

The Purpose We Find When We Stop Chasing Happiness

By Bryce Thomason · August 11, 2024 · 3 min read



A few weeks ago, I received a text message from my friend Jamaal that stopped me in my tracks. I was in the middle of a stressful day, the kind where everything feels just slightly out of rhythm, and he, in the way that only an old friend can, offered a reflection I didn't know I needed.

"There's a peace that wasn't there before," he wrote. "An ease that no longer comes the hard way. You seem more purpose-driven. Happier."

His words landed with a clarity that surprised me. Jamaal has known me through many seasons of my life, long before I stepped fully into the work I do now. He was naming something I had been feeling but hadn't yet articulated: I had stopped chasing happiness.

And somewhere in that letting go, I had found purpose.

Not through achievement.

Not through striving.

Not through the endless search for the next win.

But through connection.

Through service.

Through being part of something larger than myself.

There was a time, not all that long ago, when I believed that happiness was something to pursue, something you acquire through effort, goals, and grit. Many of us learn that early: work hard, perform well, aim high, and fulfillment will follow. But what I've discovered, and what Jamaal so lovingly reflected back to me, is that happiness is a byproduct rather than a destination. It's not something we can succeed our way into.

Purpose, however, is different.

Purpose grounds you.

Purpose steadies you.

Purpose opens you.

When I began serving my community in ways that aligned with my values, something shifted. I listened more and judged less. I became more aware

of the different paths people walk and the privileges and obstacles that shape them. I learned that real strength isn't control. It's resilience. And vulnerability isn't a liability. It's a doorway to belonging.

Somewhere along that path, a simple truth revealed itself:

The joy I had spent years trying to manufacture arrived when I stopped looking for it.

It showed up through presence.

It showed up through service.

It showed up through the quiet transformation that unfolds when we give ourselves to something meaningful.

Purpose has a way of settling us. It organizes what feels chaotic and gives shape to moments that might otherwise pull us apart. It connects us, deeply, to the people around us.

If you're exhausted by the pursuit of happiness, or if fulfillment feels just out of reach no matter how hard you try, consider this question that reshaped my own life:

What if the deepest form of happiness doesn't come from seeking, but from serving?

What if fulfillment is less about individual pursuit and more about shared purpose?

When we shift our focus from self to service, from achievement to alignment, something opens within us. We find clarity where there was confusion, resilience where there was pressure, and community where there was isolation.

Purpose doesn't require us to be extraordinary. It invites us to be available to ourselves, to each other, and to whatever is calling us forward.

And in that availability, a quiet, steady joy begins to take root. Not the fleeting kind that comes from accomplishment, but the lasting kind that grows from connection, contribution, and living from a deeper center of meaning.