

“Embracing Joy”

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” *Psalm 100:1-5*

What is your life being controlled by today? Everyone's life is going to be controlled by something. Some are controlled by greed, some by fear, some by hate, some by jealousy, and some by anger. Some are even controlled by the power of adversity. So I ask you again, what is the main controlling agent in your life?

“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.” Galatians 5:22-24

Galatians 5:22 says that “joy” is one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit and for us, it is a great security for our salvation. What do I mean by that? When life seems out of control and there is something that is overpowering your walk with Christ, joy can be a staple. It's a safe place or a haven that is drawn from the depths of our faith, which gives us the ability to celebrate the person of God. The Greek word for joy means to exult, to rejoice jubilantly or to be thrilled. Think about this. What's our motivation to be thrilled in life when it just seems crazy at times? Paul says in Romans 5:11 that we can “rejoice” in God because we have received reconciliation through Christ. God gives us abundant joy both in our salvation and ultimately for who God is.

You could say, “You don't understand what I am up against?” I get it! How can we have joy, the true acknowledgement of who God is and what He has done for us, when there are so many unforeseen circumstances in our lives that control us? Paul says in James 1:2-4, *“Count it all JOY my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* Well there is a classic oxymoron for you. Paul commands us to have “joyful trials”, so what does that mean? Joy is not synonymous with pleasure, like eating a good steak. It is not a pleasant emotion, like the day I got married to my beautiful wife in 1976. I agree with a definition I found in one of my commentaries (Life Application Commentary) . . . “When we face trials that seem out of our control to us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can have joy. It is the state of mind to look beyond the problem and see God's Goodness and to know that He is in complete control of the outcome.”

For fifteen months now, I have lived with the difficulty of cancer in my home. Speaking honestly, I have not always had true joy. There have been times where I have been just mad that cancer has disrupted my life, my marriage and ministry. God is changing my heart. I want to be a man after God's heart who is able to rejoice in the Lord for the Lord's own sake (Psalm 34:3). I want to be able to rejoice in my God because I have learned genuine trust and hope (Psalm 33:21). I want to be able to make God the complete focus of my joy, even when the roller coaster ride of cancer does not make sense to me (Psalm 43:4).

Christian joy is beautifully expressed in these stanzas from the Charles Wesley's hymn, “O for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemer's praise. The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace! Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb, you loosened tongues employ; ye blind, behold your Savior come; and leap ye lame for joy!”

Allow me to close by quoting a great woman of faith, *“It's too easy to think ahead to what could be, but that robs the joy of the day.” Karen Phinney.*

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