If Your Life Is Joyless, You Might Want to Try This

We are living in very distressing times, times of darkness and discouragement and disillusionment, times in which we are constantly bombarded by bad news. At times like this, it's all too easy to become pessimistic and cynical, even to the point of losing hope.

But there is a way out of the malaise, a way to break free from the despair. It is the way of joy, the joy of the Lord. And that joy is contagious.

Speaking personally, it was experiencing "the joy of the Lord" on December 17, 1971 that transformed my life. It was at that moment that I said to God, "I will never put a needle in my arm again." And from that moment, I was free.

In the weeks leading up to that moment of surrender, I had been wrestling with God, believing that Jesus died for my sins—something I had never believed before—yet unwilling to repent and turn away from my sins.

But on that night, without the blaring, ear-shattering rock music I used to listen to day and night (not to mention play with my band) and without the aid of any drugs—not pot or LSD or speed or heroin—as we sang old hymns to the accompaniment of a piano, I encountered a joy I had never known before.

At once, I realized that it was of a different quality from anything I had experienced, far beyond the "high" of drugs or music or sports or friendship or anything else. It was the love of God poured out in my life! It was the reality of His goodness! It was what the King James Version described as "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8). It came straight from the presence of God!

Moments later, I was a new man, and by the Lord's grace, I have never looked back.

How do we find that joy? Psalm 16 tells us that in God's presence is "fullness of joy," and Nehemiah 8 tells us that "the joy of the Lord is our strength."

How do we get into God's presence? We can do it anywhere and at any time. We don't need a building or a minister or a crowd (although, without a doubt, joyful worship with a crowd of like-minded believers can carry us to incredible, corporate heights).

We simply meditate on His goodness. We set our hearts and our minds on His promises. We recite biblical statements about Him, declaring that they are true even when everything around us shouts that they are not.

We begin to sing and worship, either alone or with the help of our favorite songs of praise. And then, regardless of how we feel, we determine to rejoice, speaking words of praise and adoration.

To quote the words of Habakkuk, a prophet who lived in some of the darkest days of his nation's history, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; He enables me to tread on the heights." (Hab. 3:17–19)

At times, we may have to do this entirely by faith, without any experience of joy. But if we will continue to worship and give thanks, continue to confess the truth of God's Word (His character never changes!), and continue to look up rather than down or around, that joy will come. And when it does, it will be contagious!

As you walk in joy personally, people will be drawn to you.

As congregations experience the joyful presence of God in worship—not hype or show but that genuine, holy presence—people will come.

And, as lost sinners find new life in the Lord, repenting with tears for their transgressions and misdeeds, there will be joy in heaven in response, a reflection of the rejoicing that is taking place on earth (see Luke 15). I have witnessed it firsthand around the world!

If you need some encouragement right now, read through Paul's letter to the Philippians where over and again, he encourages his readers to rejoice in the Lord. Yet he wrote this letter from prison! Then, read Acts 16 to see just how liberating praise and worship can be.

If you want to watch a classic Pentecostal example of joy-filled celebration (not empty emotionalism!), the fruit of years of prayer, powerful repentance preaching, and many lost people coming to faith, watch this (and yes, you'll spot me in the video too, almost 25 years ago).

Or, if that is not your style, put this worshipful, slower song of devotion on in the background and let your heart soar heavenward.

Even in a time of mourning, when looking back at the life of a beloved Christian leader who died in a tragic accident, there can be joy because of the assurance of heaven. (Watch this remarkable moment in the memorial service of Pastor David Wilkerson in 2011 after words of tribute and awe-filled songs of worship; the video is queued to the right place where joyful praise breaks out).

And so, I pray, "Pour out Your joy on Your children, Lord! And may that joy draw others to You!" {eoa}

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