

Please Try This at Home

Monthly Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life

Spelunking the Ordinary

I'm in a funny place right now. The questions I'm asking life are changing again. For quite a few years, I was asking exploratory questions about who I am, what I want to do, who I want to be with, how I want to be in the world. When I found some answers for that season of life, my questions turned into active preparation questions about how I could do and be what I wanted. I remember that being an odd season. I was excited to narrow my options down to some things I could really sink my teeth into. But there was also loss. I had to grieve any number of things that I would not be doing, that would not be part of my story.

Now I find myself in another odd transition. I've shifted from the intensity of preparation to the smoother pace of implementation and maintenance of the goals that have mattered most to me. I'm finally doing it! I am so grateful to be doing work that I love and engaging in loving relationships that I've worked so hard for. But there's a part of me that misses the intensity of preparing for something, as opposed to just doing it. I miss the unique kind of meaning and adventure that comes from focused striving for a goal.

Looking around, I see other people dealing with this kind of feeling by making "bucket lists" of things they want to do before they kick the bucket, or at least before their next life transition: run a marathon, publish a book, see the Taj Mahal, get the kitchen remodeled, etc. But since I've only recently stopped preparing for major life goals, I'm still a bit tired of all the activity those kinds of goals require. I'm craving meaning, really, not more busyness or distraction. I want a different kind of adventure, of digging deeper not adding more.

The Extraordinary Underneath

Ever seen Planet Earth or Discovery Channel specials on deserts or caves? Isn't it amazing how during the day the desert can look absolutely barren and lifeless, but at night all kinds of little adaptive creatures emerge, magically finding water and shelter in places we'd never dream of looking? Or how about the caves? They're usually not all that amazing on the surface. Even the biggest ones get dark so quickly that you'd never know how deep they go or what extravagant formations and creatures they are hiding unless you get a bunch of equipment (and permits!) and take some serious time exploring their depths.

I am coming to believe that believe normal, ordinary life is a lot like caves and deserts. And I'd wager that people who face life threatening circumstances or a major loss would largely agree with me. You've probably seen these kinds of people in movies like *The Doctor* with William Hurt, *Regarding Henry* with Harrison Ford, or *Last Holiday* with Queen Latifah. Like many of us, these folks who face major loss start out as "tourists" of life, taking a superficial walk through life's scenery, assuming they've "been there done that," and quickly moving on to the next task, the next diversion. When they run out of "travel money or energy, they grow board and dissatisfied with where they've gotten stuck.

Then, along comes the threat that everything they've taken for granted could all go away. All the sudden they are asking deeper, different kinds of questions: With limited time or energy, what

people and activities are really the most important to me? How do I want to change the way I treat those I love with the time I have left? What truths or apologies have I not passed on to those I love? What kind of legacy do I want to leave at my work? What beautiful things about every day will I miss? What kind of spiritual realities might I be encountering soon and how do I square up with those? These kinds of perspective questions turn casual sightseers into spelunkers who go deeper to find the richness right under their feet in circumstances they had assumed to be boring or short on meaning before.

Mining Meaning from the Here and Now

Because I am not up for adding a bunch of new activities or experiences right now, I'm wondering if I might find that sense of deep meaning that I crave by asking depth questions about my present circumstances. It seems like many people dodge these kinds of questions until they face a crisis or major transition like a bum knee, a cruddy economy, a demanding 2 year old, a 50th birthday, relocation to assisted living, a terminal disease, etc. But I'm wondering if I could mine for meaning right where I'm at by asking these questions now, before I face something huge.

If, like me, you feel like there should be a deeper meaning to your life, or you're wondering about interesting possibilities in your current circumstances that you haven't explored, I wonder if you'd join me in choosing a life area that feels stagnant and trying out some of the questions below on that area. And by "trying out," I do mean *trying* out. In my experience, some of the deepest questions and sources of meaning seem trite on paper, but are powerful when lived!

Work

- If my current job were my dream job, how would I approach it differently?
- Is there one task in my current job that I could "own" and be personally proud of, even if no one else notices?
- Are there any coworker tasks I could help out with in ways that might establish more grateful and meaningful connections with people at work?
- Are there parts of my work that connect to my deepest values or the ways I want the world to be? Could I shift to engaging in more of these tasks?
- What's one thing I could do to take my "tried and true" skills to the next level?

Activities

- If I found out I had 4 months to live, which activities would I drop right away? If they are not all that meaningful to me, what is keeping me from dropping them now?
- What activities have I wanted to do, but haven't because I've been too afraid or too busy? Is there a way I could move closer to beginning them, even if I can't start right now?

Relationships

- If I found out I was going to die next Saturday, who would I want to call and what would I want to tell them? What part of that could I say now?
- What kinds of interactions have blocked connection in my significant relationships for some time now? What would happen if I directly pointed out that pattern to those I love and asked them to work on it with me?

- What kinds of things do I most love doing with those I love? How could I adjust my life to include more of these times together?

Spirituality

- What questions about the meaning of life, God, or the world do I keep putting off because they feel too painful or overwhelming? What would it look like to intentionally dive into one of these questions?
- What spiritual practice or activity have I been doing so long and so “religiously” that it no longer feels genuine or worthwhile? What is the purpose of that activity? What different or creative ways have others found of achieving that same purpose that I’d like to try?
- Who in my life can I have meaningful interactions with about my spirituality? Where might I find others who could share this with me? How might I intentionally pursue deeper spiritual discussions and companionship with others?
- What “clutter” activities in my life can I clear away to have time to explore spiritual questions and connections?

If you or someone you know would like some help finding meaning in current circumstances, feel free to *call me at 303-931-4284 for a free 20-minute consultation or email info@jenniferdiebel.com.*

Thanks for reading!

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