

Walk in the Spirit's Abundant Joy With These 4 Practical Steps

Sometimes the Word of God is so practical. As I am writing this, I am about to have a few days of vacation. Over the years, I have not been the best at relaxing. It is a discipline that I am learning to get better at recently. There is a time and place for things and relaxing and enjoying is part of our journey with God.

The story of Nehemiah's command to the people of Israel in chapter 8 of his book might be a little surprising to you. The people have gathered and are listening to the teaching of God's word. They began to be grieved as they hear what is being taught.

But Nehemiah gives them this command: "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10, NIV).

When was the last time you came to the end of church and the pastor told you, "Go and enjoy choice food"? But I am learning that there is a time for enjoyment. Actually, we experience joy because God is joyful. Nehemiah is showing them that in experiencing the joy of the Lord, they find strength.

This is a theme of the Bible elsewhere as well. Paul encourages people to "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4). Elsewhere Paul makes it even simpler, "Always be joyful" (1 Thess. 5:16). I am not sure it can be plainer than that.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says that man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Now this is not some

sort of denial of sad emotions. Jesus even says that, “Blessed are those who mourn” (Matt. 5:4a, MEV). For me, and I believe for many in the church today, it is an invitation to experience the full range of emotions that God has made us with when we were created.

I am still learning about the practice of this for me but some thoughts to get you started.

1. Ask God for more joy. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. We are told that we can ask for more of the Spirit. Ask God to guide you into the full range of emotion that God has given.
2. Take yourself less serious. There are serious things in life and things that are not so serious. I am learning that knowing the difference is a power path to joy.
3. Laugh. I recently read *The Humor of Christ* by Elton Trueblood. Although I don't know that I agree with everything in the book, I love the premise that we miss something of the teaching of Jesus if we don't realize his humor. Richard Foster says something like, “Holy people are funny people.”
4. Smile! {eoa}

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