

# HARNESSING THE POWER OF





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## HOW TO HARNESS YOUR ENTHUSIASM

Have you ever felt a strong excitement about something? Have you ever felt an active interest in a job or hobby? If so, you are experiencing the wonderful feeling of enthusiasm!!!

Over the past two decades, research in psychology has uncovered many amazing benefits of positive personality traits such as enthusiasm. It is now recognised that enthusiasm can improve thinking, enhance relationships and wellbeing, and provide motivation for achieving personal goals. But did you know that the Bible contains a wealth of knowledge on this, which science is only just beginning to understand?! Join me in a journey of discovery for hidden gems of wisdom in God's word, that line up with the latest advances in scholarly research! We will find practical tips and pointers so you can change your life through the power of enthusiasm!

## WHAT DOES ENTHUSIASM LOOK LIKE?

Psychologists define enthusiasm as a state of high energy, interest and engagement in a particular activity or subject (Moè, 2016). To be enthusiastic is to be filled with joy; to be focused and have a sense of purpose. Do these sound familiar? Perhaps you can picture yourself, or someone you know, that is enthusiastic about a particular subject; or just enthusiastic, full stop!

Enthusiasm begins in the mind, but it can be seen in the way a person acts and

speaks; in their facial expression, tone of voice and body language. Enthusiastic people are the type to jump out of bed first thing in the morning, eager to get into the day. They have a twinkle in their eye and a spring in their step. They are motivated and will plough through apparent obstacles to reach their goals. Nothing can stop them!

People who are enthusiastic are bubbling over with love and life, and they are eager to share their bliss with everyone around them. Enthusiastic people are inspirers and visionaries, motivating those around them to turn problems into possibilities; to reach their highest goals and dreams. Have you ever wished to be more like this? Have you ever wanted to know the secret to a joy-filled life? Let's find out! Enthusiasm is something that affects your whole being. It is interesting to reflect on this in light of the origin of the actual word. The word "enthusiasm" comes from the Greek word entheos. "En—" means "in", and "—theos" is the word for God. So "enthusiasm" means literally, "in God", or "filled with God". There are many different ideas about God in the world today. But God, the God who is presented in the Bible, can bring joy and purpose into your life, so that you will be filled with genuine, longterm enthusiasm!

It may come as a surprise to you to find out that God wants us to have energy and purpose in life! It is true that the Bible contains many serious and solemn warnings. It is a book about how to be saved, and that decision is one that has eternal consequences. Many of the Bible prophets were filled with sadness as they thought about the sins of God's people (Jeremiah 9:1). Jesus Himself wept over Jerusalem, the city He loved, because its people refused to receive Him, and the gift of everlasting life (Luke 19:41). The Bible presents the results of wrong-doing, or sin, plainly, as something that always causes pain.

The Bible is not to be taken lightly. It has many parts which are very sad to read. However, that does not mean that God expects His followers to go through life feeling sorrowful and dejected. Far from it! The Bible says that God is the source of all true joy and fulfilment! For instance, the prophet Isaiah wrote, "you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace" (Isaiah 55:12). Many Psalms express joy and gratitude at the thought of being in God's presence. We read, "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." "How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light" (Psalm 16:11; 36:7–9).

Those who trust in the God of the Bible know that evil is not God's work; it is the work of an enemy (Matthew 13:28). Although Christians will experience sorrow on account of sin in the world, they will still find comfort and joy in God's love. This will give them the strength to be able to rise above the disappointments of this world. For instance, even when he was unjustly imprisoned, the apostle Paul was able to write, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). He and Silas sang while 7

their feet were in the stocks in a dungeon in Philippi (Acts 16:25). Christians will have a deep, lasting sense of joy and purpose for living that nothing can take away.

Let's look more closely at the idea of joy in trial, because it also tells us something else that is important about enthusiasm. Enthusiasm includes excitement about a topic or project. But the kind of engagement that the Bible promotes is not just a passing interest in something that goes as quickly as it comes.

One of Jesus' most famous parables, or stories, explains this. This parable is often called The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3–8; 18–23). A sower is a farmer. This parable tells about a farmer who planted seed by throwing it out as he walked up and down in his field, as farmers did in Jesus' day. In this parable, the seeds fell into different kinds of soils. The different soils determined the success or failure of the crop. In the parable, some of the seed fell into stony ground. Speaking of this, Jesus explained to His disciples, "The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away" (Luke 8:13).

What does this verse show us about the excitement of enthusiasm? It is not wrong to make a full commitment to Jesus; this is absolutely vital to salvation! Nor should we delay to make the choice to follow God. But we should not depend on emotional excitement as the basis for faith. True faith and trust in God will lead us to obey Him and cling to Him even during the difficult times.

Purpose is another essential aspect of enthusiasm The Bible reveals our true value and purpose as human beings. First, we as human beings were created God's image (Genesis 1:26-28). in That means we have tremendous value. God's purpose is for us to become more like Him in character, by having a personal relationship with him. The Bible calls this process of character transformation, "sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:23).

As human beings, we have all sinned, which is really a rejection of God (Romans 3:23). But God sees such value in us, that He gave Jesus to save us from sin (John 3:16). Because we are God's creation, we know that we are extremely valuable But Jesus' sacrifice shows us just how valuable we are to God. We are not valuable because of that sacrifice; God

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made the sacrifice, to show how much He loves us, and because we are of such high value to Him!

Because of Jesus' sacrifice, God's original purpose can still be fulfilled in us. Until we find this purpose, and are working actively to fulfil it, we will always feel dissatisfied. That is what Ecclesiastes 3:11 is referring to when it says, "He has put eternity in their hearts". Until we find assurance of everlasting life, which comes from committing our lives completely to God, we will always feel a sense of emptiness, no matter what else we may achieve.

We also noted that social warmth is vital to enthusiasm and an important part of God's purpose and plan for us as people is social relationships! From the story of creation, we see that God created people to be in families (Genesis 1:26–28). When He became a man, Jesus showed that marriage is pleasing to God by performing His first miracle at a wedding (John 2:1–11). Social relationships are an important part of joy and purpose, and when we follow God, we will enjoy loving and empathetic bonds with other people.

The Bible encourages us to be enthusiastic, but it specifies that there are some things it is not wise to be enthusiastic about. For instance, we read there about people whose "feet run to evil", and those that "make haste to shed blood" (Proverbs 1:16). But the Bible tells us that those who do these things will finally reap the consequences of them (Proverbs 1:18,19). In His love, God warns us, "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent" (Proverbs 1:10). The Bible is very clear that our enthusiasm should be focused on only doing, and being, genuinely good, as God is good (Psalm 119:68). 1 Corinthians 13:6 says that love "does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth." A genuine love for life will lead us to avoid those things that would harm ourselves and others, and instead, choose only what is good (Psalm 34:12–14).

A life of enthusiasm is one that is filled with joy, interest and purpose. As you may imagine, those who experience this receive many benefits besides just overall life-satisfaction. Let's look at a few of these.

#### **BENEFITS OF ENTHUSIASM**

Joy, love for life and positive social relationships are all part of enthusiasm. Today we know that those things are also vital for well-being (Morton, 2018). That means that enthusiasm is good for your health! The same part of the brain that is responsible for emotions is also the control centre for memory and motivation (Morton, 2018, pp. 1-14). So it makes sense that the joy of enthusiasm not only boosts your physical health, but also your intellect. In other words, enthusiasm is good for your brain! Many of the studies that have been done on this, have looked at the effects of teacher enthusiasm on student learning. Enthusiasm has been linked with intrinsic motivation, recall of information, creativity, engagement, and the perception of time passing (Moè, 2016). All of these factors are also important in other areas of life, like relationships and career success. There is really no area of life in which enthusiasm is not a powerful factor.

Earlier, we saw that the Bible encourages us to be enthusiastic for good. The Bible also gives hints of the benefits that come from this. For instance, joy is an essential part of enthusiasm. Proverbs 17:22 speaks of the benefits of this. It says, "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones."

In addition to joy, enthusiastic people also have focus, and the energy to work to achieve their goals. They are diligent and hard-working. These are the people who will achieve their personal best in everything they do. There are many Bible verses about the value of diligence. Here are a few. "He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich." "The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty." "Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before unknown men (Proverbs 10:4; 21:5; 22:29). The Bible emphasises the value of hard work over unimproved

talent. It is not how many natural abilities we have that is most important to God. What is important is to make use of what we have.

The Bible also shows the benefits of healthy social interaction. Quoting again from the wise man Solomon, "Two are better than one...For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up" (Ecclesiastes 4:9). This shows that social support is really important at times when we are feeling down.

Both the Bible and the latest scholarly research show that enthusiasm is important for overall wellbeing and success in life. So why is it that not everyone is able to receive these benefits? What are the barriers to enthusiasm?

#### BARRIERS TO ENTHUSIASM

Although enthusiasm is an essential ingredient in success, it cannot exist alone. Without other important factors, enthusiasm will die out, leaving us with shattered hopes and dreams. One of the most important factors in sustaining enthusiasm is trust (Walker, 2002). Trust, in turn, can only exist where there is mutual commitment, openness and willingness to learn (ibid.).

The opposite of trust is doubt. We saw earlier that it was through sin that the human race lost its original sense of purpose. Have you ever thought that the foundation of sin is doubt? That is actually how sin first entered our world, in the Garden of Eden. Let's have a closer look at this story, so that we can better understand barriers to enthusiasm. When Adam and Eve were first created, they were made in God's image (Genesis 1:26–28). This tells us they not only had physical features like God, but they were like Him in character. Since God is love, we know that they were full of love for God and His law. Their attitude is described in Psalm 40:8: "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart."

God had made a wonderful, perfect world for Adam and Eve to enjoy (Genesis 1:31). In the beautiful Garden of Eden, He gave them everything that could make them happy. God told them that they could freely eat the delicious fruit from every tree of the garden, except for one (Genesis 2:16,17). That might sound strange, but God had a purpose in doing that. By giving them the choice about whether or not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, God was really leaving them free to choose whether or not they would return His love. In not eating from just that one tree, they would be showing complete trust in God.

But Satan, who had been created as the highest and most perfect of God's angels, had chosen to hate God and rebel against Him (Isaiah 14:12–14; Ezekiel 28:12–18; Revelation 12:7,8). When he did this, his purposes became malevolent. He no longer felt happy and fulfilled. He wanted to hurt God as much as possible. Jealous of the happiness of Adam and Eve, he determined to get them to feel the same misery he did.

Disguised as a serpent, Satan spoke to Eve from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The serpent said, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of

the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1). In some ways, what the serpent said was true. But because he changed the order of the words, he made it sound like God wanted to hurt Adam and Eve; a bit like, if you went into a room with lots of delicious healthy dishes, and were told you couldn't eat any of them! Then, the serpent told an outright lie, the opposite of what God had said: "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). He told Eve that she would become like God, by disobeying what God had told her to do (verse 5). We know that Eve chose to believe the serpent, because she ate the fruit, which God had said not to do (verse 6). So, at the same time she believed Satan, Eve distrusted God. After Eve ate the fruit, she persuaded Adam to eat it, too. Now they were both guilty.

Adam and Eve thought they could find happiness and purpose by breaking God's

law, but instead they found it led to pain and sorrow. After they sinned, Adam and Eve no longer looked forward to seeing God. They felt guilt and shame, and ran to hide when God called for them that evening (verses 7–19). This shows that doubt and sin separate us from God (Isaiah 59:2). God is the source of joy, so sin also separates us from joy. We also lose our sense of purpose, because we are no longer connected with God.

Sin, which starts with doubt and ends in shame, steals our enthusiasm for what is good. It twists our likes and dislikes, so that instead of loving life and good, we become attracted to evil (Jeremiah 17:9). The final result of sin is death (Romans 6:23). That is not the life God planned for us. That is no life at all! Sin is a terrible barrier that prevents us from experiencing the happiness God wants for us. But we saw earlier that God has made a way of escape from sin for us! We no longer need to be trapped in the darkness of doubt and despair! However dark your past may be; however depressing your present circumstances, God is able and willing to bring hope and joy back into your life. From today, you can have a new beginning! How can this be done? God's word also tells us the secrets to living a life of enthusiasm! Let's find out what it says!

#### HOW TO BOOST YOUR ENTHUSIASM

#### 1. Practise trust in God

We now know that trust is absolutely essential to enthusiasm. It is vital, however, that we place trust in those who are trustworthy. In the Bible, God reveals that He is trustworthy. He has all power, but is also filled with love (Jeremiah 32:17; 1 John 4:8). This means He always uses His power for good, never to harm us.

How do we trust God? Trust is very closely connected with faith, and the Bible has a lot to say about faith. Hebrews 11 is a famous chapter on faith, which talks about Bible heroes who demonstrated their faith by acting in obedience to God before they saw the results of their actions. For instance, Noah built the ark before a cloud appeared in the sky and before a drop of rain fell.

Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established." The Bible is full of promises of what God can do in your life. Trust God's word, that He is good, and will only do what is best for you (Psalm 34:9,10). Then show you believe His word, by obeying it. This is the way to develop trust in God.

#### 2. Follow God's Plan

God has a purpose for everything He has made, and He also has a plan for how that purpose can be fulfilled. God's plan is based on the principle of self-sacrificing love (1 Corinthians 13:5; Matthew 22:36– 40). For people, God's plan is explained in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17). God Himself is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). And it is only in receiving His gifts, and sharing these with others, that we find true meaning and purpose in life.

#### 3. Choose good food

The sixth commandment reminds us that life is the gift of God, and we need to take care of it (Exodus 20:13). That means, God cares about your health. God wants you to be well (3 John 2)! Have you ever noticed how hard it is to be positive when you are not feeling your best?

One of the most important steps to health is the food you eat. Again, it is wellknown that healthy food is absolutely essential to well-being. A whole-foods, plant-based diet will provide the nutrients your body needs to deal better with stress, lift your mood, and maintain enthusiasm (Morton, 2018, pp. 98–113).

#### 4. Move

God designed us to move. We know that exercise is vital for keeping bones and muscles healthy (Morton, 2018, pp. 27–42). Exercise is also a powerful mood booster. It improves thinking, attention and creativity. It is a powerful way to boost your mood. Next time you feel down, try taking a walk or swim. Exercise will help you find your enthusiasm once again!

#### 5. Sleep

The Bible also talks about the importance of sleep (Psalm 4:8; 127:2; Proverbs 3:24). It is well-established that chronic sleep loss not only drains energy and enthusiasm, but can contribute to serious health problems (Morton, 2018, pp. 114–131). Insufficient sleep affects many parts of our body: our learning and memory, our metabolism and weight, our cardiovascular health, and our immune function. In addition, our moods and outlook suffer. By getting enough sleep, everything in life goes so much better!

#### 6. Enjoy recreation

In our world today, we scarcely have time to stop and catch a breath. Life in the twenty-first century is fast-paced! While this can be exciting, it is also important to take time out to enjoy doing things you love. Time in nature is especially important. When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in a garden (Genesis 2:8). This shows how important nature is for health. Take time in your life to enjoy a garden and go for walks in the great outdoors. You will find yourself refreshed and ready to dig into your daily tasks with new zest!

#### 7. Reflect

It's important to spend time each day reviewing what you have achieved, and thinking about how you can improve in the future. An important part of this is prayer and Bible study. Prayer is your opportunity to pour out your heart to God, the One who sees and knows your deepest thoughts and desires, who wants the very best for you, and has the power to help you change (Psalm 62:8). The Bible is God's voice, speaking directly to you. There you will find guidance for challenging situations, and promises to give you power for transformational change! Nothing will improve your mind and renew your enthusiasm like God's word. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31). Take time for God, and you will find your strength is renewed.

#### 8. Be Grateful

It can be easy to focus on the negatives of life. But this is counterproductive to experiencing enthusiasm. No matter how bad circumstances may be, those who follow God can be joyful in the hope of eternal life. And even in the here and now, we can always find something to be grateful for.

#### 9. Forgive

As you begin to change your life, you will find many barriers to doing this. At one time or another, we have all been hurt by others. Remembering these hurts can bring a lot of pain. You will also realise more and more your own weaknesses. Poor choices from the past will often return to haunt you. As long as you cling to these things, they will drag you down, preventing you from realising the joy life still holds for you. It is absolutely essential to let go. Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is yourself.

Many people have the false idea that forgiveness is denying that wrong has been done; or returning to an abusive relationship. This is not the case. Forgiveness means choosing to move beyond a painful situation and live life joyfully in spite of it.

#### 10. Spend time with enthusiastic people

Did you know that moods are contagious? Solomon counselled. "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways, and set a snare for your soul" (Proverbs 22:24,25). This verse is talking about anger, which is generally a negative emotion. However, the same advice holds true for other emotions. Of course, we cannot avoid people who have less-thandesirable emotions completely; and we should strive to help everyone. But we need to set boundaries on our relationships so that we do not allow ourselves to be pulled down by the negative choices of others. Choose positive, enthusiastic people as your closest friends, and you will find your mood improves.

#### ENTHUSIASM AND GOD

By putting the above steps into practice, you will find new zest for life. You will discover the secret of true enthusiasm: entheos, being filled with God. Perhaps you have never accepted God into your life; or your relationship with Him has become distant, or formal. Or maybe you do have a relationship with Him already, but want to experience one that is even closer. Here are some more details on how to grow your relationship with God.

#### 1. Evaluate your spiritual condition

The first step in improving your relationship with God is to evaluate where you are now. Ask yourself these five questions:

i) Am I satisfied with my relationship with God right now? Think about your relationship with God over the past year. Rate it on a scale of 1 to 10. Would you like this rating to improve?

ii) What is my purpose in life? Ask yourself, Does my purpose match God's purpose for me, as explained in the Bible? If not, what do you need to change so that it does?

iii) What am I most passionate about? If you want your relationship with God to be better, it is very likely that some things in your life will need to change. Ask yourself, Am I passionate about activities that lead me away from God? Am I allowing minor things to stop me from being close to God? Take the time to think of specific things that may be pulling you away from God. The ten points for increasing enthusiasm listed above are a good place to start. When faced with decisions in life, ask yourself, Would I do or say this if God were here? If you are unsure, then it is wise to say no. You cannot afford to let anything take God's place in your life.

iv) How will people remember me? Think about your life from a long-term perspective. How do your family, friends, and work colleagues see you? What legacy are you leaving behind each day?

v) How can I make God my focus? Now that you have reviewed your priorities and relationships, think of practical ways you can make the changes that will enhance your relationship with God. The apostle Paul wrote, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). This means, when you decide to stop doing wrong, substitute something positive in its place. For instance, if you want to give up a particular food that is not best for you, research healthy options that can replace it. If you know you need to exercise more, plan how you can fit exercise into your day. Finding a friend who will support you and hold you accountable for the changes you want to make can be a great help. When you have made your plan, ask for God's help, then determine to stick to it!

#### 2. Stand beneath the cross

Not long before He gave His life for us, Jesus said, "If I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32). By saying He would be lifted up from the earth, Jesus meant He would die on the cross. Thinking about Jesus' sacrifice for us can transform our hearts and our lives, because we realise our true worth. You can read about the final scenes of Jesus' life in the four gospels: Matthew21–28; Mark11–16; Luke19–23; John 12–21.

#### 3. Put away all known sin

As we have seen, sin separates us from God. It causes us to carry a heavy burden of guilt and shame. Confess any sins you are aware of to God. Ask Him to wash these away, then believe that He does this. Thank Him for His forgiveness, and ask for His power to live a changed life. Claim the Bible promise, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

#### 4. Consider your worship focus

Ask yourself, what is my motivation and focus in worship? Am I doing this out of genuine love for God, or just from habit? If you sense a lack of enthusiasm in the time you spend worshipping God, ask Him to reignite your first love for Him.

#### 5. Cultivate an active prayer life

Three things are needed for a fire: fuel, oxygen, and a spark. This has a parallel in the Christian life. The Bible is like fuel; personal choice is like a spark, and prayer is like oxygen. In Luke 18:1, Jesus taught that, "men ought always to pray." When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, He shared these wonderful words with them:

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

By teaching His disciples this prayer, Jesus didn't mean that we need to repeat these same words every time. But this shows us the things we are to pray for. Quiet time with God in prayer will give you the purpose, meaning and commitment that you seek.

#### 6. Study the Bible

As we saw earlier, the Bible is God's voice, speaking directly to each one of us. Time is absolutely essential to building any strong relationship, and it is the same with our relationship with God. It is important to take time every day to listen to His voice.

If you are unsure of where to start in your Bible study, here are a few simple tips:

#### 1. Pay attention to context

Study the Bible carefully and slowly, paying close attention to the context of the verse you are reading. Make sure the conclusions you come to match with the rest of Scripture.

#### 2. Study slowly, with a definite plan

It's better to study a few verses until you understand them, than to read ten or twenty chapters and have no idea of what they mean. Make a systematic plan of how to study the Bible. Various plans include: what the Bible says on a particular topic; comparing the lives of different Bible characters; or studying the themes of different Bible books.

#### 3. Pray before studying

Without God's help, we cannot understand the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:14). Pray that God will send His Holy Spirit to help you learn what He wants you to know.

#### 4. Keep it simple

The Bible explains itself (2 Peter 1:19–21). To understand the Bible, it is most important to be willing to do what God says (John 7:17). If you pray for God's guidance, you will find that He will help you to understand His word.

#### 5. Read out loud and take notes

Reading aloud will help you fix the thoughts of Scripture in your mind. Writing notes will help you process what you learn.

In this booklet, we have looked at the power of enthusiasm. We have seen that

enthusiasm means to be filled with God; to be overflowing with love, life, joy, and purpose. A life of enthusiasm is good medicine for body, mind, and soul. But doubt and shame can keep us away from God, stopping us receiving the blessings He longs to give.

Perhaps from this study, you have realised as never before your need of God in your life. Or you may wish for a deeper relationship with God. If so, I encourage you to commit, or recommit, your life to God in prayer this moment. God is waiting and longing to bless you; to make you truly entheos: filled with His love, filled with His goodness. All He needs is your permission. Will you make that choice right now?

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Pastor Gary Kent is Speaker for The Incredible Journey ministry. He has produced and presented numerous documentaries on subjects including the Bible, Bible prophecy, world events and natural health. His passion is to share the good news of Jesus' imminent return.

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