

# Values-Based Living

*Choosing the direction of your life instead of reacting only to thoughts and emotions*

Human emotions are important. They provide information, signal needs, and help us understand ourselves and others.

But emotions are not always reliable guides for decision-making.

When people are anxious, hurt, angry, ashamed, overwhelmed, or uncertain, emotions often push them toward avoidance, impulsive reactions, shutting down, people-pleasing, procrastination, withdrawal, or short-term relief instead of long-term growth.

A values-based life means learning to make choices based not only on how you feel in the moment, but also on who you want to be and the kind of life you want to build.

## Values Are Like a Compass

Values are like a compass direction — they help guide us toward the kind of person we want to be, even during difficult moments.

Thoughts, emotions, fears, urges, and old patterns can easily pull us away from that direction. Because of this, living a values-based life requires awareness.

We have to learn how to notice when the mind and emotions are trying to take over and develop enough awareness and skill to tolerate discomfort in service of our greater wellbeing and deeper values.

## Emotion-Based Living

Emotion-based living often sounds like:

- “I don’t feel motivated.”
- “I’m too anxious.”
- “I’ll do it when I feel ready.”
- “I don’t want to feel uncomfortable.”

- “I was angry, so I reacted.”
- “I felt rejected, so I pulled away.”

The problem is that emotions constantly change.

If emotions fully control behavior, life can become increasingly reactive, fear-driven, avoidant, disconnected from long-term goals, and emotionally exhausting.

## Values-Based Living

Values-based living asks:

*“Who do I want to be in this moment?”*

Values are not goals you complete. They are ongoing directions that guide behavior.

- honesty
- courage
- compassion
- growth
- integrity
- connection
- curiosity
- responsibility
- authenticity
- balance

A values-based decision may still feel uncomfortable.

- speaking honestly while anxious
- setting boundaries while feeling guilty

- apologizing when pride wants to defend
- going to therapy while afraid
- staying calm during conflict while angry
- taking action despite self-doubt
- resting even when productivity pressure appears

The emotion is still present. The difference is that the emotion is no longer fully in control.

## **A Meaningful Life Is Often Less Comfortable**

Ironically, a values-driven life is often not the easiest path.

It may involve vulnerability, uncertainty, grief, courage, responsibility, difficult conversations, emotional exposure, and growth.

In many ways, a meaningful life can actually feel more uncomfortable than a highly avoidant life.

But it is also often far more authentic, connected, fulfilling, purposeful, and emotionally free.

Over time, people can learn that discomfort itself is not dangerous.

As we practice tolerating difficult thoughts, emotions, and experiences, we become more psychologically flexible and less controlled by fear, avoidance, or immediate emotional reactions.

## **Questions That Can Help**

- What kind of person do I want to be right now?
- What action would align with my values?
- If fear was not making this decision, what might I choose?
- What would future me be proud of?
- Am I moving toward the life I want — or away from discomfort?

## **Final Thought**

The goal of life is not to become comfortable all the time.

The goal is to build a life that feels meaningful enough that discomfort no longer has to be in charge.

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