

The prophet Zephaniah says, "Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!" (3:14) The reason he gives for rejoicing is God's presence. "The LORD, your God, is in your midst." For him God is a loving, accepting figure. His presence is cause to rejoice.

Generally a lot of the recreation that takes place in our society does not reflect real joy. People spend lots of money on items that are supposed to be fun: games, sports equipment and boats. They party a lot. Sometimes they enjoy all of this while they are doing it. Sometimes it does not cover up pain underneath. Rarely does it reflect real joy. People often get along with the happiness that comes from affluence for quite a while. It is all right as long as nothing makes them think too deeply about life. But its shallowness becomes apparent when trouble strikes. There is nothing to rely on when they get seriously ill or lose someone close to them. The possibility of economic recession threatens their existence.

But Zephaniah says, "Rejoice, the LORD is in your midst." Then he makes clear why that is joyful news by describing what life is like when God is present: "God will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival." He pictures God like someone who loves and delights in another person. God loves you so much that he wants to sing about it. He wants everyone to know.

So we can count on God's loving presence in everyday life. We will run into experiences that cause people despair: illness, loss of those close to us, economic trouble. Like other people we will find those experiences hard and depressing. But we need not find them hopeless. A loving God is beside us. He strengthens us to get through troubles to a happier time.

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