

## Joy With a Capital "J"

What immediately comes to mind when I hear the word "joy"? I think of a baby laughing – there is nothing like it!

How about the moment you and your spouse first said, "I do."?

The birth of a child or better yet, a grandchild!

Watching our dogs chase and play, or even hiking around a curve in a trail when a magnificent view is revealed!

Can you add a few? What brings you joy?

Is this what Jesus is talking about when He promises Joy? Yes, but though wonderful, "secular joy" is surface joy, here one minute, gone the next. The joy we receive through the Holy Spirit in our lives as followers of Jesus is much deeper.

Pat Russell and I were talking about this a couple of days ago, and she had a wonderful insight: She said, "Happiness is what we experience as we celebrate the achievements of self – winning a prize. Joy is what we feel when we are encompassed by a presence that transcends the self. We create happiness, but are seized by joy!"

References to joy are found throughout the Bible. Our Scripture said this morning, "This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

Romans 15:13: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Luke quotes David in Acts 2:28. He says, "You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence." Jesus teaches us in John 15:9-11, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Did you notice that joy in these verses is accompanied by hope, peace, and love? As CJ mentioned last week, it is impossible to separate hope, peace, joy and love. Think back to those things that came to mind when I asked "What brings you joy?"

A baby's laughter, the birth of a child or grandchild, taking wedding vows, watching puppies, being overwhelmed by a breathtaking view – all are accompanied by intense feelings of hope, love, commitment, or awe.

I'd love to spend time just sharing and talking about the joy we feel when things are going well. That would be great, but would not expose the true nature of the joy we receive through the Holy Spirit, the joy, that like peace, passes understanding. I hope you will explore the Psalms in the coming weeks. Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love abound in them – in all situations. Kim read that we find joy in His steadfast love, in hard times, in His provision, because He reigns, in His might, in His glory, in His justice and in our redemption. Each one of these is a study in itself. Don't worry, I'm only going to delve a bit deeper into one of them: How do we find Joy in the midst of sorrow, or during trials or burdens we are bearing?

I found an article online entitled "Can We Have Joy and Peace Daily?" It reads, "It is no surprise that we live in a wild world. Referencing Matthew 24: 6-8, it states: All across the globe there are wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, tense political elections, sickness, disease, famine, and corruption. Closer to home, we face depression, anxiety, even numbness to feelings, loss, grief, and online bullying. It seems as if no matter where we turn, we are met with difficult situations and difficult times.

I'd like to share something very personal. It's a journal entry I wrote just five days before my Dad died.

3-22-02

Everybody asks me how I'm doing. I guess I'm "doing" fine. How do I feel? I can't really answer. I find myself doing nothing even though there is a lot to do. I try to feel God's presence, yet I'm not sure I can. I try to feel peace, yet I don't. I don't feel scared, I don't feel happy – I do feel somewhat lost- somewhat alone, yet I guess the closest approximation to what I feel is simply confusion about what I may be feeling. I'm in limbo. Some kind of suspended, frozen in the moment existence – waiting for something to happen.

Why have I withdrawn? Why do I feel alone in a loving family? Why do I feel responsible for everyone else's sanity at this time? My Dad is dying. I should feel a much stronger emotion than I do. Am I not allowing myself to feel because I know

I have to continue to be the strong one? The one everyone counts on to keep her head and make decisions no matter what the circumstances are?

My Dad is slipping away from me every day. I can't stand to be with him. I can't stand to be away. I picture him lying in bed weak and helpless as an infant, yet an infant has a future on this earth. I'm so unsure of myself, yet Mom and Robert are depending on me alone to get them through this...all the while, I'm in limbo.

That was such a difficult time, not just for me, but for Mom and Robert, Mitch and the kids -all of us.

How are we to find comfort, joy, and peace in the midst of the darkness?

The answer is simple. We lean on God's Word! (We lean on Jesus). Through Him, through scripture, we can find calm and comfort no matter what we're facing. I actually counted how many verses with the words Joy, or joyful were listed in my Bible's concordance: 236!

Just one week after Dad passed away, we had his "Celebration of Witness to the Resurrection." It was not a funeral, or even a memorial. It was a true celebration! It was a joyful day.

Listen to my journal entry from that day:

March 30, 2002

Today was Dad's service. Actually, it was "A Celebration of Witness to the Resurrection!" What a wonderful service it was! Pastor Kirk asked people to share their memories and stories, and wow! A lot of people had things to say! Kirk read my reflection about Dad asking us to hold up the side of the Jeep (that's a story I'll tell any of you who want to hear it later), then Uncle Wayne shared about all the projects Dad always had going. Uncle Max said the picture of Dad smiling on the bulletin cover was all wrong – he said Dad used that smile to get Max to do things that got him in trouble! Don Cummins said he was always roped into helping Dad get things done on his projects, and that he really got heckled because he married Dad's cousin. Uncle Harry said, "You think you had it bad, I was after their little sister!" Aunt Pat shared about how she didn't really know Dad until she was an adult and what a wonderful man he was. Cousin Cynthia talked about our exceptional family and how great it was to grow up with our uncles and Aunt Pat. Ann Capron shared about going to our house in Leadville while the plumbing was

out, yet Dad welcomed her as if it was a palace. Many others shared, old and new friends. It was beautiful and wonderful!

Pastor Kirk talked about Dad's great faith, and Mom's, and their legacy in our faith and the faith of our kids. It was just perfect. The choir sang, and that meant so much to us. Everyone actually had a good time. Terry Dessaire said it was the best funeral he had ever attended. What a blessing! What a joy!

I can't begin to explain how I could experience joy during such a time of emotional upheaval, but it was there, and still is.

Donna McDaniel, in her article, "Joy in the Morning," says, "Joy comes from a deep-rooted, spirit-inspired happiness. The Bible says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10 ESV).

The Hebrew word for joy is "rinnah" It means "ringing cry of a humble request" or "Ringing cry in proclamation, joy, praise." Its both a cry of prayer and a praise. It's a powerful word and a powerful idea. It shows that joy is found not after pain, not after everything is made right, but in the midst of it. The only way this is possible is because of the work of the Father. He is the only one who can see and feel our pain and fill us with joy. The Word says the Father gives us joy and peace. It tells us that real joy comes from the Father and is ours forever. The joy that is found in the Father's presence isn't lacking in action; it transforms and regenerates us."

I did a Google search: How do I find joy in the Lord? The AI answer: To find joy in the Lord, you cultivate a deeper relationship with Him through consistent prayer, Bible study, and praise, while actively living out your faith by loving others, serving, and focusing on His goodness rather than just your circumstances, understanding that His joy is a deep, lasting strength, not just fleeting happiness. There were also suggestions in how to deepen and develop your relationship with God.

**Pray continually and ask:** Talk to God often and don't hesitate to ask for His joy, as He promises to give it when asked.

**Read and Meditate on Scripture:** God's Word is a handbook for joy, revealing His character and promises, especially when you meditate on His faithfulness.

**Surrender and Trust:** Give God first place, allowing Him to direct your life and trusting He is in control, even when you can't see the way.

**Praise and Thankfulness:** Make praise and giving thanks a habit, focusing on God's greatness and blessings, even in tough times, to shift your perspective.

**Love and Serve Others:** Fulfill the greatest commandment by helping the hungry and oppressed, serving others according to their need, as loving brings others joy.

Remember Galatians 5:22-23. But the Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Finally, adopt Philippians 4:4-9. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again; rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God, and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Amen.