

347 - How to Know What Brings You Joy

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't! Today is episode 347 - How to Know What Brings You Joy.

This episode releases on Monday, January 1st. Oh man, when the first day of the year falls on a Monday. That's a vibe, isn't it? You are all well-practiced in optimization and starting over with new goals and getting things done. If you've been here for even a little while, you also have relaxed around those words, recognizing that optimization and productivity are not our primary goals. We want to live our lives well, not just get the most done in the quickest amount of time. We are focusing on being wholehearted people who love well, who seek kindness, who name what matters to us, and who *then* seek after getting stuff done with all of that in mind. Over the years of this podcast, we've simply been tweaking the order of how we live, starting with who we are today, not who we wish to be in the future.

That's why on this first day of the year, I don't want to talk about goals and habits and starting a new year. All three of those things are actually quite valuable and a normal part of our lives, and we'll even talk about some of them over the next few weeks. Today, however, I want to start somewhere else. I want us to start with what brings you joy. Because joy matters, right? Living a good life isn't about reaching peak optimization or *doing* a bunch of things, even valuable things you love. I think here in this space, we want to be people who are alive as ourselves wherever we are, no matter what is happening around us. Our circumstances and to-do lists don't run the show. There is no show. This isn't a performative life to plan and then robotically manage. There is only this one beautifully messy human life in a beautifully messy human world, and we want to live it well, in service to others, with great compassion towards ourselves and our people, with meaning and purpose, and with joy. This is one of those moments where I absolutely sound like Pollyanna with a clipboard, but it's still true.

So with that posture in mind, let's start the new year considering what brings us joy and inviting as much of that into our lives as we can.

First, let's talk about why this is even an issue. When I say "so many," I legit mean *so many* of you struggle to know what you like, what makes you feel like yourself, what brings you joy. I see a handful of reasons why this might be true. First, you're just really busy. You might have so much filling the hours of your day that is in the category of work and responsibility that you simply don't have time to figure out what you really like and love. Second, you are so focused on other people that you rarely give any priority to yourself. This is often very true of moms, especially in those early years of parenting when it's all hands on deck all the time to keep your tiny humans alive, but you're also not doing anything terribly creative or intellectually challenging. You're just taking kids to park after park, grabbing pouches and tissues, trying to get kids to sleep at relatively regular intervals, all while tending to a home and making food for everybody and even perhaps slowly feeling like you're going insane. Honestly, without some effort and planning, it can be hard to know what brings you joy during that season of life. The

third observation I've made about this is that a lot of us go through a life transition or two where our circumstances change, maybe even who we are changes, and we don't accommodate those changes in terms of what we like. We just assume that what worked for us a few years ago, a few transitions ago, is the same now, and when it's not, we feel a little unmoored. I'm sure there are other reasons aside from those three, but those are the three I find to be the most common in folks I talk to about this. We're too busy, we're taking care of other people, and/or we've gone through so much life we don't even know what we like anymore.

So what's next? How can we know what brings us joy? I have seven loose steps to walk you down the path.

Step one: use the right word for right now. When you think about what brings you joy, you might want to drill down a bit on what you really are looking for. You know how we've talked before about the seven kinds of rest? It's challenging to just say "I need to rest" when there are multiple versions of that, and focusing on the version you really need right now is going to lead to a more fulfilling pursuit of rest. I think the same is true when we're talking about what brings us joy. For you right now, what word is actually the thing you're missing, the thing you need? Is it joy? That deep-seated satisfaction with the moment you're in? Is it happiness? That lighter feeling of genuinely being so happy and buoyant right now? Is it fun? Are you missing fun? Are you missing delight and laughter and silliness and activity? Is your word contentment? Are you hoping for a more rooted energy and a sense of ease and contentment no matter your circumstances? Is it wholeness? Are you feeling a little fragmented as a person, and you would really like to be intentional about feeling like yourself? To feel whole?

Use the right word. And use the right word for right now. Based on where you are right now, in this day, in this week, in this anticipated next short season, what word is at the forefront? Which one feels the most important to you right now? They all matter, but if you try and intentionally invite all of those words into your life all at the same time, nothing will likely happen. Too much at once, even of good things, will fall to the wayside of your regular life obligations. Remember, Lazy Geniuses start small. So what word matters most to you right now where you are? If you had to choose one for yourself in the very near future, which one is it? That's your first step.

Step two is to name your season, and then name your stretch. Naming your season is about being realistic about what is going on in this season of life. Are you stretched thin because of a work project, a parenting challenge, or a leaky roof that won't seem to stay fixed? Are you in a season of transition where you're still trying to figure out what it means to live day in and day out with this new job or new kid or new city or new rhythm? Are you anticipating a new season that's coming, and you're overwhelmed by the anticipatory stress of all of that? Are you simply in a season of it being January and life is about to pick back up again, and you'd like to start the year with a little more intention? Whatever it is, name your season.

Then name your stretch. When I say stretch, I simply mean a stretch of time in front of you where you'd like to prioritize this thing you've named. How long do you want to focus on fun? It doesn't mean once the month or whatever is over that fun is, too. It's more about your intention. If you're choosing the right word for right now, how long is your right now? How long do you want to be thoughtful about this word before moving on? Name your season, then name your stretch.

Step three is a question. When was the last time you felt that way? If you are wanting to feel like yourself more over these next couple of weeks in January and you're intentionally looking for what does that, look back first. When was the last time you felt like yourself? When was the last time you really had fun? When was the last time you remember feeling deeply content? When was the last time? Then ask yourself what was happening. What made you feel that way? It could've been the activity or circumstance. It could also have just been a moment of presence where you simply stopped, noticed what was around you, and felt it in your bones. When was the last time you felt that way?

Step four is where the rubber meets the road. Based on the right word for right now, based on your season of life and your stretch of time, and based on what you just noticed after remembering the last time you felt that way, what's next? I want you to pick something. I simply want you to pick one thing you can do to invite that joy or fun or contentedness or happiness or self-fulfillment into your life. It might be a single choice or event, like playing basketball with friends. It might be something with longer legs like taking an art class you've always wanted to take. But I want you to pick something. Especially notice the first thing that comes to mind. I often think that's a great place to start. It's not your only option for all of eternity. You're simply picking something.

I have a few ideas of how to approach this. The first is honestly a little weird, but I think it's tremendously helpful. If you're having trouble naming what it is you like, look up a course catalog at your local community college. You don't have to take a class, but flip or scroll through the course catalog. I remember doing this all the time a decade or so ago, and it was weirdly inspiring. Most of the classes are geared towards beginners of things, so notice what classes make you a little sparkly. Maybe you're drawn to art or writing. Maybe there's a class to learn how to play pickleball and you suddenly realize how much you wish you were already in on the pickleball craze. Maybe you're drawn to things where you move your body, where you help others, where you explore an idea you've never had the chance to explore before. Again, the point isn't to take a class. You totally could, but this is just an exercise, so much so that you could choose any course catalog from anywhere. Simply notice what makes you come alive, especially in light of the right word for right now.

Another way to know what you like or to at least explore what that might be is to look at your camera roll, at what you notice. Look at your Instagram saves and what you like enough to want to remember later. Look back at journals or even the people you've texted over the last few weeks. What words have been floating around that might point you in the direction of something you like?

I can hear a few of you right now who are locked into the belief that you just don't know. You have gone so long without having fun or feeling like yourself or experiencing regular joy that it just feels hopeless. First, I'm so sorry that's where you are. I also know without question that you do not have to stay there. Every single person requires joy, fun, and connection. Every single person is wired differently but also wired to exist in a way that matters. You are capable of experiencing this is what I'm saying. The hopelessness you feel is circumstantial and has possibly been your narrative for so long it feels like you have no other options. But you do.

If you seriously just have no idea what to pick, then just pick something. Pick one thing to try that could bring you one step closer to joy or wholeness or fun. One thing one time. It doesn't have to be so heavy. If that's you, I highly encourage you to listen to Episode 34 of The Next Right Thing Podcast with Emily P. Freeman. It's an episode aptly called Pick What You Like, and she uses a phrase I now use multiple times in my own life: pick what you like, then see what grows. None of this is wasted, and none of it is as high stakes as you might think. If you pick something you think you like but you end up not liking it, no worries! Just pick something else.

And when I say pick something, I don't necessarily mean a hobby to commit to or a huge thing. Pick something like listening to music during a time of day you don't normally, especially if it's a time of day you experience stress. Pick music you don't normally listen to and see if you like it. Pick something like a fun nail polish that you notice when you look down, that makes you feel like yourself. Pick something like a one-off outing with some family friends where you all go bowling and do weird challenges on your turns and eat bad pizza and laugh. Pick something like spending a couple of hours going to a thrift store you've always wanted to shop in but never make the time to. Just pick something. You probably won't find what you're looking for waiting for it to come to you. Simply pick something.

Once you've picked what you like, schedule it. If it's one thing, put it on the calendar. If it's a regular thing, put it on the calendar. If it's something that's more about presence and awareness and an addition to a regular day, like music or a candle or a bird feeder on your office window, still schedule starting that thing. Put a reminder in your calendar to light the candle, to order the bird feeder, to start the music, to take the walk during your lunch break, to call the friend while you're driving home from school dropoff. Schedule it. If you don't put that thing in its place, chances are it won't happen.

Number six is remember it. I think this is key, especially if you're in the early stages of learning what brings you joy, what you love to do for fun, and what makes you feel like yourself. If you're still learning these things about yourself in this current season of life, choose a way to remember. I already mentioned Emily P. Freeman. She's currently doing something fun every day and then writing it down in a journal. And by fun, I mean something simple like her favorite takeout and a New Girl rerun during a lunch break. Bringing awareness to this intention is so key in maintaining that awareness but also in figuring out what brings you joy.

So here's a practical idea for you. Get one of those blank notebooks lying around your house because this is a group that loves some pretty paper, and make it your place to remember. Every day or every day it happens, write down the thing that brought you joy, that was fun, that made you feel like yourself. Be aware of what it is, and write it down. If you prioritize a specific word for a specific season but then don't have anything to write down about that word, you can notice how much more intentional you need to be. You're missing out on this thing that's of tremendous value to you, so even *not* writing something down has something to teach you.

You could also get one of those one line a day journals and use it specifically for things that make you feel like yourself, for moments that made you happy, made you laugh, or brought you joy. A joy log. Get yourself a joy log. I like the idea of the one line a day journal for this because of being able to see multiple entries on the same day of the year. You can look at what brought you joy during certain seasons of the year and replicate those things if you still love them.

But remember it. Find the simplest way to remember what is bringing you joy each day. Take a photo, write a line, keep adding to a voice memo. Whatever it is, remember.

And finally, step seven: compassionately repeat more than necessary. I was going to say compassionately repeat as necessary, but that's our problem. We often don't make this kind of thing necessary because of the noise of regular life. In order to make this kind of pursuit so natural you don't even have to think about it, you need to do this way more than you think is necessary. So compassionately repeat this often. Repeat using the right word for right now. Maybe you need to shift to the word fun for a season because while you feel fairly content and like yourself, you just don't have fun the way you used to, and you want to bring that back into your life again. So choose a new right word for right now. Always always live in your season. Name where you are. Name a reasonable amount of time in front of you to be intentional about this thing. Don't assume that what you choose today has to be your commitment until you die. Start small, both in the choice and for how long you think you might do it. And compassionately repeat way more than necessary just picking something. Just pick something you like, then see how it grows. You'll find that you repeat that Emily P. Freeman phrase as much as I do once you start saying it. It's a wonderful piece of permission to live by.

So as you move into 2024, I invite you to prioritize knowing what brings you joy. Find it. Explore what you like. Continue to seek after feeling more and more like yourself. It's a lifelong process, and you have to start somewhere. But wherever you start, be sure to start small.

And that's how to know what brings you joy.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week. This week it's someone named Amanda whose last name I don't know, but Amanda sent this email in awhile back, and it plays very beautifully into today's episode. It's a little long, but the setup matter and is quite lovely. "I am off on a 3 month maternity leave (short, by our Canadian standards) with a toddler and a

now 7 week old. For the past 6 weeks, I ask myself the same question all throughout the day: If I can only get *one* thing done, what do I *actually* want it to be?

Basically, whenever I realize I'm in a stretch of time where I can get something non-baby-non-toddler-related done, I really quickly guess how much time I have (and always make sure to underestimate it, so I'm usually talking 5-15 minutes) and then choose ONE thing. If I get that done, then I move on to the next one thing. It helps with the part of me that likes to feel like I've accomplished something. By choosing only one goal at a time, I can usually hit it, and it's amazing how much I can get completed when I'm only doing one thing at a time.

Most importantly though, is how my list of what I actually want to get done has evolved. It started off being much more of a chores list (necessary, but not particularly fun) and now is just as likely to include: laying on the couch with a book, drinking my coffee in silence, staring at the baby, or leaving a friend a Voxer. And because they all get put under my same mental category of 'daily goals', my days are that much more enjoyable.

I also have a "what *one* thing do I want to do this week" that I share with my husband during our weekly check-in so that he can get on board with helping me find time for a goal that takes a bit more time or joint effort. Thanks to that, I was able to recently spend half a day at a Nordic Spa and this week got out on my first postpartum run.

I was telling a friend about this whole philosophy, and she responded "wow, sounds like you've been listening to the Lazy Genius", haha. So I thought I should share my successes with you, as they are largely thanks to your book and show.

All the best, Amanda”

Did you notice the small steps in this? The gradual evolution of chores to doing things for yourself? The gradual realization of things that make Amanda happy? I also love her phrase “my days are that much more enjoyable.” She’s still got two tiny humans at home, but prioritizing these small things in the context of a regular to-do list matters. It does make our days that much more enjoyable. *En joy able*. This is such an excellent real life example of knowing what brings you joy. Thank you for sharing this with us, Amanda, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

Okay, y'all, that's it for today! Thank you so much for listening, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!