

Honing a Heart for Others in 3 Focused Steps

When the world is overcast with heavy clouds of bitterness, fear, and turmoil, hiding away feels like a healthy option. It could be said that in avoiding the madness, one is opting for the appropriately evolved flight response to preserve self and wait for brighter days ahead.

But what if, instead, those overcast times were spent outside—in the thick of the gale? Would that be a suicide mission, or instead a strength-training exertion to promote our own long-term health?

Storm clouds breed widespread havoc. But so too do isolation and inward-focused behaviour.

When we isolate from our fellow man, and hoard all that we can in self-preservation mindsets, we tamper with our sanity in a slippery slope of unhealthy thinking. We begin to see the world through foggy lenses and miss the beauty that can be found within widespread angst.

What beauty, you say? The beauty of joy springing up like a well in parched land. *It is possible*, and I'd dare say it's less abstract that you think.

Joy is forged in pain and drought, and found in warm embraces—in smiles that could light up the darkest expanse. It's experienced in the miniscule efforts that truly matter most: offering love in practical forms.

To break the cycles of destruction, it becomes imperative to fight the madness, not flee from it.

By honing a heart for others, we can turn the tide on the havoc of darkness, doom, and despair, replacing it with hope and joy, and ultimately freedom.

I would like to propose three focused steps to take when it feels easier to flee the chaos and hide away. Three measures that will mean the difference between soul and spirit starvation, and a meaningful life. They are *marked maneuvers* that will hone hearts to see others and seek to better them rather than burden them. *Focused strides* that break down barriers so light can shine through.

Counter-intuitive maybe, but with practice these points become eloquent reflections of lives well-spent.

- Lives purposed and rooted, able to withstand momentary afflictions and produce ripe luscious fruit in and despite it
- Fruit like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control...sound familiar?

Three easy steps, and here they are:

1. Bundle up
2. Bring it up
3. Bind it up

Let's explore them together.

BUNDLE UP

Get yourself layered appropriately to weather the storm. What does that look like? For the Christian, it looks like putting on the Armor of God and being rooted in faith through the reading and understanding of God's word. Alternatively, one could say this step is like "winterizing for snow season" or "donning your own oxygen mask so you can help others don theirs."

Bundling up ensures our basic survival needs are first met, and it prepares us in the most literal sense for the fight ahead. It's an important first step. Still, it's often not considered ideal, or maybe preferable, when we have a warm, cozy bubble to stay self-sufficiently hidden in.

Looking long-term, though, if we understand that our safe zone can only satisfy temporarily before itself breaking down, we must engage this first step and bundle up. And remember, by faith, victory is promised, and fear is not a viable option.

BRING IT UP

Awareness matters. What are you witnessing in the chaos around you? Eyes open, what do you see? Who do you see? What suffering, both individually and globally? Verbalize it. Call it out.

The Christian would term this "speaking to the storm." Simply, it is taking authority over a situation. You aren't saying you created it or are to blame for it, but you *are* saying that it doesn't belong and that there *is* something that can be done to better it.

Bringing it up makes it real and concrete. It makes it matter. You may be shocked to find others coming alongside when they witness your declarative outcry. But even if solo in the squall, you've bundled up and therefore can assuredly impact for good.

BIND IT UP

In the midst of the wreckage, it's time to bind up the wounds. Individually, this looks like compassionate, hands-on care and attention to those directly impacted by the storm. Globally, binding is prolonged bravery within the tempest, boldly declaring hope and freedom beyond it. The burdens of sin are heavy. Daily, deception and downright evil leave victims in their wake. By showing up, bundled and aware, you shine hope into the dark expanses.

Binding is the nitty-gritty toil that reaps the most long-term benefit, despite the immediacy of the strain. It's *love* in action. And as engagement increases, so too will conditioning to last longer and go further.

The goal ahead is calling. A meaningful, abundant life awaits. You won't find it by looking inward and absorbing the lie that self matters more than community.

If you are finding it hard to see joy these days—if the overcasting gloom is wearing on your spirit—don't hide away! Arise! By honing a heart for others, your own internal strife will fade. Not all at once, mind you. This isn't a quick fix scheme, nor is it meant to replace appropriate self-care measures. But consistent bundling up, bringing up, and binding up will station your heart to witness a powerful display of light breaking through darkness. Joy breaking through sadness. Hope breaking through despair.

As Christians, we cling to Jesus as our hope and our example for walking in victory. On a wider scale, this approach is still a healthy choice for anyone wanting freedom from the void of self-centred pursuits. An outpouring of beauty, despite the storms, comes by consistently honing a heart for others.