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### Generosity; the eighth pillar of joy

In the year 1863 in the midst of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln declared a national holiday be set aside as an opportunity to pause from the horrors of war in order to give thanks for the bounty of the land and the gifts we receive from it. And while this holiday provides a beautiful opportunity to offer gratitude for some, it is simultaneously a reminder to many of what they do not have; enough love, food, shelter or security. In fact, for many Native American peoples, Thanksgiving Day is a painful reminder of all that was lost to them with the arrival of the Pilgrims of the European settlers.

These are divergent realities and yet, emotional maturity allows for holding simultaneous realities at once. Cultivating a more joyous life is like crafting the patches of a beautiful quilt, we take the fabric of different moments from our lives, our history, and weave them together with the **perspective** time offers, and the **humility, acceptance, and humor** that love and loss provide.

We lay those squares over a warm foundation of **forgiveness, gratitude and compassion** and with time, stitch them all together with **generosity**; knowing full well that all of this life experience isn't something meant for us to keep, it is meant for us to lovingly hand on to the next generation.

Over the past two months we have been exploring the "Book of Joy," and the wisdom found therein. The eight pillars of joy; **perspective, humility, acceptance, humor, forgiveness, gratitude, compassion and generosity** have provided a helpful anchor to weather the tumult.

What I have noticed most these last eight weeks, is that life and the living of it is endlessly multifaceted. People, grief, hope, and recovery are also multi-faceted, no two experiences look the same. The key to living a more joy filled life seems to rest in this truth, as well as in flexibility to move among the dimensionality with greater ease.

Something happened in my family this week that has not happened for a long time. We took three days off together. On Wednesday we went into the city to look at the window displays all dressed up for the holidays. On the way home we visited friends in the East Bay, and had a last-minute dinner with Ellie's God moms. It seemed as if there was enough time for all these things, we were not rushing or stressed out, we just moved from one thing to the next as a loving unit.

On Thanksgiving morning, my little trio went to church together. In the late morning we drove again down the ruins of HYW 12 to my parents, and met a cousin with whom my mom has reconnected through her research on [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com). It has been thirty years since any of us have seen Tommy Henson, but my mom being a generous spirit invited cousin Tommy to come for Thanksgiving and to stay the week. It could have been a disaster, but it was not. Tom is a retired biology teacher who lives in Southern California, he did a tour of duty in Vietnam and another with the Peace Core in Soweto. Tom was nothing but lovely, and fit right in with the family comings and goings.

By Thanksgiving afternoon another half dozen of our favorite folks had arrived, and after a luxurious visit and delicious meal, we all sat down together and watched the movie E.T. There was among us all a feeling of shared contentment.

Perhaps it is because Katie and I have a small child, or because we both work professionally. Perhaps it is because we feel the weight of the world and a constant sense of urgency to do something about it, or maybe we have just forgotten how to relax, but it has been a long time since I can remember feeling content.

I attribute my newfound and hopefully somewhat lasting disposition to two things. During the time we were evacuated from Aqua Caliente, and a little while afterwards, we stayed with my parents. We connected with friends who called or wrote to check in- to make sure we were all ok. We drew near to the people who live in our hearts, we took time to connect and from that place we reached out, to others in our town and to complete strangers. That is part one.

Part two is that because no one knew how long the fires would last or what recovery would look like, nearly everything that we had planned for October and early November got cancelled. The only goal of these past two months has been to be present to each unfolding moment.

Of course, that is the heart the Dali Lama's message, the more present we are to each moment, the more contentment and joy we will feel. It is the constant worry about what has been, and what will yet be that keeps us emotionally and spiritually strung out.

Being available to love and grounded in the present that allows us to feel joy and greet others with a generous attitude; not judging, not asking them to conform, but allowing them to be where they are and appreciating them fully.

So much of what we do in this lifetime is based on projection; what we feel people project onto us and what we ourselves project onto others. We know that this does not breed generosity, so we have to practice catching ourselves when we are doing it.

When we are triggered by someone else's behavior, rather than blaming that person, we must ask ourselves why we are triggered. When someone says something about us that is unfair or untrue, generosity invites us to wonder what is going on for that person. When in doubt, turn to wonder.

Today marks the end of another year in the church calendar. Next week begins the journey through Advent and into Christmas. It may feel like not much has or ever will change; each day continues to bring unwelcomed reports of violence, on Mosques, synagogues, and churches, in city streets and suburban schools.

These are indeed unsettling times, simultaneously what is **also** true is that what we need- is already here. The more we can tap into a sense of deep contentment, the more able we are to be generous. The more contentment we experience, the less compelled we are to conquer, to kill, or on a lesser level to be perpetually distracted.

My wife and daughter and I capped off our three-day staycation with a trip to the French Circus at Cornerstone and dinner on the square.

Before returning home, we took a stroll through the lights in the park and saw for the first time the very tender little hearts lining the walkway. Sentiments of love and care send from school children around the Bay Area.

That moment, was the first gift of the season for me, what the holidays are really all about. The time and the care that the children and teachers had put in and the effort to wrap the trees, laminate and hang the hearts- it was an act of generosity, freely given and expecting nothing in return.

I am not naive enough to believe that the holidays will go off without a hitch this year, or that my brush with contentment has adjusted my outlook for good. All I know is that I sure would like to live in that place a little more often than I normally do. I wish that for you as well.

Amen