



J O H A N N
H A R I

New York Times Bestselling
author of *Chasing The Scream*

LOST CONNECTIONS

UNCOVERING
THE REAL
CAUSES OF
DEPRESSION –
AND THE
UNEXPECTED
SOLUTIONS



B L O O M S B U R Y

CHAPTER 8

Cause Three: Disconnection from

Meaningful Values

When I was in my late twenties, I got really fat. It was partly a side effect of antidepressants, and partly a side effect of fried chicken. I could still, from memory, talk you through the relative merits of all the fried chicken shops in East London that were the staples of my diet, from Chicken Cottage to Tennessee Fried Chicken (with its logo of a smiling cartoon chicken holding a bucket of fried chicken legs: who knew cannibalism could be an effective marketing tool?). My own favorite was the brilliantly named Chicken Chicken Chicken. Their hot wings were, to me, the Mona Lisa of grease.

One Christmas Eve, I went to my local branch of Kentucky Fried Chicken, and one of the staff behind the counter saw me approaching and beamed. “Johann!” he said. “We have something for you!” The other staff turned and looked at me expectantly. From somewhere behind the grill and the grizzle, he took out a Christmas card. I was forced, by their expectant smiles, to open it in front of them. “To our best customer,” it said, next to personal messages from every member of the staff.

I never ate at KFC again.

Most of us know there is something wrong with our physical diets. We aren't all gold medalists in the consumption of lard like I was, but more and



more of us are eating the wrong things, and it is making us physically sick.

As I investigated depression and anxiety, I began to learn something similar is happening to our values—and it is making many of us emotionally sick.

This was discovered by an American psychologist named Tim Kasser—so I went to see him, to learn his story.

As a little boy, Tim arrived in the middle of a long stretch of swampland and open beaches. His dad worked as a manager at an insurance company, and in the early 1970s, he was posted to a place called Pinellas County, on the west coast of Florida. The area was mostly undeveloped and had plenty of big, broad outdoor spaces for a kid to play—but this county soon became the fastest-growing in the entire United States, and it was about to be transformed in front of Tim's eyes. “By the time I left Florida,” he told me, “it was a completely different physical environment. You couldn't drive along the beach roads anymore and see the water, because it was all condos and high-rises. Areas that had been open land with alligators and rattlesnakes ... [became] subdivision after subdivision after shopping mall.”

Tim was drawn to the shopping malls that replaced the beaches and

marshes, like all the other kids he knew. There, he would play Asteroids and Space Invaders for hours. He soon found himself longing for stuff—the toys he saw in ads.

It sounds like Edgware, where I am from. I was eight or nine when its shopping mall—the Broadwalk Centre—opened, and I remember wandering around its bright storefronts and gazing at the things I wanted to buy in a thrilled trance. I obsessively coveted the green plastic toy of Castle Grayskull, the fortress where the cartoon character He-Man lived, and Care-a-Lot, the home in the clouds of some animated creatures called the Care Bears. One Christmas, my mother missed my hints and failed to buy me Care-a-Lot, and I was crestfallen for months. I ached and pined for that lump of plastic.

Like most kids at the time, I spent at least three hours a day watching TV—usually more—and whole days would pass in the summer when my only break from television would be to go to the Broadwalk Centre and back again. I don't remember anyone ever telling me this explicitly, but it seemed to me then that happiness meant being able to buy lots of the things on display there. I think my nine-year-old self, if you had asked him what it meant to be happy, would have said: somebody who could walk through the Broadwalk Centre and buy whatever he wanted. I would ask my dad how

much each famous person I saw on television earned, and he would guess, and we would both marvel at what we would do with the money. It was a little bonding ritual, over a fantasy of spending.

I asked Tim if, in Pinellas County where he grew up, he ever heard anyone talking about a different way of valuing things, beyond the idea that happiness came from getting and possessing stuff. “Well—I think—not growing up. No,” he said. In Edgware, there must have been people who acted on different values, but I don’t think I ever saw them.

When Tim was a teenager, [1](#) his swim coach moved away one summer and gave him a small record collection, and it included albums by John Lennon and Bob Dylan. As he listened to them, he realized they seemed to be expressing something he didn’t really hear anywhere else. He began to wonder if there were hints of a different way to live lying in their lyrics, but he couldn’t find anyone to discuss it with.

It was only when Tim went to study at Vanderbilt University, a very conservative college in the South, at the height of the Reagan years, that it occurred to him—slowly—to think more deeply about this. In 1984, he voted for Ronald Reagan, but he was starting to think a lot about the question of authenticity. “I was stumbling around,” he told me. “I think I was questioning just about everything. I wasn’t just questioning these

values. I was questioning lots about myself, I was questioning lots about the nature of reality and the values of society.” He feels like there were piñatas all around him and he was hitting chaotically at them all. He added: “I think I went through that phase for a long time, to be honest.”

When he went to graduate school, he started to read a lot about psychology. It was around this time that Tim realized something odd. For thousands of years, philosophers² had been suggesting that if you overvalue money and possessions, or if you think about life mainly in terms of how you look to other people, you will be unhappy—that the values of Pinellas County and Edgware were, in some deep sense, mistaken. It had been talked about a lot, by some of the finest minds who ever lived, and



Tim thought it might be true. But nobody had ever conducted a scientific investigation to see whether all these philosophers were right.

This realization is what launched him on a project that he was going to pursue for the next twenty-five years. It led him to discover subtle evidence about why we feel the way we do—and why it is getting worse.

It all started in grad school, with a simple survey.

Tim came up with a way of measuring how much a person really values getting things and having money compared to other values, like spending

time with their family or trying to make the world a better place. He called it the Aspiration [Index,3](#) and it is pretty straightforward. You ask people how much they agree with statements such as “It is important to have expensive possessions” and how much they agree with very different statements such as “It is important to make the world a better place for others.” You can then calculate their values.

At the same time, you can ask people lots of other questions—and one of them is whether they are unhappy or if they are suffering (or have suffered) from depression or anxiety. Then—as a first step—you see if they match.

Tim’s first tentative piece of research was to give this survey to 316 students. When the results came back [4](#) and were all calculated out, Tim was struck by the results: materialistic people, who think happiness comes from accumulating stuff and a superior status, had much higher levels of depression and anxiety.

This was, he knew, just a primitive first shot in the dark. So Tim’s next step was—as part of a larger study—to get a clinical psychologist to assess 140 eighteen-year-olds in depth, calculating where they were on the Aspiration Index and if they were depressed or anxious. When the results were added up, they were the same: the more the kids valued getting [things5](#)

and being seen to have things, the more likely they were to be suffering from depression and anxiety.

Was this something that happened only with young people? To find out, Tim measured one hundred citizens of Rochester in upstate New York, who



came from a range of age groups and economic backgrounds. The result was the same.

But how could he figure out what was really happening—and why?

Tim's next step was to conduct a more detailed study, to track how these values affect you over time. He got 192 students to keep a detailed mood diary in which, twice a day, they had to record how much they were feeling nine different emotions, such as happiness or anger, and how much they were experiencing any of nine physical symptoms, such as backache. When he calculated out the results, he found—again—higher depression among the materialistic students; but there was a result more important than that. It really did seem that materialistic people were having a worse time, day by day, on all sorts of fronts. They felt sicker, and they were angrier.

“Something about a strong desire for [materialistic](#) pursuits,” he was starting to believe, “actually affected the participants’ day-to-day lives, and decreased the quality of their daily experience.” They experienced less joy,

and more despair.

Why would this be? What could be happening here? Ever since the 1960s, psychologists have known that there are two different ways you can motivate yourself to get out of bed in the morning. The first are called *intrinsic* motives⁷—they are the things you do purely because you value them in and of themselves, not because of anything you get out of them. When a kid plays, she’s acting totally on intrinsic motives—she’s doing it because it gives her joy. The other day, I asked my friend’s five-year-old son why he was playing. “Because I love it,” he said. Then he scrunched up his face and said “You’re silly!” and ran off, pretending to be Batman. These intrinsic motivations persist all through our lives, long after childhood.

At the same time, there’s a rival set of values, ⁸ which are called *extrinsic* motives. They’re the things you do not because you actually want to do them, but because you’ll get something in return—whether it’s money, or admiration, or sex, or superior status. Joe, who you met two chapters ago, went to work every day in the paint shop for purely extrinsic reasons—he hated the job, but he needed to be able to pay the rent, buy the Oxy that would numb his way through the day, and have the car and clothes that he thought made people respect him. We all have some motives like that.

Imagine you play the piano. If you play it for yourself because you love it, then you are being driven to do it by intrinsic values. If you play in a dive bar you hate, just to make enough cash to ensure you don't get thrown out of your apartment, then you are being driven to do it by extrinsic values. These rival sets of values exist in all of us. Nobody is driven totally by one or the other.

Tim began to wonder if looking into this conflict more deeply could reveal something important. So he started to study a group of two hundred people in detail over time. He got them to lay out their goals for the future. He then figured out with them if these were extrinsic goals—like getting a promotion, or a bigger apartment—or intrinsic goals, like being a better friend or a more loving son or a better piano player. And then he got them to keep a detailed mood diary.

What he wanted to know was—Does achieving extrinsic goals make you happy? And how does that compare to achieving intrinsic goals?

The results, when he calculated them out, [9](#) were quite startling. People who achieved their extrinsic goals didn't experience *any* increase in day-to-day happiness—none. They spent a huge amount of energy chasing these goals, but when they fulfilled them, they felt the same as they had at the start. Your promotion? Your fancy car? The new iPhone? The expensive

necklace? They won't improve your happiness even one inch.

But people who achieved their intrinsic goals *did* become significantly happier, and less depressed and anxious. You could track the movement. As they worked at it and felt they became (for example) a better friend—not because they wanted anything out of it but because they felt it was a good thing to do—they became more satisfied with life. Being a better dad? Dancing for the sheer joy of it? Helping another person, just because it's the right thing to do? They do significantly boost your happiness.

Yet most of us, most of the time, spend our time chasing extrinsic goals—the very thing that will give us nothing. Our whole culture is set up to get us to think this way. Get the right grades. Get the best-paying job. Rise through the ranks. Display your earnings through clothes and cars. That's how to make yourself feel good.



What Tim had discovered is that the message our culture is telling us about how to have a decent and satisfying life, virtually all the time, is not true. The more this was studied, the clearer it became. Twenty-two different studies [have,10](#) in the years since, found that the more materialistic and extrinsically motivated you become, the more depressed you will be.

Twelve different studies found that the more materialistic and extrinsically motivated you become, the more anxious you will be. Similar studies, inspired by Tim's work and using similar techniques, have now been carried out in Britain, Denmark, Germany, India, South Korea, Russia, Romania, Australia, and Canada—and the results, all over the world, keep coming back the same.

Just as we have shifted en masse from eating food to eating junk food, Tim has discovered—in effect—that we have shifted from having meaningful values to having junk values. All this mass-produced fried chicken looks like food, and it appeals to the part of us that evolved to need food; yet it doesn't give us what we need from food—nutrition. Instead, it fills us with toxins.

In the same way, all these materialistic values, telling us to spend our way to happiness, look like real values; they appeal to the part of us that has evolved to need some basic principles to guide us through life; yet they don't give us what we need from values—a path to a satisfying life. Instead, they fill us with psychological toxins. Junk food is distorting our bodies.

Junk values are distorting our minds.

Materialism is KFC for the soul.

When Tim studied this in greater depth, he was able to identify at least four

key reasons why junk values are making us feel so bad.

The first is that thinking extrinsically poisons your relationships with other people. He teamed up again with another professor, [Richard Ryan](#)¹¹

who had been an ally from the start—to study two hundred people in depth, and they found that the more materialistic you become, the shorter your



relationships will be, and the worse their quality will be. If you value people for how they look, or how they impress other people, it's easy to see that you'll be happy to dump them if someone hotter or more impressive comes along. And at the same time, if all you're interested in is the surface of another person, it's easy to see why you'll be less rewarding to be around, and they'll be more likely to dump you, too. You will have fewer friends and connections, [12 and they won't](#) last as long.

Their second finding relates to another change that happens as you become more driven by junk values. Let's go back to the example of playing the piano. Every day, Tim spends at least half an hour playing the piano and singing, often with his kids. He does it for no reason except that he loves it—it makes him, on a good day, feel satisfied, and joyful. He feels his ego dissolve, and he is purely present in the moment. There's strong scientific

evidence that we all get most pleasure from what are called “flow states” [13](#) like this—moments when we simply lose ourselves doing something we love and are carried along in the moment. They’re proof we can maintain the pure intrinsic motivation that a child feels when she is playing.

But when Tim studied highly materialistic people, he discovered they experience significantly fewer flow states [14](#) than the rest of us. Why would that be?

He seems to have found an explanation. Imagine if, when Tim was playing the piano every day, he kept thinking: Am I the best piano player in Illinois? Are people going to applaud this performance? Am I going to get paid for this? How much? Suddenly his joy would shrivel up like a salted snail. Instead of his ego dissolving, his ego would be aggravated and jabbed and poked.

That is what your head starts to look like when you become more materialistic. If you are doing something not for itself but to achieve an effect, you can’t relax into the pleasure of a moment. You are constantly monitoring yourself. Your ego will shriek like an alarm you can’t shut off.



This leads to a third reason why junk values make you feel so bad. When you are extremely materialistic, Tim said to me, “you’ve always kind of got

to be wondering about yourself—how are people judging you?” It forces you to “focus on other people’s opinions of you, and their praise of you—and then you’re kind of locked into having to worry what other people think about you, and if other people are going to give you those rewards that you want. That’s a heavy load to bear, instead of walking around doing what it is you’re interested in doing, or being around people who love you just for who you are.”

If “your self-esteem, your sense of self-worth, is contingent upon how much money you’ve got, or what your clothes are like, or how big your house is,” you are forced into constant external comparisons, Tim says.

“There’s always somebody who’s got a nicer house or better clothes or more money.” Even if you’re the richest person in the world, how long will that last? Materialism leaves you constantly vulnerable to a world beyond your control.

And then, he says, there is a crucial fourth reason. It’s worth pausing on this one, because I think it’s the most important.

All of us have certain innate needs—to feel connected, to feel valued, to feel secure, to feel we make a difference in the world, to have autonomy, to feel we’re good at something. Materialistic people, he believes, are less happy—because they are chasing a way of life that does a bad [job](#) of

meeting these needs.

What you really need are connections. But what you are *told* you need, in our culture, is stuff and a superior status, and in the gap between those two signals—from yourself and from society—depression and anxiety will grow as your real needs go unmet.

You have to picture all the values that guide why you do things in your life, Tim said, as being like a pie. “Each value” you have, he explained, “is like a slice of that [pie.16](#) So you’ve got your spirituality slice, and your family slice, and your money slice, and your hedonism slice. We’ve all got all the slices.” When you become obsessed with materialism and status, that slice gets bigger. And “the bigger one slice gets, the smaller other slices



have to get.” So if you become fixated on getting stuff and a superior status, the parts of the pie that care about tending to your relationships, or finding meaning, or making the world better have to shrink, to make way.

“On Friday at four, I can stay [in my office] and work more—or I can go home and play with my kids,” he told me. “I can’t do both. It’s one or the other. If my materialistic values are bigger, I’m going to stay and work. If my family values are bigger, I’m going to go home and play with my kids.”

It's not that materialistic people don't care about their kids—but “as the materialistic values get bigger, other values are necessarily going to be crowded out,” he says, even if you tell yourself they won't.

And the pressure, in our culture, runs overwhelmingly one way—spend more; work more. We live under a system, Tim says, that constantly “distracts us from what's really good about life.” We are being propagandized to live in a way that doesn't meet our basic psychological needs—so we are left with a permanent, puzzling sense of dissatisfaction. For millennia, humans have talked about something called the Golden Rule. It's the idea that you should do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Tim, I think, has discovered something we should call the I-Want-Golden-Things Rule. [17](#) The more you think life is about having stuff and superiority and showing it off, the more unhappy, and the more depressed and anxious, you will be.

But why would human beings turn, so dramatically, to something that made us less happy and more depressed? Isn't it implausible that we would do something so irrational? In the later phase of his research, Tim began to dig into the question.

Nobody's values are totally fixed. Your level of junk values, Tim discovered by following people in his studies, can change over your

lifetime. You can become more materialistic, and more unhappy; or you can become less materialistic, and less unhappy. So we shouldn't be asking, Tim believes, "Who is materialistic?" We should be asking: "*When* are people materialistic?" Tim wanted to know: What causes the variation? There's an experiment, by a different group of social scientists, that gives us one early [clue.18](#) In 1978, two Canadian social scientists got a bunch of four- and five-year-old kids and divided them into two groups. The first group was shown no commercials. The second group was shown two commercials for a particular toy. Then they offered these four- or five-year-old kids a choice. They told them: You have to choose, now, to play with one of these two boys here. You can play with this little boy who has the toy from the commercials—but we have to warn you, he's not a nice boy. He's mean. Or you can play with a boy who doesn't have the toy, but who is really nice.

If they had seen the commercial for the toy, the kids mostly chose to play with the mean boy with the toy. If they hadn't seen the commercial, they mostly chose to play with the nice boy who had no toys.

In other words, the advertisements led them to choose an inferior human connection over a superior human connection—because they'd been primed to think that a lump of plastic is what really matters.

Two commercials—just two—did that. Today, every person sees way more advertising messages than that in an average morning. More eighteen-month-olds can recognize the McDonald's [M19](#) than know their own surname. By the time an average child is thirty-six months old, [20 she already](#)

knows a hundred brand logos.

Tim suspected that advertising plays a key role in why we are, every day, choosing a value system that makes us feel worse. So with another social scientist named Jean Twenge, [21](#) he tracked the percentage of total U.S. national wealth that's spent on advertising, from 1976 to 2003—and he discovered that the more money is spent on ads, the more materialistic teenagers become.

A few years ago, an advertising agency head named Nancy Shalek [22](#) explained approvingly: “Advertising at its best is making people feel that without their product, you're a loser. Kids are very sensitive to that ... You open up emotional vulnerabilities, and it's very easy to do with kids because they're the most emotionally vulnerable.”

This sounds harsh, until you think through the logic. Imagine if I watched an ad and it told me—Johann, you're fine how you are. You look good. You smell good. You're likable. People want to be around you. You've got enough stuff now. You don't need any more. Enjoy life.

That would—from the perspective of the advertising [industry23](#)—be the worst ad in human history, because I wouldn't want to go out shopping, or lunge at my laptop to spend, or do any of the other things that feed my junk values. It would make me want to pursue my intrinsic values—which involve a whole lot less spending, and a whole lot more happiness.

When they talk among themselves, advertising people have been admitting since the 1920s that their job is to make people feel inadequate—and then offer their product as the solution to the sense of inadequacy they have created. Ads are the ultimate frenemy—they're always saying: Oh babe, *I* want you to look/smell/feel great; it makes me so sad that that at the moment you're ugly/stinking/miserable; here's this thing that will make you into the person you and I really want you to be. Oh, did I mention you have to pay a few bucks? I just want you to be the person you deserve to be. Isn't that worth a few dollars? You're worth it.

This logic radiates out through the culture, and we start to impose it on each other, even when ads aren't there. Why did I, as a child, crave Nike air-pumps, even though I was as likely to play basketball as I was to go to the moon? It was partly because of the ads—but mostly because the ads created a group dynamic among everyone I knew. It created a marker of status, that we then policed. As adults, we do the same, only in slightly

more subtle ways.

This system trains us, Tim says, to feel “there’s never enough. When you’re focused on money and status and possessions, consumer society is always telling you more, more, more, more. Capitalism is always telling you more, more, more. Your boss is telling you work more, work more, work more. You internalize that and you think: Oh, I got to work more, because my self depends on my status and my achievement. You internalize that. It’s a kind of form of internalized oppression.”

He believes it also explains why junk values lead to such an increase in anxiety. “You’re always thinking—Are they going to reward me? Does the person love me for who I am, or for my handbag? Am I going to be able to climb the ladder of success?” he said. You are hollow, and exist only in other people’s reflections. “That’s going to be anxiety-provoking.”



We are all vulnerable to this, he believes. “The way I understand the intrinsic values,” [24](#) Tim told me, is that they “are a fundamental part of what we are as humans, but they’re fragile. It’s easy to distract us from them ... You give people social models of consumerism ... and they move in an extrinsic way.” The desire to find meaningful intrinsic values is “there, it’s a powerful part of who we are, but it’s not hard to distract us.” And we have

an economic system built around doing precisely that.

As I sat with Tim, discussing all this for hours, I kept thinking of a middle-class married couple who live in a nice semidetached house in the suburbs in Edgware, where we grew up. They are close to me; I have known them all my life; I love them.

If you peeked through their window, you'd think they have everything you need for happiness—each other, two kids, a good home, all the consumer goods we're told to buy. Both of them work really hard at jobs they have little interest in, so that they can earn money, and with the money they earn, they buy the things that we have learned from television will make us happy—clothes and cars, gadgets and status symbols. They display these things to people they know on social media, and they get lots of likes and comments like “OMG—so jealous!” After the brief buzz that comes from displaying their goods, they usually find they become dissatisfied and down again. They are puzzled by this, and they often assume it's because they didn't buy the right thing. So they work harder, and they buy more goods, display them through their devices, feel the buzz, and then slump back to where they started.

They both seem to me to be depressed. They alternate between being blank, or angry, or engaging in compulsive behaviors. She had a drug

problem for a long time, although not anymore; he gambles online at least two hours a day. They are furious a lot of the time, at each other, at their children, at their colleagues, and, diffusely, at the world—at anyone else on the road when they are driving, for example, who they scream and swear at. They have a sense of anxiety they can't shake off, and they often attach it to things outside them—she obsessively monitors where her teenage son is at



any moment, and is afraid all the time that he will be a victim of crime or terrorism.

This couple has no vocabulary to understand why they feel so bad. They are doing what the culture has been priming them to do since we were infants—they are working hard and buying the right things, the expensive things. They are every advertising slogan made flesh.

Like the kids in the sandbox, they have been primed to lunge for objects and ignore the prospect of interaction with the people around them.

I saw now they aren't just suffering from the absence of something, such as meaningful work, or community. They are also suffering from the *presence* of something—an incorrect set of values telling them to seek happiness in all the wrong places, and to ignore the potential human connections that are right in front of them.

When Tim discovered all these facts, it didn't just guide his scientific work. He began to move toward a life that made it possible for him to live consistent with his own findings—to go back, in a sense, to something more like the beach he had discovered joyfully in Florida as a kid. “You’ve got to pull yourself out of the materialistic environments—the environments that are reinforcing the materialistic values,” he says, because they cripple your internal satisfactions. And then, he says, to make that sustainable, you have to “replace them with actions that are going to provide those intrinsic satisfactions, [and] encourage those intrinsic goals.”

So, with his wife and his two sons, he moved to a farmhouse on ten acres of land in Illinois, where they live with a donkey and a herd of goats. They have a small TV in the basement, but it isn't connected to any stations or to cable—it's just to watch old movies on sometimes. They only recently got the Internet (against his protestations), and they don't use it much. He works part time, and so does his wife, “so we could spend more time with our kids, and be in the garden more and do volunteer work and do activism work and I could write more”—all the things that give them intrinsic satisfaction. “We play a lot of games. We play a lot of music. We have a lot of family conversations.” They sing together.

Where they live in western Illinois is “not the most exciting place in the

world,” Tim says, “but I have ten acres of land, I have a twelve-minute commute with one flashing light and three stop signs on my way to my [office,25 and we afford](#) that on one [combined full-time] salary.”

I ask him if he had withdrawal symptoms from the materialistic world we were both immersed in for so long. “Never,” he says right away. “People ask me that: “Don’t you miss this? Don’t you wish you had that?” No, I don’t, because [I am] never exposed to the messages telling me that I should want it ... I don’t expose myself to those things, so—no, I don’t have that.”

One of his proudest moments was when one of his sons came home one day and said: “Dad, some kids at school are making fun of my sneakers.”

They were not a brand name, or shiny-new. “Oh, what’d you say to them?”

Tim asked. His son explained he looked at them and said: “Why do you care?” He was nonplussed—he could see that what they valued was empty, and absurd.

By living without these polluting values, Tim has, he says, discovered a secret. This way of life is more pleasurable than materialism. “It’s more fun to play these games with your kids,” he told me. “It’s more fun to do the intrinsically motivated stuff than to go to work and do stuff you don’t necessarily want to do. It’s more fun to feel like people love you for who you are—instead of lov[ing] you because you gave them a big diamond

ring.”

Most people know all this in their hearts, he believes. “At some level I really believe that most people know that intrinsic values are what’s going to give them a good life,” he told me. When you do surveys and ask people what’s most important in life, they almost always name personal growth and relationships as the top two. “But I think part of why people are depressed is that our society is not set up in order to help people live lifestyles, have jobs, participate in the economy, [or] participate in their neighborhoods” in ways that support their intrinsic values. The change Tim saw happening in Florida as a kid—when the beachfronts were transformed into shopping malls and people shifted their attention there—has happened to the whole culture.

Tim told me people can apply these insights to their own life, on their own, to some extent. “The first thing is for people to ask themselves—Am I setting up my life so I can have a chance of succeeding at my intrinsic



values? Am I hanging out with the right people, who are going to make me feel loved, as opposed to making me feel like I made it? ... Those are hard choices sometimes.” But often, he says, you will hit up against a limit in our culture. You can make improvements, but often “the solutions to the

problems that I'm interested in can't be easily solved at the individual person level, or in the therapeutic consulting room, or by a pill." They require something more—as I was going to explore later.

When I interviewed Tim, I felt he solved a mystery for me. I had been puzzled back in Philadelphia about why Joe didn't leave the job he hated at the paint company and go become a fisherman in Florida, when he knew life in the Sunshine State would make him so much happier. It seemed like a metaphor for why so many of us stay in situations we know make us miserable.

I think I see why now. Joe is constantly bombarded with messages that he shouldn't do the thing that his heart is telling him would make him feel calm and satisfied. The whole logic of our culture tells him to stay on the consumerist treadmill, to go shopping when he feels lousy, to chase junk values. He has been immersed in those messages since the day he was born. So he has been trained to distrust his own wisest instincts.

When I yelled after him "Go to Florida!" I was yelling into a hurricane of messages, and a whole value system, that is saying the exact opposite.



[CHAPTER 9](#)

[Cause Four: Disconnection from Childhood](#)