The background of the book cover is a photograph of a lush, green landscape. A wide, reddish-brown dirt road curves from the bottom right towards the center. To the left of the road, there are large, vibrant green banana trees. In the distance, rolling green hills and mountains are visible under a soft, hazy sky. A few small figures of people can be seen walking on the road. On the far left edge, there is a vertical orange band with a repeating geometric pattern in green and black.

Finding True Purpose
Through Surrender

Unexpected JOY

Kelly C. Miller

“Unexpected Joy follows the journey to finding lasting joy in the midst of a chaotic world. Kelly does a great job of bringing good theology to life in this book written for everyday people who are seeking to find purpose and meaning in their contexts with all the challenges that come with them. Kelly shows how God uses broken people to extend His grace to the next generation because they are available to be used by Him. I would love to put this book in the hands of everyone; it won’t leave you the same!”

—**Isabirye Daniel**, secondary school chaplain, The Amazima School;
lead pastor of Agape Community Church, Wakitaka, Jinja, Uganda

“Like Paul, who used his skills at work to not be a burden but to bless those he served, in the same manner, Kelly and Danlyn invested their organizational skills to serve and love those who longed to be loved by Jesus. They truly were a kiss of the Holy Spirit to the sweet people of Uganda. Get ready to experience unexpected joy as you see the joy of generosity being lived out through humble and surrendered lives. A truly refreshing book!”

—**Boyd Bailey**, president, Georgia NCF (National Christian Foundation)

“Unexpected Joy is both a challenging and inspiring read. Challenging in the sense that Kelly pushes the reader to truly explore what Jesus teaches in the New Testament and put it into practice. Inspiring with the countless stories of his time in Uganda, living in a culture that was the opposite of what he had known up to that time. God used that difference to deepen his love for everyone he encountered. This book will stretch you and deepen your walk with God.”

—**Karen Stubbs**, founder, Birds on a Wire

“Kelly Miller is a great storyteller, and his stories of life in an African mission school are filled with emotion, humor, and deep spiritual insights. *Unexpected Joy* reminds us that faith is not just a collection of abstract doctrines, but a transformative way of life. Be ready to be entertained, inspired, informed, and challenged to rediscover the joy of living in the grace of Jesus Christ. Highly recommended!”

—**Terry Glaspey**, award-winning author;
professor at Northwind Theological Seminary

“From the pinnacle of success pursuing the American dream to serving as dean of student life at a boarding school in Uganda, Kelly Miller’s story grips readers, draws them into the narrative of grace and joy, and stimulates every emotion, often several at the same time. This is a powerful story of redemption, demonstrating the privilege it is for God’s people to be involved in God’s work around the globe. You will be changed by reading this book.”

—**Glenn R. Kreider**, editor in chief, *Bibliotheca Sacra*;
professor of theological studies, Dallas Theological Seminary

“*Unexpected Joy* is an experiential testament to the beauty and power of surrendering to the Lord. By sharing touching stories and personal experiences, Kelly invites readers on a transformative journey toward understanding how the simple act of daily submission can lead to a life of joy and purpose in the most unlikely places and through the most beautiful people. Kelly and Danlyn’s story encourages us all to embrace surrender and find beauty in the unexpected, ultimately leading us to a deeper connection with the Lord and a more fulfilling life.”

—**Scott Bowen**, cofounder, Champions United, Uganda

“King David carried a certain ferocity when it came to things that mattered most to him. Whether battle or dance, he went all in with abandon. Kelly Miller is just like that. His and Danlyn’s story is about courage in spite of fear.”

—**Justin Dillon**, author and entrepreneur

“For the past 20 years, I’ve had a front-row seat and witnessed the transformational power of the ideas presented in this book in the life of the author, “Uncle Kelly”—a title he and Aunt Danlyn earned in our family nearly a decade before their adventure to Uganda. The road to the promised joy of the Christian life truly is one of brokenness, grace, and the work of the Holy Spirit, and this book provides a map for the journey!”

—**Joel Thomas**, lead pastor, Buckhead Church, Atlanta, GA

Unexpected JOY

Kelly C. Miller



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AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

It didn't take me long to learn why Uganda is called "The Pearl of Africa." By any measure, it's a beautiful country. Each region offers its own stunning scenery—Lake Victoria, the Nile River, majestic mountains, rolling hills, and crater lakes. The equatorial sun is always hot, but the high elevation ensures pleasant temperatures and constant breezes. Where we live, for most of the year, the average daily high temperature is about 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Agriculturally, it would be hard to find a country more fertile than Uganda. In support of this claim, I've heard people say, "You could plant a pig's ear and grow a pig." There are stark differences between city life and village life, but people are generally friendly no matter their circumstances. Oh, and if you're into coffee, I've been told Uganda has the best in the world.

People often ask me what I like most about living in Uganda. I could talk about the warm, hospitable people, or the students I have come to know and love. There is also the visual beauty of the landscape, or the enjoyable pace and rhythm of life. For me, however, it's the peace I experience in the early mornings, when I take the school dog (Muggle) for a walk. It's also when I'm most aware of the

extraordinary joy God has given me here, in this season of my life. Ernest Hemingway said, “I never knew a morning in Africa when I woke up and was not happy.” I couldn’t agree more.

No one would accuse me of being a morning person, but here it’s not uncommon for me to be up early enough to watch the first rays of the morning sun appear over the small mountains above the school. On those days, as Muggle and I walk the dusty roads around the expansive school grounds, I thank God for creating us with the senses that allow us to experience and enjoy the beauty of his creation.

In those early hours of the day, the temperature is nearly perfect. There is a coolness to the air that seems improbable for a country on the equator. The many birds, all over the campus, greet us with a symphony of sounds. The distorted speaker of a nearby mosque broadcasting the sunrise call to prayer is a reminder of how important it is for our students to see and experience the true gospel of Jesus. Outside the fence of the school people are making their way to work—some on foot and some as passengers on the many motorcycle taxis scurrying about.

The students gather with their Mentors on the porches of their houses for morning devotions. Some of them are singing worship songs, while others are intently discussing the Word. Soon after, they will go to breakfast and then spend the day with a dedicated team of teachers committed to teaching them *how to think* instead of just *what to think*. Even though I’ve seen these sights and heard these sounds hundreds of times, I am always overwhelmed by what God has taught me on this unexpected journey. Above all, I am grateful for how I get to see, in the most undeniable way, the transformative work of the Holy Spirit.

When I was in high school, I was very much into what were then called hair metal bands, and somehow I convinced my parents it was okay to go to the concerts. It was 1986. I was fourteen years old and apparently old enough to go see Mötley Crüe at the old Omni

in Atlanta on their “Girls, Girls, Girls” tour (please don’t judge me). Tommy Lee did an upside-down drum solo, and I’m sure there was a lot of raunchy visual content, but, thankfully, I don’t remember much about it. What made that night memorable, however, was the opening act. A newer group with a fresh sound, Guns N’ Roses, was given an opportunity. None of us had heard of them before. The Crüe was notorious for booking opening acts that had no chance of taking the spotlight from them. Well, that night, Guns N’ Roses stole the show, and it wasn’t even close.

Unless you lived through the late eighties and early nineties, it’s hard to appreciate how Guns N’ Roses conquered the music world. This was before streaming or the internet, so the metrics were album sales and the length of lines outside record stores to get concert tickets. Guns N’ Roses was on top, for years. To be at that concert, on that night, to see that opening act—that would soon become the biggest band in the world—was an experience I will never forget.

Even now, I can remember feeling like *I was privileged to be at a very special moment in time.*

Now more than thirty years later, I have that same feeling, only this time it’s God who is blowing my mind, not a rock band. Over the last five years, at a secondary boarding school in Jinja, Uganda, I have seen God redeeming and transforming a generation of young people who will change their communities by how they live for him. I have seen not only *what* we are called to do as followers of Jesus, but *how* we are to do it. Serving in Uganda has put all the diverse experiences of my life into the right perspective.

The pursuit of happiness has been a popular theme for as long as anyone can remember. There’s an avalanche of books, seminars, and studies, from secular and religious writers alike, that claim to show the way to joyful enlightenment. Now, in our age of digital media, we have podcasts and YouTube videos repackaging the same messages. Much if not most of this content fails its audience because it suggests,

in one way or another, that we are in complete control of our own joy and can get there from our own effort and strength.

If that were true, the world would look a lot differently than it does today.

There is no ten-step program or self-help strategy to lasting joy and a contented life. The better way comes from the promises of Jesus and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. To receive these promises, and to receive the full joy of the Christian life, we first have to make a decision. Do we believe that Jesus and the life he has promised is better than what the world is offering? All throughout my life I have heard the world telling me that happiness comes from money, power, and fame—so the solutions are simple: make more money, seek more power, and do whatever it takes to be known. Unfortunately, some churches have tried to package that set of solutions together with the idea of the Christian life.

My question is, How's that working out?

I don't think I have ever seen Americans more unhappy than they are today, and this is at a time when we have more of everything the culture is naming as the solution. All of us, at times, have struggled to find joy in this world. Why? Because we don't have a good understanding of the obstacles and perspectives that hold us back, and because we fail to see how the ways of our me-first culture lead only to defeat. Here's a paradox: on the one hand, we have access to an abundance of good, biblical teaching and theology; but on the other hand, Western Christians don't look much like the Jesus we profess to follow. To put it simply: we have great difficulty with sincere obedience.

If you're serious about growing your faith and experiencing God in a deeper way than ever before, this is the most important book you've ever read! (Maybe this is a good time to admit I'm prone to exaggeration.) It's impossible to exaggerate, however, the grace of God's plan to reconcile creation to himself, and the grace of his plan for us to enjoy him and enjoy life as we fulfill our created purpose.

Do you want to experience extraordinary joy? God tells us what to do and how to do it, and offers us the strength to make it happen. Despite this reality, we still resist, and revert to doing things our way instead of his way. Maybe we don't like to surrender control. Maybe we can't let go of what the culture has taught us. Maybe our churches have given us a picture of a legalistic God who is more concerned about rules than about love, grace, and joy. Or maybe we have never fully grasped the role of the Holy Spirit in our growth and transformation. Whatever our misunderstandings are, or where they are from, most Christians miss out on the full and joyful life God has promised.

I'm a former software executive who has spent the last five years in Uganda working as the Dean of Student Life at a unique school serving teenagers from challenging backgrounds. Living in a developing country and sharing the gospel in an honor/shame culture has helped me better understand the issues the world is facing. The underlying problems in Uganda are not greatly different from the underlying problems in the Western world, but they do manifest themselves differently here. This contrast has led to an important and helpful clarity, for which I am grateful.

I haven't been less busy in Uganda than I was in the US, but I have definitely been less distracted. As a result, I've learned a lot of new things. The most important lessons have to do with seeing the gospel, the wisdom of God, and the truth of Scripture validated in every facet of life. Even though I'm embarrassed I had to move to Uganda to learn these things, I have gained a deeper *understanding* through the *experience*, and my eyes have been opened to the right *perspectives*. I have learned how God leads us to joyful *obedience*, and how, with that posture, we grow to be more like him, for our good and his glory.

This book is an overflow of God's grace in my life. I am grateful for the opportunity to write about some of my experiences and how

God used them to bring me to a deeper understanding of what he has done, what he is doing, and what he has promised for those who love him. I write with the same deep conviction that Dr. Luke had after he carefully investigated everything and *became certain* about the risen Christ.



SECTION ONE

THE FOUNDATIONS OF A GREATER JOY





If our goal as Jesus followers is to grow in Christlikeness, resulting in contented lives characterized by the fruit of the Spirit—that then attract others to the gospel—then our current status is both disappointing and discouraging. We long for widespread and transformational change, but it’s not happening at the rate it should or to the degree it should, especially in the light of the truth of our faith.

This is despite the great trove of resources we have, and despite our best efforts. After hundreds of years of archaeology, science, and debate, the historical fact of the resurrection of Christ stands. Atheists and antagonists are left with no good way to make their case, apart from pursuing strategies like appealing to emotional arguments about suffering and evil in the world. I don’t dismiss those arguments, but, ironically, only the Christian worldview has the answer to them.

We should be seeing the greatest expansion of faith since the first century. But we’re not. We must either be misunderstanding the underlying causes of the problem or looking at the world with the

wrong perspectives. I think it's both. For things to change, we need to better know the truth, and to better avoid the obstacles that prevent us from acting obediently.

We must grow to better understand the three key topics of *brokenness*, *grace*, and *the Holy Spirit*, and how they lead us to the promised joy of the Christian life. But before doing so, we need to appreciate the kind of *understanding* that comes from *experience*. This is foundational. My experiences in Uganda are helpful in this regard because they serve as a testimony to the truth and wisdom of Scripture.



CHAPTER 1

UNCLE KELLY

*Without context, words and actions
have no meaning at all.¹*

GREGORY BATESON

Within a few days of when I arrived in Uganda, it became clear I would be known as “Uncle Kelly.” All the staff and students have addressed me in this way since the very beginning. Once I appreciated the context, I understood this is a title of respect, one which I was happy to receive.

For God to use this book in your life, knowing the context of this writing is also very important since I’m writing from a unique set of circumstances and experiences. It will also be helpful to understand who I am, recognize who you are, and share the setting for this book.

Misunderstanding context, and misapplying God’s Word, has led to painful errors in the history of the Christian church. The current church makes the same mistakes, but the modern manifestations are more about putting down individuals than conquering countries. In my lifetime, Christians and churches have (incorrectly) used God’s word to oppress African Americans, the promiscuous, and the LGBT community, just to name a few. There are

Jesus followers who justify damaging actions by misusing Scripture, mainly by taking it out of context. We've also seen the rise of false gospels, embraced by professing Christians.

GOALS AND APPROACH

Much has been written about what needs to happen for the church to look more like Jesus, and what his followers need to do to grow in relationship with him. I will not repeat or repackage that content. I will also resist the temptation to debate theological issues.

Instead, I will present a helpful framework for living the Christian life. I will make the case for *awareness* and *understanding* as starting points for developing the right *perspectives*. I will show the importance of willful and sincere *obedience*, and the role of the Holy Spirit, in producing good fruit and good works in our lives. I will remind you that God's promises are infinitely better than anything this world can offer. Along the way, I will get in your face a little bit (okay, maybe a lot) about whether you actually believe what you say you believe.

I'm writing this book to share the experiences I've had that validate the truth and wisdom of Scripture, and to challenge you to embrace a journey of understanding the *brokenness* of the world, God's amazing *grace*, and the power of the *Holy Spirit*. I want you to fall more in love with Jesus, joyfully obey his teaching, and live in the hope of his promises. My prayer is that you will embrace the life God has created you for, for your good and for his glory. A life centered on anything other than Jesus will never satisfy in any lasting or meaningful way. Finally, I want you to become so overwhelmed by God's grace that you are actively sharing the gospel with your life.

WHO IS THIS GUY?

Like anyone else, I am the sum of the decisions I've made and the experiences I've had throughout my life. You might not expect

a guy like me to be the author of a book like this. I'm not a pastor or even a pastor's kid. I didn't grow up disadvantaged or experience spectacular tragedy. I haven't struggled with alcohol, drugs, or pornography. But in my unremarkable life I've experienced a remarkable journey into a deep understanding of the Christian faith, and of how obedience unlocks the fulfillment of our God-given purpose in life.

I was born in the hippie generation and grew up in the '80s. By the time I was twenty-seven years old I reached the top of the cultural ladder of success. My life has been framed by Jesus, my marriage, international business, student ministry, travel, three-plus years in seminary (I didn't finish), and then almost five years in Uganda. I am a reformed skeptic who loves apologetics and has been wonderfully "wrecked" by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

I know how the blind beggar must have felt when he was asked to explain his healing and replied, "One thing I do know, I was blind and now I see" (John 9:25). I'm an unashamedly emotional guy when it comes to talking about God's grace. Our students here in Uganda refer to me as "the president of the crying club" because I often shed tears when preaching on Sunday mornings. (As a side note, let it be known that about half the students are also now card-carrying members of that club.)

More than twenty-four years ago I married the most beautiful girl I've ever seen, and we have enjoyed a wonderful partnership. Danlyn also happens to be the strongest person I know. She has faced more physical pain and difficulty than any person ever should, but it has only served to grow her hope in Christ (and mine). Because of her physical limitations we don't have children, but God used that to push us toward student ministry almost twenty years ago. Nothing has influenced our lives more than the privilege of leading students to know Jesus and the gospel. Many of the students we have led are

like members of our family. We call them our “kids” even though now they are in their late twenties and early thirties.

I grew up in the greatest-ever decade for just about everything, so I feel a fondness for the culture of that era, which provided so many good moments for me and my friends. As a result, you will have to endure some references you may or may not be familiar with, many of them from movies you may consider inappropriate. I will say, in advance, you’re probably correct. In my defense, I grew up watching these movies on the Superstation, which did a good job in editing out the questionable content.

Paul wrote, “Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things” (Philippians 3:7-8). I identify with Paul’s story, and specifically with his perspective on his previous excesses and successes. This is the perspective God has used to grow me, and the context I am sharing with you from.

So that’s who “this guy” is. Now, what about you?

WHO ARE YOU?

I have spent the last twenty years talking with a great variety of people around the world about the gospel. Most of you reading this probably share a lot in common with those I’ve encountered in my travels when it comes to your questions and struggles about following Jesus.

If you’ve ever heard the gospel, you fit into one of four categories described by Jesus in the Parable of the Sower. From that parable, Jesus explained how people were responding in different ways to his kingdom message. He described a farmer who went out to sow his seed and the four places where the seed landed. After Jesus told the parable, the disciples came to him a bit confused. Graciously, Jesus explained the parable to them:

Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown (Matthew 13:18-23).

How have you responded to the message of Jesus? Are you one of those who has heard the message but has not spent much time trying to understand (seed along the path)? Maybe you're one of those who rejoice because the gospel makes so much sense, but then the demands of life take higher priority and push God to the bottom of the list (seed on rocky ground). Or maybe you fall into the third category, where you allow worry, along with the pursuit of wealth and comfort, to distract you from following Jesus (seed among thorns).

Likely you have struggled with life's biggest questions, about how the world began, life's meaning, morality, and where we spend eternity. As a result, maybe you have developed a worldview in which you are confident. Even so, you have a deep need to be fully known and fully loved. Perhaps, you seek personal benefit, sometimes at a great cost, more than you fear consequences. Likely you are sometimes willing to make unwise decisions, and face obvious dangers, if

you think the results will make you happy. Maybe your goals are misaligned because of a misunderstanding of your true needs.

Am I getting close?

In regard to your Christian faith, maybe you avoid the hard teachings in Scripture, or resist applying them to your life, even when you agree with them. Because of this, there's a constant tension between your disobedience and your desire for faithfulness. Maybe you've been disappointed, or angry with God. There has likely been a church, a professing Christian, or someone you love, who has deeply hurt you, and in doing so has significantly affected how you relate to the gospel. I could go on, but I think you get the point.

I'm writing to Christians who have long wanted to experience the fullness of the life Jesus has promised, but are exhausted from trying, or are disappointed with the results of their efforts. I hope you are willing to be honest about what you believe and why you believe what you believe. I am writing to those who have not yet arrived at a mature, fruit-bearing faith and to anyone who desires a deeply personal, transformational relationship with God.

IN THE FRONT ROW

In 2019, I had the opportunity to speak at a donor event in Santa Barbara, California. After my presentation, a number of attendees waited to speak with me, to hear more about what I'd shared and to ask questions. Given the battle we are in for the hearts and minds of the next generation in Uganda, the first question was simply, "What's it like being on the front lines?" Without hesitation, my instinctive response was, "I honestly don't feel like I'm on the front lines. It feels more like being in the front row."

I'd never thought about it in those terms prior to that moment, but it got me thinking about the similarities between the first-century setting in which Jesus and his followers did ministry, and the village setting we are working in here in Uganda. What would it have

been like to watch the first disciples proclaim the gospel in a materially disadvantaged, honor/shame culture? What did Jesus direct his closest followers to do? Well, God and his people are doing similar things, in a similar setting, here in Uganda. I've had the best seat in the house to watch the story unfold.

It's a bit frustrating that I had to move to a developing country, and face the challenges of sharing Christ here, to understand how the first-century Christians did ministry and grew in their faith. They walked away from everything they had known. They faced intense persecution. They embraced the radical, countercultural teaching of a certain Jewish rabbi. And then they were willing to die for the gospel. Why?

Because they saw a man tortured and killed, and then rise from the dead.

Even today there are people willing to die for what they believe, but that's very different from what motivated the first disciples. They were willing to die for what they *saw, understood, and experienced*. With that confidence they changed the world. They preached about the risen Christ and, more importantly, validated his teaching by how they lived. Their approach then should inform our approach today, no matter the culture.

The parallels between the culture in the villages of Uganda and the culture of the first century offer an opportunity to build an approach based on the ways of Paul, Peter, James, and all the foundational heroes of the Christian faith. If our goal is to have an unshakable faith, full of a joy that challenges and inspires others, we should already be learning from the first Christians, the group with the strongest faith ever recorded.

CHRISTIANS, CULTURE, AND CONTEXT

In his letter to the church in Galatia, Paul was frustrated with the followers there who had retreated back to legalism. Subsequently, they were losing the joy of God in their lives. Many of the problems

Paul was addressing are the same issues we face now. If Paul were alive today he could probably repurpose many of his pastoral letters and send them directly to us. Sadly, there is nothing groundbreaking about saying the Western church today is becoming less joyful, more apathetic, and less like the Jesus who gave his life for it.

In most cultures, Christians are nearly indistinguishable from nonbelievers. This is shocking! How can it be? How can people be saved by grace, have an eternal hope, and then fail to live with infectious joy and contentment? Much like the first-century church in Corinth, the modern church is lacking maturity, is going backwards, and is known for jealousy, quarreling, and worldly pursuits.² All of this makes it difficult for nonbelievers to come to Christ.

It's not hard to see what's happening. Leave it to Jesus followers to take the most attractive person in the history of the world and make him unattractive! As a result, the number of people identifying as religiously unaffiliated continues to grow.³ For many years, there has been a broad sense that things are going in the wrong direction, and there needs to be some real change with the way Christians interact with the broken world around them.

In his book *Something Needs to Change*, David Platt made his case for how Christians should address the urgent needs of humanity. In his book *Letters to the Church*, Francis Chan wrote about how Jesus' followers should be the church in the way Scripture commands. In his book *Love Does*, Bob Goff talked about how believers should follow the teachings of Jesus by actively and intentionally loving one another. Despite these wonderful books and the dozens of other similar ones, the changes many say are needed are elusive.

How is this possible? It's not because the books aren't well written or the authors aren't credible. It's not because we don't know what to do or don't understand why it's important. It's not even for a lack of genuine effort! Whatever the reasons, the calls to action have not produced meaningful change.

At first glance, the COVID-19 pandemic and the events surrounding the death of George Floyd seemed to be the catalysts for the division, anger, and unrest we've seen in America over the last few years. But long before these major events of 2020, people all over the world were becoming less and less open-minded, and less and less able to consider opposing viewpoints. Useful discussion and healthy debate have become relics of the past. All of us, to varying degrees, have gravitated toward confirmation bias.

Confirmation bias has to do with only giving attention to information that reinforces what you already believe. These days it's hard to find people who watch both Fox News and CNN, or who read both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Because of the groundbreaking documentary *The Social Dilemma*, we now know that social media and tech companies are programming us to become more radical about what we already believe. The reason? Money. More radical content leads to more emotional reactions, which leads to more online attention, which leads to more advertising dollars. If that doesn't scare you, it should.

Unfortunately, this is not limited to social issues and politics. Confirmation bias is also alive and well throughout the global community of professing Christians. The ancient Israelites constantly tried to make God into a god they could be more comfortable with. In the same way, we tend to read Scripture with an interpretation of convenience. Like the ancient Jews, we often abandon the one true God for false gods that fit with what we want to be true. Christians, in many cases, have adopted attitudes of platitudes like "follow your heart" or "you just do you."

All of this is further complicated by a postmodern culture that views absolute truth as an offensive concept, and worse, preaches that truth is relative. Any truth that would challenge one's worldview or beliefs is exchanged for a more convenient version of the "truth."



Instead of looking to Scripture, people seek advice from those

who will validate the choices they've already made. We listen to those who support their ideas, no matter how ignorant, foolish, or dangerous they might be. Social media only makes this worse. The great news is that truth is not, in any way, relative. It is not subjective. It can be objectively tested.

I mentioned earlier that I'm a reformed skeptic. It was hard for me to maintain that skepticism, however, when I evaluated the claims of Jesus through objective lenses. My experiences in Uganda have confirmed for me that the propositions of Scripture are true, and that only the cross of Christ brings meaning to who we are. Only the truths of Scripture explain the suffering and brokenness in the world, and provide the opportunity to know true joy, justice, and peace. There is nothing else in the world that comes close!

So this is the context in which I am writing: a post-modern, post-truth, culture of criticism and self-righteousness; a world reluctant to objectively evaluate truth, out of fear of hurting feelings or offending someone.

As for me, I'm not afraid of offending anyone with this effort. Nor am I worried about the criticism that will inevitably come with writing a book like this, in our current culture. You may find this book too philosophical, or maybe you'll disagree with my theology. That's okay. Maybe you'll have strong opinions about the work I've done with students or the work I've done in Uganda. That's your prerogative. But if you are willing to set aside your personal biases for a short time, and willing to be open to the truth of God as told through some of my experiences, you might just find yourself on a path toward a greater joy, a joy that only comes from God.



Something to Remember: Context is important, always. For God to use this book as an instrument of change in your life, it's important to start our journey with you understanding me, understanding yourself, and understanding what to expect on the pages ahead.

Now that you've been introduced to who I am, why I took the time to write this book, and the setting in which I'm sharing my journey to unexpected joy, let's consider the roles that *awareness*, *understanding*, and *perspective* have in the development of unshakable faith and, eventually, extraordinary joy.