



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Chasing the good life

Several years ago, our family had a huge oak tree fall on our home during a storm.

It wasn't just any home — it was our forever home. We'd moved in 10 days earlier. At last we had the space to spread out and breathe. We'd waited for this a long time.

The destruction was major, forcing us to move out. I know God doesn't work this way, but at first it felt like punishment, a gavel of judgment coming down in the form of tree limbs crashing through my master bedroom ceiling.

"What have I done wrong?" I wondered. "What am I supposed to learn from this?"

The following nine months were the most chaotic of my life. We moved four times, lived in a rental home with most of our possessions in boxes, and faced several curveballs that compounded the stress. Nothing in my life was normal. I had too many balls in the air, yet none I could eliminate.

From the outside, my life wasn't enviable. It wasn't pretty, comfortable or convenient. It wasn't "the good life" we all crave. Yet on the inside I felt something positive happening, a spiritual growth rooted in my constant need to pray. I didn't pray because I should; I prayed because I had to. I couldn't cope alone.

One morning in particular, I encountered God differently than I had before. I'd gone to bed very stressed, and before my eyes opened the next day my mind fell into prayer. This had become my morning routine, my automatic reflex. And as I lay in bed trying to mentally gear up for the day, an unspeakable peace came over me. All I could think was, "Jesus."

I sensed Him in the room with me. I felt the peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7). I found calm within the craziness. Suddenly, I wasn't overwhelmed anymore. I was happy — extraordinarily happy. I wanted the joy of that moment to last forever.

That is when I *got it*. That is when I realized how hard times present opportunities to encounter God and His son in ways that aren't possible when life is pretty, comfortable and convenient.

When we moved back into our renovated home, our lives returned to normal. Practically overnight my stress vanished. But can I tell you how I felt the first morning I woke up in my new master bedroom? Do you know what went through my mind as I opened my eyes to a calm, serene sanctuary?

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Gone were my automatic prayers. Gone was my desperation. Gone was my reflex to connect with God. At last I was waking up to an easier life, yet I felt empty. And sad. And a little disappointed.

I know Jesus is with me always. I know I can encounter Him in good times, too. But what I learned by stepping away from the comfortable bubble we all normally live in — then returning to that bubble — is how quickly I can forget Jesus when I'm not desperate. Without a concerted effort, I might easily stop seeking Him.

The "good life" we chase in this world — it's actually a good distraction from what truly matters. It doesn't feed our soul, and that's why it leads to emptiness. The people we tend to envy are those rich with goods, but the people we *should* envy are those rich with faith. They're the ones who have it figured out. They're the ones getting their spirits renewed daily and drawing closer to Christ.

Instead of chasing the good life, how about we chase the God life? How about we think outside the bubble and past the material pursuits we think will bring us happiness? Chasing the God life replaces our fear of bad things happening because we can trust that any hardships enable God to do His best work through us. It helps us detach from *stuff* so we can cling to Christ.

I realize now that the tree falling on our house wasn't punishment; it was a gift. It allowed me to see how I didn't miss my possessions boxed up, my forever home or the security of a bubble. My life was pared down, yet nothing was lacking. I had my family and my God, and they were enough.

This Easter season, let's reflect on whether the comfort we enjoy hinders our ability to know Jesus. Let's consider where our mind immediately goes in the morning when we wake up. Most of all, let's remember how desperately we need our risen Savior on good days, too. Only Christ can save us from ourselves, making sure the pursuits we choose lead to eternity, not emptiness.

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