

A JOY STRONGER THAN CIRCUMSTANCES

VIDEO ONE

“What sparks joy?” A question made popular by Netflix tidying expert Marie Kondo.

We can all recall moments when only the word ‘joy’ seems to get close. Those moments of elation that cause us to want to jump up and down, to celebrate. Blissful moments. From laughing with friends to long walks along the beach. The thrill of a first romance or the adrenaline you experience during a gig.

Perhaps we experience deepest joy when something good happens to those we care about. We feel joy at a friend’s wedding, or as a young relative’s face lights up on Christmas morning having received “just what they’d been hoping for.”

In our fast-paced society, we are increasingly aware that we need to make space for what brings us joy. Research has shown that creating margin for these activities doesn’t just benefit our own personal health, but society at large too. Employees reporting higher levels of joy in the workplace are also more productive, creative and precise in their decision-making. Joy is good for our wellbeing.

But, though joy is essential, we’re faced with the reality that much of our experience of joy is fleeting. As much as we want it to, joy never seems to last.

This is because, in the way we’ve considered it so far, joy is always at the whim of our circumstances. Things or people or situations bring us joy. So, no matter how much we might try to cultivate joy, if we’re depending on our external circumstances, we are at the mercy of the world around us.

This makes our basis of joy extremely fragile. After all, an unexpected diagnosis, an injury on the sports field or an unexpected financial crisis can change life in a moment. Less dramatic changes can rob us of joy too. Friends cancel plans and the sunsets of summer soon fade into the drawn-out depth of winter.

In the face of this, a popular recent approach has been to try and ‘manifest’ joy – to turn to positive thinking.

There are real benefits to reframing our outlook on difficult situations, but a “positive vibes only” outlook ultimately calls us to suppress our emotions. So, whilst it’s superficially attractive to us, a super-optimistic outlook is actually damaging. Toxic even. It requires us to deny our authentic emotions, feelings which are important in telling us what we really need.

Ultimately, we need a kind of deeper joy.

We need a joy that raises our eyes to see beauty and good even on the days that are dull or dim. We need a joy that allows us to both weep at the funeral of a loved one and raise a glass in their honour. And we need a joy that doesn’t fade when life gets tough.

Quick bursts of spontaneous pleasure aren’t enough. Nor is a cheery, mind-over-matter outlook. Neither of these forms of so-called joy can match what our hearts ache for.

So, consider this. What if our efforts to find joy point to something bigger?

What if our momentary experiences of joy reveal a longing for a deeper reality, of where true and lasting joy can be found?