, he wasn't just a driver to me. He touched my life. He told me a powerful story about his wife recovering from cancer by choosing to eat a

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raw diet. That story gave me hope. It made me question the foods I consumed. Gradually, I started switching to organic, all-natural products. Without even knowing it, he persuaded me to live a healthier lifestyle.

You might also recall the news story of a bus driver in my hometown of Buffalo, New York, who stopped a woman from committing suicide. She was standing on a bridge overlooking the expressway that just happened to be along his route that day. He was able to stop the bus and talk the woman off the ledge. He may have gone to work that day with the intention of getting people from point A to point B. However, on that day, his purpose was to stop someone from ending her life.

Now that's what you call a pretty big purpose.

I don't believe people are placed on this planet with no purpose whatsoever. I think people are just so busy trying to find their purpose that they don't see the little things they do that make a huge impact. Much like finding joy, we don't sit around and wait for our purpose to happen. We live it. We stop waiting for people to tell us our purpose in life. We stop trying to decide what encounters will have an impact. We simply live out our story with each day that passes. Every day, we are changing lives without even knowing it. Therefore, we don't need the recognition or the confirmation to know we have a specific purpose. All we really need is the assurance that we are living it out with each breath.