

I am not in the Pursuit of Happiness, Part 1

By Katy Gower

I am not in the pursuit of happiness. I cannot recall the exact day, time, and year that I came to this absolute truth. But it came and brought with it freedom for my life.

I could see clearly how fickle and temporary happiness truly was; it came and went, never permanent. Happiness is not a permanent state of being. No one is happy all of the time. Everyone experiences happy times, sad times, painful times, angry times, funny times, embarrassing times, and the list could go on.

I thought to myself, why would I pursue something so temporary? What a wasted pursuit! What a waste of my life!

Another thought, what in my life would be lasting and permanent if I lived in the pursuit of happiness? In every marriage, unhappy and difficult seasons come. In every job, unhappy and difficult situations arise. In every church, unhappy people bring quarrelsome situations. In every neighborhood, that one unhappy, grumpy neighbor moves in and disrupts the entire block.

If the true pursuit of my life was happiness then every few years I would be divorcing and remarrying someone new, changing jobs, church hopping, and moving from one place to another. I know that sounds extreme but I honestly have seen this happening. I know people that are in their fifth or sixth marriage and every few years are looking for a new job because they are discontent and unhappy.

The everchanging life, not transitioning to bigger, better things but continually exchanging the same for a different same. What do I mean? I will explain.

Note, I am not saying an everchanging life is bad. I am posing two different types of everchanging lives. Also, I am sharing based on personal experiences, studies, and observations.

The everchanging life exchanging the same for a different same. Consider these ideas: "You deserve to be happy." "You have a right to be happy." "No one should expect you to remain in a job where you are unhappy." "No one should suggest you remain in an unhappy marriage." "When things get tough, get out of there." "As long as you are happy, that is all that matters." "Don't you want him (or her) to be happy." "Don't you want to be happy?" "You only live once." "Don't worry, be happy."

This type of thinking can lead to a vicious cycle of repetition. Because happiness is temporary a person in hot pursuit of it must be changing their circumstances constantly to keep it. For example, a person marries the "love of their life", after the honeymoon phase there arises a bump in the road. The sting of unhappiness is felt. As time passes another difficulty arises and another sting of unhappiness is felt. This is not what they signed up for and those infamous words are spoken aloud, "I am not happy."

Separation leads to divorce and in many cases the unhappy person has found a new "love of their life" who makes them happy again before the final divorce papers have even been signed.

Marriage #2, the honeymoon phase may last a little longer than the first and a baby is added to the picture. What picture? The picture-perfect family. Pure bliss is felt, they have the "love of their life" and a beautiful baby. As time passes, some differences and disagreements arise in parenting styles

and those habits they used to think were cute have now become unbearable. They start to feel discontentment. They begin doubting that they can deal with certain issues and wondering why should they have to? They deserve to be happy. Those infamous words are spoken aloud again, "I am not happy."

Separation and then divorce #2, maybe this time they wait before they date. Their attorney advises it is best. They need to get through the legal battle for property and custody. They put some secretive feelers out there because the moment the divorce is final they will find that new "love of their life" that will bring them happiness and bliss again.

But I promise it will not last because happiness is temporary, it comes and goes, it is never permanent. They will continue in this vicious cycle exchanging the same for a different same.

Why is it a different same? Because the pursuit is the same. The pursuit hasn't changed making it impossible for anything else to change. When you are pursuing something temporary; nothing will be lasting.

"He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who pursues worthless things lacks sense." Proverbs 12:11 (NASB)

I am not in the Pursuit of Happiness, Part 2

Our first breath was not a happy one; we were scared, cold, and crying. Our first breath came as we transitioned from the womb to the world, the same but new.

The everchanging life transitioning into bigger, better things is not exchanging anything for anything. The purpose and pursuit of this life is found in the Word of God. This person is enduring, growing, and transforming through the unhappy and difficult times, not running from them. Romans 5:3-5b says "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us **develop** endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character **strengthens** our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment." (NLT)

When I transitioned from adolescent into adulthood, I was the same person becoming someone new, the adult version of me. When I entered marriage, I was the same person transitioning into a new one flesh relationship with my husband. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have **become** new." (NKJV) In Galatians 6:15b, Paul writes, "What counts is whether we have been **transformed** into a new creation." (NLT) (Emphasis added.)

Words like endure, become, transform, and strengthen are important because they can bring about real change in a person's life. Therefore, pursuing something temporary cannot be an option. I must pursue those things which bring about lasting, positive, and permanent life change. And I found those things in the Word of God.

"But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness." 1 Timothy 6:11 (NKJV)

I am in the pursuit of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness.

“He who pursues righteousness and loyalty finds life, righteousness and honor.” Proverbs 21:21 (NASB)

I am in the pursuit of loyalty.

“for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and building up of one another.” Romans 14:17-19 (NASB)

I am in the pursuit of joy in the Holy Spirit.

I am in the pursuit of things which make for peace and building up of one another.

“Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.” Hebrews 12:14 (NASB) “Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.” Psalm 34:14 (NASB)

I am in the pursuit of peace and sanctification.

“I will pursue Your commands, for You expand my understanding.” Psalm 119:32 (NLT)

I am in the pursuit of God’s commands.

Consider how different the marriage example previously shared could have been if the pursuits found in the Word of God were embraced: A person marries the love of their life, after the honeymoon phase has passed there arises bumps in the road. The stings of unhappiness are felt.

The unhappy person understood that troubles would come because the Bible warned of such. Instead of speaking those infamous words “I am not happy” out loud, they took those words in private to God. They pursued God for help and direction. The possibility of separation for a season could have indeed still come. But the person pursued things which make for peace with and the building up of their spouse. They pursued God’s commands to forgive and to seek reconciliation. They pursued gentleness, patience, and kindness. They grew and they endured, and God was given time to do His work. They made it over those bumps in the road and the season of separation; on the other side, they found unspeakable joy. Years later, they look back and praise God because it was worth it. Every tear and hurt, every minute of suffering and sacrifice was worth it. Reconciled and restored, the marriage was stronger, the couple closer than before, the one flesh relationship ready to face future challenges together with God in the center.

I know many are thinking this example is a fantasy or a dream; not applicable or possible in their specific situation with their specific circumstances. I understand this thinking. But big picture, whether the life challenge be financial, relational, or medical, the answer is the same across the board: pursue God through Jesus Christ. All things are manageable and possible with Him; and He is still in the miracle business of transforming lives, healing the sick, comforting the brokenhearted, answering our prayers, and so much more.

“Three things will last forever – faith, hope, and love – and the greatest of these is love.” I Corinthians 13:13 (NLT)

I am in the pursuit of faith, hope, and love.

“To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, the one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lip from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” 1 Peter 3:8-12

May we all fiercely pursue bigger, better, life-changing things with God through Jesus allowing Him to transition us and transform us constantly into newness of life.

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