

Joy, Joy, Joy!

Think of your life without joy. You know, without joy, we can do nothing; we are like an instrument out of tune which yields nothing but harsh sounds. Without joy, we are a member out of joint. We can do nothing well without joy and a good conscience, which is the foundation of joy.

We try to get joy through entertainment. We pay someone to make jokes, tell stories, perform dramatic actions, sing songs. We buy the vitality of another's imagination to divert and enliven our own poor lives. The enormous entertainment industry in America is a sign of the depletion of joy in our culture. Society is a bored, gluttonous king employing a court jester to divert it after an overindulgent meal. But that kind of joy never penetrates our lives, never changes our basic nature. The effects are extremely temporary -- a few minutes, a few hours, a few days at most. When we run out of money, the joy trickles away. We cannot make ourselves joyful. Joy cannot be commanded, purchased or arranged.

But there is something we can do. We can decide to live in response to the abundance of God, and not under the dictatorship of our own poor needs. We can decide to live in the environment of a living God and not our own dying selves. We can decide to center ourselves in the God who generously gives and not in our own egos which greedily grab.

Joy is an emotion which sustains and nurtures the Christian. Joy is not a moral requirement for Christian living, it is a consequence. It is not what we have to acquire in order to be a Christian; it is what comes to us when we walk by faith. Christian joy is not an escape from sorrow. Pain and hardship still come, but they are unable to drive out the happiness of the one who is redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. This joy only came from being "*in the Lord*" (Philippians 4:10). The joy that develops in a Christian does not come from feeling good about yourself, but feeling good about God. We know that His ways are dependable and His promises are sure. Paul stated that there was a great "*joy in the faith*" (Philippians 1:25) and joy in those who "*stand firm in the Lord*" (4:1).

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