

6 Spirit-Filled Steps to Help You Sow Seeds of Joy in a Season of Darkness

With the COVID-19 pandemic raging all around the globe, life can feel pretty dark. The news is sobering and for many, the future looks grim. People are anxious and depressed. In fact, in just the last two days I've heard of three suicides. Staggering!

This morning as I opened the Scriptures, I read, "Light shines on the righteous, and joy on the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and praise His holy name" (Ps. 97:11-12, NIV). What a great word for today. Jesus said of Himself, "I Am the light of the world" (John 8:12b, MEV). If you've placed your trust in Him, He has clothed you in His righteousness. And guess what? You become a bearer of His light to the world! He shines His light through you. You then are to be an ambassador for Him—showing the world His love and joy.

How is this possible when you likely feel a little down yourself? Is it authentic to try to spread joy when you are feeling sad, lonely or fearful? Honestly, the last thing we need right now is fake Christianity. Don't fake it and try to put on a plastic smile and be all "happy-clappy" when the world is in a period of great suffering. Frankly, that's a big turn-off!

So, what does it look like to authentically sow seeds of joy both in yourself and others during this period of our history? Here are just a few ideas that have helped me, and I pray they help you as well. You could think of it as your joy-plan for dark days!

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1. Write down at least one Scripture. The exercise of writing out a Scripture verse helps to cement that thought in your thinking. I started doing this in college and have continued it all through the years. Why? When you write out Scripture, you help cement that verse in your mind. Ask the Lord for one Scripture a day to write out. The Lord loves to answer that prayer! Look back at that Scripture as you move throughout your day. You'll find He brings it to mind.

2. Pray for at least five people. The power of interceding on behalf of others is huge! As you plead for the health and well-being of others who are close to you, it strengthens your bond to them and encourages your own heart as well.

3. Call, text or send a handwritten note to at least one person. Some are not phone people. Instead, you can write a text message or send a handwritten note. The purpose is to encourage. Encouragement helps people feel valued and cared for. Ask questions like, "How are you doing? Is there anything I can do for you today? How can I pray for you?" Then offer one affirmation. When we affirm others, we tell them something we appreciate about them. Everyone needs affirmation.

4. Do one generous act. The world needs generosity more than ever. Generously keep giving to your church and to missions. Generously give away your time and encouragement. Generously give gifts to others to encourage them. It can be something small. Our daughter has a lemon tree in her front yard. She's offered lemons to her neighbors, and she's made lemon bars to encourage her friends. A retired gentleman I know who has limited resources felt God wanted him to write a generous check to encourage a missionary family. He doesn't have a lot to give away, yet he lives generously to bring joy to others. Another friend left a bag of candy and chalk on the porch of a young mom who is feeling cooped up during the quarantine. Be creative; be generous.

5. Listen to two worship songs. Praise brings joy. When you're listening to worship music, let the words prompt your praise. Worship fills our hearts with joy, so don't hold back.

6. Write down your top three blessings at the end of every day. Steve and I have been doing this. It's easy. Keep a journal at the dinner table and write down the top three things you are grateful for every day. It could be something as small as the sight of a beautiful flower, the joy of smelling coffee brewing or the feel of snuggling a baby. (If you're a parent, don't practice social distancing from your tiny children. They need your snuggles!)

Friend, now more than ever, the world needs joy. Plant these seeds of joy every day and watch joy grow in your own heart and in the hearts of others. You can make a difference during this time. Know that I'm praying for you as you shine! {eoa}

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