

YOU MIGHT BE A JOYFUL PERSON IF...

Psalms 126:1-6

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INTRODUCTION

A. Jeff Foxworthy's "You Might Be Redneck If ... "

1. "You might be a redneck if your wife has ever said, 'Come move this transmission so I can take a bath.'"
2. "You might be a redneck if your school fight song was 'Dueling Banjos'"
3. "You might be a redneck if you've ever given rat traps as gifts."
4. "...you've been married three times and still have the same in- laws."
5. "...You think Taco Bell is the Mexican phone company."
6. "...Your house still has the "Wide Load" sign on the back of it."
7. "...You got stopped by a state trooper. He asked you if you had an I.D. and you said, 'Bout What?'

B. What does a joyful person look like? The Psalmist tells us in Psalms 126:1-6.

I. FIRST, YOU MIGHT BE A JOYFUL PERSON IF YOUR WORSHIP IS VIBRANT.

A. This is what the Psalmist says-1-2a.

B. John Burrough, retired NFL star, reflects on his 1998 Super Bowl experience: In the middle of all the explosions and hoopla and hype, all I could think was, *Is this it? Is this all it is? Why, this doesn't even compare to worshiping my God!*

C. Joy should be the major characteristic of our worship-Psa 28:7.

Psalms 28:7 The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.

II. SECOND, YOU MIGHT BE A JOYFUL PERSON IS YOU'VE LEARNED TO BE CONTENT.

A. This is what the Psalmist says-2b-3.

B. Contentment is a characteristic of joy.

1. Paul learned to be content-Phil. 3:11-13.
2. Have you learned this yet?

C. Lottery Winner Only Wants New Nylons

Thelma and Victor Hayes struck it rich. In August of 2005, the Canadian couple won more than \$7 million (Canadian) in the lottery.

There are a few additional facts that make the story interesting. According to the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Commission, Thelma and Victor are one of the oldest couples ever to win such a large jackpot. At the time they won, the Hayes' had been married 63 years, and both of them were 89- years-old.

During a televised interview, Thelma and Victor were asked the typical question, "What are you going to do with the money?" The couple responded that, at this stage in life, they were unlikely to become "giddy high spenders." In fact, they intended to remain in the retirement home where they lived.

While her husband planned on buying a Lincoln Town Car, Thelma's personal shopping list contained only one item. She told reporters, "I'm getting a new pair of nylons."

John Beukema, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania; source: "Jackpot Winners to Splurge on Nylons, Car," MSNBC.com (8-6-05)

III. THIRD, YOU MIGHT BE A JOYFUL PERSON IF YOU HAVE AN OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK ON LIFE.

A. This, again, is what the Psalmist says-4.

B. Disabled College Student Full of Optimism

There was a disabled college student who had to travel back and forth from classes and other school activities on crutches. Around campus, he had an unusual talent for friendliness and optimism. One day, a student asked him what had caused his deformity.

"Infantile paralysis," he replied briefly, not wishing to elaborate on his difficulties.

"With a misfortune like that, how can you face the world?" inquired his classmate.

"Oh," replied the young Christian, smiling, "the disease never touched my heart."

C. Joyful people are optimistic people.

IV. FOURTH, YOU MIGHT BE A JOYFUL PERSON IF YOU HAVE A GENEROUS HEART.

A. This is what the Psalmist says-5-6.

B. Lee Strobel Impressed by Impoverished Family's Example

While working as a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*, Lee Strobel was assigned to report on the struggles of an impoverished, inner-city family during the weeks leading up to Christmas. A devout atheist at the time, Strobel was mildly surprised by the family's attitude in spite of their circumstances:

"The Delgados—60-year-old Perfecta and her granddaughters, Lydia and Jenny—had been burned out of their roach-infested tenement and were now living in a tiny, two-room apartment on the West Side. As I walked in, I couldn't believe how empty it was. There was no furniture, no rugs, nothing on the walls—only a small kitchen table and one handful of rice. That's it. They were virtually devoid of possessions.

In fact, 11-year-old Lydia and 13-year-old Jenny owned only one short-sleeved dress each, plus one thin, gray sweater between them. When they walked the half-mile to school through the biting cold, Lydia would wear the sweater for part of the distance and then hand it to her shivering sister, who would wear it the rest of the way.

But despite their poverty and the painful arthritis that kept Perfecta from working, she still talked confidently about her faith in Jesus. She was convinced he had not abandoned them. I never sensed despair or self-pity in her home; instead, there was a gentle feeling of hope and peace."

Strobel completed his article, then moved on to more high-profile assignments. But when Christmas Eve arrived, he found his thoughts drifting back to the Delgados and their unflinching belief in God's providence.

"I continued to wrestle with the irony of the situation," Strobel writes. "Here was a family that had nothing but faith, and yet seemed happy, while I had everything I needed materially, but lacked faith—and inside I felt as empty and barren as their apartment."

In the middle of a slow news day, Strobel decided to pay a visit to the Delgados. When he arrived, he was amazed at what he saw. Readers of his article had responded to the family's need in overwhelming fashion, filling the small apartment with donations. Once inside, Strobel encountered new furniture, appliances, and rugs; a large Christmas tree and stacks of wrapped presents; bags of food; and a large selection of warm winter clothing. Readers had even donated a generous amount of cash.

But it wasn't the gifts that shocked Lee Strobel, an atheist in the middle of Christmas generosity. It was the family's response to those gifts. Strobel writes:

"As surprised as I was by this outpouring, I was even more astonished by what my visit was interrupting: Perfecta and her granddaughters were getting ready to give away much of their newfound wealth. When I asked Perfecta why, she replied in halting English: 'Our neighbors are still in need. We cannot have plenty while they have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do.'

That blew me away! If I had been in their position at that time in my life, I would have been hoarding everything. I asked Perfecta what she thought about the generosity of the people who had sent all of these goodies, and again her response amazed me. 'This is wonderful; this is very good,' she said, gesturing toward the largess. 'We did nothing to deserve this—it's a gift from God. But,' she added, 'it is not his greatest gift. No, we celebrate that tomorrow. That is Jesus.'

To her, this child in the manger was the undeserved gift that meant everything—more than material possessions, more than comfort, more than security. And at that moment, something inside of me wanted desperately to know this Jesus—because, in a sense, I saw him in Perfecta and her granddaughters.

They had peace despite poverty, while I had anxiety despite plenty; they knew the joy of generosity, while I only knew the loneliness of ambition; they looked heavenward for hope, while I only looked out for myself; they experienced the wonder of the spiritual, while I was shackled to the shallowness of the material—and something made me long for what they had.

Or, more accurately, for the One they knew."

Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christmas* (Zondervan, 2005)

C. Joyful people are also generous people.

CONCLUSION

A. Hopefully there are few "rednecks" here tonight.

B. However, we all should be joyful people. People who....

1. Worship vibrantly.
2. Learned contentment.
3. Optimistic.
4. Generous.