
S P E C I A L I S S U E

TIDINGS

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THE JOY OF LIVING IN JESUS CHRIST

Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

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W E L C O M E

TO OUR SPECIAL ISSUE ON

Joy

BEING inundated with so much negativism in the world, the brothers and sisters of the Tidings Committee thought it would be helpful to focus our Special Issue this year on joy in our life in Christ. Joy and its related words, joyful, joyfulness, joyous, rejoice, and gladness, are only used about 300 times in the Scriptures. However, this is a case of quality, not quantity. Its use is peppered throughout the Word to bring encouragement and hope as we walk through our daily readings. These passages paint a picture of how God protected his people, Israel, and the joy they expressed over His overshadowing care for them. It's probably no surprise to anyone that Psalms account for about one-third of all of the use of these words of joy and are a beautiful place to go to see joy expressed. As we know, there is an even greater joy than all others promised to those who continue in faith to the end.

This issue covers the special joy we share as brothers and sisters of Christ through music, community, adversity,

forgiveness, identifying with Christ, and fellowship. There are everyday joys and joy in our worship. We also asked several brothers and sisters, older and younger, to briefly share an experience of joy in their life in Christ. We hope you, too, will reflect on your life in the Lord to glean those moments of joy experienced in being in him.

God chose the word joy to have a special meaning. Our Lord Jesus Christ saw it as something special. To that end, any discussion of joy would be incomplete without talking about *“for the joy that was set before him,”* and so we recommend that article to you as well.

One of our primary goals in presenting this special issue on this topic is, as the Apostle John expressed in 1 John 1:4, *“And these things we write unto you, that your joy may be full.”*

Alan Markwith,
Chairman,
Tidings Committee

DOES the reader recognize this situation? Something is lost at home. Let us say it is an envelope, and the contents are important. Everybody says it should be in a certain place, but it is not found there. The search goes on throughout the house without success. Then, at last it is found - in the very place where it was supposed to be at first. It had been passed over a dozen times, unrecognized. It was unrecognized because the searcher had a wrong idea of the envelope's shape and color. For the time being, he had forgotten what it really was like, and so it was undiscovered. This is a parable.

Joy

One of the criticisms sometimes leveled against us is that, as a community, we lack joy. But it could well be that joy is there, but it is undiscovered because it is unrecognized. That is to say, the critic has a wrong idea of what he is looking for. It may be that he has confused cheerfulness with joy. He says that our services are formal; our hymns are dull; our methods are perfunctory, and therefore there is no joy.

We contend that people can have joy without shouting, dancing, or falling about. Let us not make a mistake here. There is nothing wrong with cheerfulness—at home or in the ecclesia. The writer has to confess that he prefers the person who comes to cheer him up rather than the one who

comes to read him the Riot Act. Under the right conditions, cheerfulness is excellent, but it is different from joy. Understand also that sometimes joy is expressed in songs and dance and radiant faces. But if these are absent, we must not conclude that joy has gone. Joy may be expressed in the ordinary and the orthodox. David danced, and so did Habakkuk; Mary sang a great song; the Emmaus disciples went back on the double, and Hannah went home with a lilt in her step.

Let us anticipate a question. Did not Jesus say, "*Be of good cheer*"? The answer is that he said it five times, always to people in some form of trouble: to the palsied man who was let down through the roof; (Matthew 9:2) to the disciples

in peril on the sea; (Matthew 14:27, Mark 6:50) to the woman with an issue of blood; (Matthew 9:22 NKJV) to the disciples about to lose their Master; (John 16:32-33) to Paul in prison at Jerusalem. (Acts 23:11) Their troubles were different, but to each came the same answer: *“Be of good cheer.”* We can be sure of one thing: the King was not telling them to cheer up. To suffering troubled people, that is but a short expedient. The benefit lasts for an hour, and then the old sorrow returns.

This was not the Lord’s method. Turn up your Bible dictionaries to see what he really said. *“Be of good courage”* was his word of consolation. This call to courage was not just a piece of advice, empty of reason. The reason for the courage was discovered in the fact of Christ himself; what he was doing and would do for them, now and hereafter. To the palsied man, pardon and healing. To the broken woman, comfort and relief. To the frightened sailors, *“It is I; be not afraid.”* To the perplexed disciples, having to face the world, *“Be of good courage, I have overcome the world.”* To the Apostle in prison,

confined and frustrated, a promise that he would be free and would testify at Rome. In every case, it was because of Christ and his power that they were urged to have courage.

Joy At The Last

Our purpose is to stress that cheerfulness is good, but it is circumstantial. Cheerfulness exists when conditions are favorable, but when conditions are the opposite, cheerfulness is absent and indeed would be inappropriate. That is why Christ did not tell the troubled, suffering folk to cheer up—and why he did urge them, in the midst of their trouble, to have courage, because in that direction, they would at last realize joy. When the heart is heavy, and the spirit is sad, and the shadows are long, then cheerfulness, good as it is, will not be possible. The mystery is this—that where cheerfulness is impossible, joy remains. The proposal is that joy transcends adverse circumstances and may even transform them. Remember Paul’s words: *“As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”* (2 Corinthians 6:10).

Following the suggestiveness of the



proposal, think of Acts 16. Two men are in prison. Their backs are torn and lacerated. They are chained in the lowest and darkest dungeon, cramped in the stocks—**and they are singing**. We can be sure they are exercising their discipleship on the highest level. They are not singing just to keep their spirits up; they are singing for joy. The song was the outcome of their gladness. It was the song of the resurrection. The stocks hurt them; their bloody backs pained them, but for some reason, they were impelled to offer praise to God. Somehow, the joy in their hearts had to find expression in the song, and no pain could muzzle it. The other prisoners heard it because no bars could fetter it.

Rejoicing in Tribulation

Later on one of these men will write some strange and wonderful words: *“Let us rejoice in our tribulations, for tribulation worketh patience.”* (Romans 5:3 RV) Somehow the affliction was being used for good. The foe becomes an ally. This is why, perhaps, one day, he will write to the Corinthians: *“I overflow with joy in all my afflictions.”* Or again: *“Our light affliction worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”*

The adversity is transmuted into the force of victory. Surely the soul of man shrinks from tribulation. Surely pain brings grief. If and when these things have to be faced, men steel themselves and, with stoic fatalism, endure the pain and bow to the adversity. Let us not tone it down. It is brave and heroic how people submit to tribulation. They say: “What cannot be cured must be

endured.” This was the philosophy of stoic paganism, but it is not the philosophy of Paul, the servant of Christ.

Out of his own experience, he teaches us that in some mysterious way adversity is part of the cure: that out of the very weakness, the strength of God will be made perfect. In the hand of the Lord, there is healing in the very tribulation. That is why joy is possible in circumstances where cheerfulness would fly away. These men were in the dark, but the darkness did not matter because they were children of light. These men were in prison, but the prison did not matter because, at the same time, they were in Christ.

Do not draw a wrong conclusion. It does not mean that we cannot have joy unless we have suffering. That is false; but it does mean that when suffering comes, joy can remain and be intensified. The King once said to his own: *“Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.”* It is not simply that one condition is exchanged for another but that the very sorrow itself, in some way, has a background of joy. Of the suffering Saviour, it was written: *“Who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.”* (Hebrews 12:2) We should be wrong to think that his joy was postponed to the resurrection day. As he bent his will to the agony of the cross and the confrontation with Sin, we can believe that there was joy in the realization that he was defeating iniquity and redeeming men from death and corruption. He was able to despise the shame because, in the

moment of its worst assault, he had a consciousness of the final and ultimate joy of salvation. In the great prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus said to his Father about the disciples: *“These things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”* (v. 13). That prayer was answered at Philippi. Men, who through joy, sing in prison, cannot really be imprisoned.

A Fruit of the Spirit

The foregoing should convince us that joy is not one great moment of ecstasy that comes in a crisis, lasts for a day, and then is gone. The point we are stressing is that joy is not circumstantial but is independent of circumstances. One proof of this is in Galatians 5:22. Paul says: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.”* It does not matter whether you believe that the qualities listed are different fruits or that there is one fruit, love, and all that follows are the flavors, colors, and textures of the one fruit.

Whichever way you look at it, joy is part of the fruit of the spirit. Fruit is not a flash-in-the-pan thing. It is permanent, solid, and substantial. The growth is real but often imperceptible. Slowness is not failure. It is there on dull days as well as sunshine days. If joy sings, it never tires. There is a song for June and a song for January. The word for joy is a common word. It is not a red-letter word, flaming with passion. It means something steady, quiet, divinely wonderful, like fruit. It means gladness, delight—a sense of assurance. Those men at Philippi knew beyond any doubt that they were not alone. They knew in their deepest hearts that all things were working together for good under the providential hand of God. Bodily, they seemed to be in the hand of the jailer, but spiritually, they knew they were in the hand of God. As it turned out, even the jailer was part of the great purpose: very soon, he washed their stripes. They had an



unalterable conviction that nothing could separate them from the love of Christ. They trusted in the profound secret that the city was being built and that one day it would come down out of heaven from God. They knew that no power on earth could prevent it, and they were part of it. Sin was defeated; pardon was full and free; death was vanquished. The King was alive for evermore. This gives cause for joy, and joy gives cause for song.

Delight From Doing God's Will

Another cause for joy is obedience. Remember the words inscribed about the Redeemer: *"I delight to do thy will, O my God."* (Psalm 40:8). Delight is joy, and joy comes from doing God's will. Ask any man who is flirting with sin, who plays the fool with his discipleship, and he will tell you that in the deepest part of him there is no joy. Conscience gives him no peace; neglect spoils his tranquility. For the moment, he may enjoy the satisfaction of the flesh, but afterward, the remorse brings only misery. There is no joy in disobedience. One proof is in the life of King Saul. Is there a sadder picture in the whole of the Bible than Saul creeping through the darkness of the night, seeking a witch woman in violation of his own edict? A king who once was chosen by God, entering the illegal market of evil. The whole picture is full of fear and foreboding, and one thing there is not—there is no joy. Joy comes from obedience. Jesus said: *"Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it."* That blessedness is rich

with joy. Some object to this point of view on the grounds that it will make us self-satisfied and wrongly superior. They confuse joy with smugness. That believers can get smug, there is no doubt, but it is not likely to come through faithful obedience to God's word and will. It is more likely to come by feverish activity trying to make up for the lack of true spiritual submission. Finally, think of the impediments to joy. Doubt is one—that spirit that is always without complete conviction; always worrying over problems; nursing a voice inside which every day intrudes on the side of skepticism. Jude says we must be very merciful to those who find faith hard and doubt easy. Joy is difficult for them. Another hindrance is fear. Very often, it is fear of the judgment seat: not that reverential fear, which is an essential part of worship and service, but that fear which tends towards dread. Those with this burden so often see the eyes of fire and rarely hear the voice of love. The judgment is a solemn thing, but it is not intended to rob us of joy. God is not an ogre who is trying to trap us into perdition. He is a loving Father who has gone to the uttermost to save us for Himself. He wants us to succeed. For those who seek joy, let them cast their burden on the Lord. "He will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

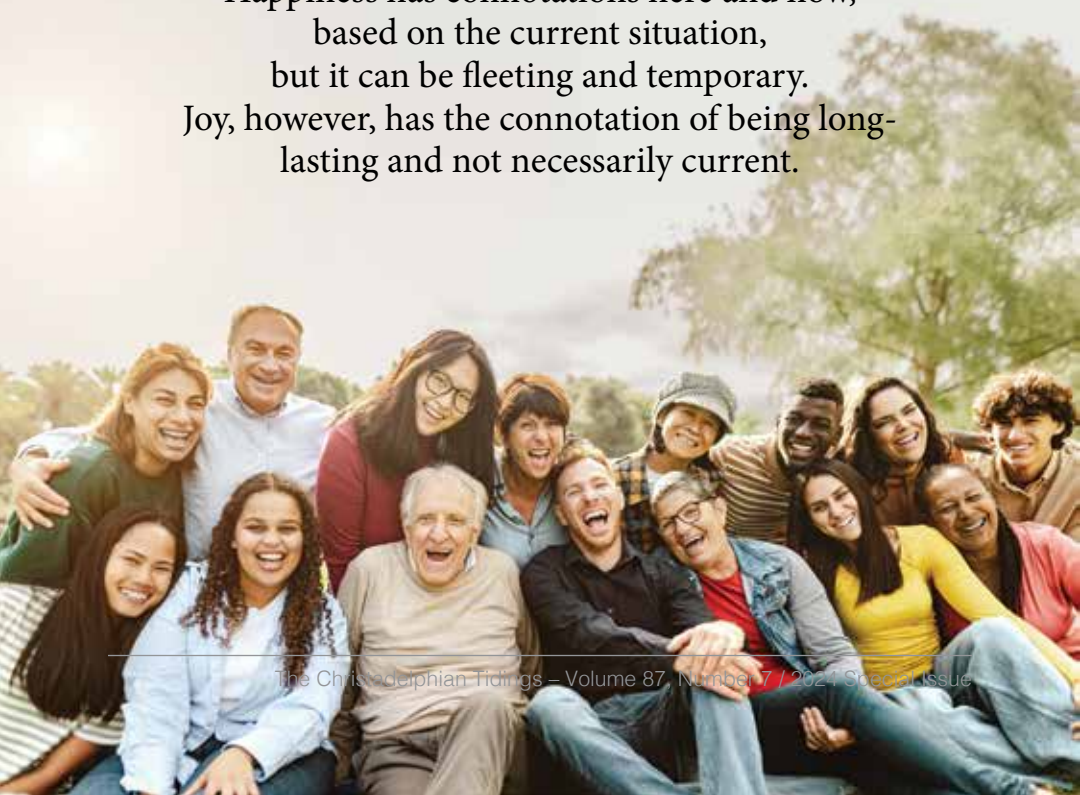
*Dennis Gillett,
Genius of Discipleship,
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THE JOY OF FELLOWSHIP

By Casmon Gordon

Happiness has connotations here and now,
based on the current situation,
but it can be fleeting and temporary.
Joy, however, has the connotation of being long-
lasting and not necessarily current.



THE first time the word fellowship appears in the New Testament Scriptures is at the founding of the early ecclesia, where the brethren *"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."* (Acts 2:42).¹ The word for fellowship, *koinonia*, occurs 20 times in the Scriptures and has the sense of sharing things in common, and having communion and community with each other. Fellowship among the disciples of Jesus is a key aspect of the Christian life, as believers in Jesus Christ come together in love, faith, caring, and the encouragement of each other.

We have the example of how a fellowship is supposed to look and function in Acts 2:42-47, where the early first-century ecclesia began. We are told that *"all that believed were together and had all things in common,"* (v. 44) meaning they all shared their time and resources and saw to the needs of each other. They had daily Bible study for their spiritual nourishment, shared joyful meals of fellowship in each other's homes, and gave YAHWEH thanks and praise, doing what was good and right in His sight as He instructed through Jesus. That is the essence of fellowship. The Spirit moved the apostle to write to the believers in Phillippi, declaring:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. (Philippians 2:1-2).

Koinonia means agreeing with God and one another, being united in desire and purpose, and ministering *"through love serve one another."* (Galatians 5:13). Our *koinonia* with each other is based on our common *koinonia* with Jesus Christ.

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:6-7).

A powerful example of what *koinonia* means and what it should look like in practice can be found in a study of the phrase *"one another"* in the Scriptures. Scripture commands us to be:

- devoted to one another (Romans 12:10 NIV),
- to honor one another (Romans 12:10 NIV),
- live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16),
- accept one another (Romans 15:7 NIV),
- serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13),
- be kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32 NIV),
- admonish one another (Colossians 3:16 NIV),
- encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV; Hebrews 3:13 NIV),
- spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24 NIV),
- offer hospitality (1 Peter 4:9 NIV),
- and love one another (1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11; 3:23; 4:7; 4:11-12).

Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. (Philippians 2:2-4 KJV).

In Western thought and culture, eating is done mainly for flavor and nutrition and is often done alone; if eating is together, there is minimal regard for who is at the table. However, in many Eastern cultures, eating was considered a special event exclusively enjoyed among trusted friends and loved one. They often shared food and utensils and even ate from the same plate! We see this happen at the Last Supper, where Jesus said, *"He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me."* (Matthew 26:23 KJV). Because the ancients usually sat comfortably on the floor while eating, this gave fellowship the connotation of a repose, relaxation, and intimacy. At the Last Supper, we also see *"the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?"* (John 21:20 KJV).

Happiness has connotations here and now, based on the current situation, but it can be fleeting and temporary. Joy, however, has the connotation of being long-lasting and not necessarily current. It is why Scripture advises us to look *"unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down*

at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2 KJV). Happiness is also transactional, but joy is permanent, resilient, visionary and strategic, and goes far beyond the here and now.

Clearly, Jesus' first advent life was far from happy, as he had to contend with his own nature, with the burden of bearing the responsibility of carrying the future hope of all humanity, and with his friends and family who ridiculed him and doubted his Messiahship. Beyond that, the Jewish leaders who followed him around, harassing and trying to frustrate the work of salvation he purposed at every opportunity. He also dealt with the stubbornness and unbelief of most of the people he encountered, even the faithlessness of his own disciples. In addition, he had the specter of his painful crucifixion in mind as he preached the good news of the gospel wherever, whenever, and to whomever would listen.

Despite all of these things, he still had joy because he understood that at the end of the painful process, he would accomplish his purpose and be exalted to sit at the right hand of God (Psalm 110:1). This joy motivated Jesus. It allowed him to look beyond his current unpleasant situation and see the blessing of the reward of his work of sacrifice and salvation.

The fellowship and togetherness we share now are a taste of the joy of the fellowship we will share forever in the Kingdom of God. Having fellowship with Jesus necessitates also sharing the *"fellowship of his sufferings."* From this, we share a life that conforms with Jesus' life and the promise of a reward of the blessing of resurrection. When

reflecting on his own suffering, the apostle said: *“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”* (Philippians 3:10 KJV).

Fellowship involves partaking in common things, not just food and shelter but also a shared experience. By being partakers in the fellowship of his sufferings, we also are partakers and identify with Jesus' death. He also identifies with us, as we share the experience of *“suffering for righteousness' sake, happy are ye.”* (1 Peter 3:14 KJV). We share fellowship with Jesus in the type of life he lived and his death. We can look forward with the hope of being allowed to share in his resurrection and being partakers together with him of *“the joy that was set before him.”* (Hebrews 12:2). Fellowship also means having *“one mind”* and a common spiritual perspective.

It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us. (2 Timothy 2:11-12 KJV).

The purpose of God is to bless the earth, not just to people it with a race of

immortals who glorify Him: the earth should also be a Kingdom consisting of a family of priests. So everywhere there will be loving fellowship with the Father, with Jesus, and among brethren related by the blood of Jesus, the Anointed One. These things considered, we can agree that *“if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”* (1 John 4:11 KJV), especially since love is the crucial identifier that we are indeed children of God. We are partakers in the joy of fellowship with the Father, the Son, and one another. There will be joy in the Kingdom because there will be no such thing as hatred, malice, grudges, bitterness, and resentment, *“for the former things are passed away.”* (Revelation 21:4 KJV). Only love, peace, and harmony will be present. These things are consistent with the Spirit of God. (Romans 8:13-14).

The beauty and blessings in the joy of fellowship are illuminated when contrasted with its opposite: selfishness and self-centeredness. As a survival strategy, the group's good is more important than the good of the one, and working together is more advantageous than working alone. Fellowship is each one being concerned and looking out for the welfare of everyone

Fellowship involves partaking in common things, not just food and shelter but also a shared experience...

else. Selfishness involves sacrificing everyone's welfare to satisfy a personal desire. Selfishness is, therefore, short-sighted and dysfunctional and will ultimately prove to be fleeting.

Even though there will be joy in the end when the Kingdom comes, we can enjoy some of that joy now. At the same time, we wait in probation for the fulfillment of all things. We are to inherit the Kingdom (Galatians 3:29, 1 Thessalonians 2:12), and therefore, we must practice Kingdom life in this current dispensation in preparation for *"the acceptable year of the LORD"* (Isaiah 61:2 KJV; Luke 4:19 KJV). When our Master returns to usher in the age, we will rejoice with everlasting joy (Isaiah 51:11 KJV). We must, therefore, pray for the shalom and wholeness of each other, and see to the welfare and best interest of each other. This situation is a foretaste of good things to come.

The superiority of fellowship over selfishness and self-centeredness is seen in that fellowship involves unity and working together to achieve common goals and a shared purpose. As such,

brothers and sisters working together must help each other whenever we stumble. The Preacher advises that *"two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up."* (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 KJV).

This benefit we receive from everyone helping each other is perfected because, while we share in fellowship with our brothers and sisters, we also share with the Father and His beloved Son. Together, they are more than willing and capable of further lifting us when our feet slip. God confirms that *"though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand."* (Psalm 37:24 KJV). As always, we are comforted by the fact that the Father is just a prayer away, and when our foot slips, we should *"humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."* (James 4:10 KJV).

We live in a real world with real people, and we have real issues. We often may find ourselves in situations that we may not desire nor enjoy and may feel distressed and discouraged. But because we share a fellowship with each



other and the Father through Jesus, we can help and encourage each other and empathize with each other's feelings, sharing in each other's pain. It's why Scripture advises that we "*confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.*" (James 5:16 KJV).

This action is very important because we often create and live in our delusions and distortions of reality. We can think everyone else's life is perfect, as they don't seem to have any apparent issues. If we put on a facade to conceal our struggles and failures, this thought usually arises, thus deceiving those with whom we share fellowship.

So when we see our troubles, we believe something must be terribly wrong with us. The result is we get discouraged and suffer in silence. When we share our weaknesses and strengths, our failures and successes, we do a world of good for those who are going through their own pain and struggles; they will understand that they are not alone in their pain. And just as we were lifted up and helped by the Father, others will be encouraged to know the Father will also help and lift them up!

The other practical implication of sharing fellowship is that too often, we have problems and struggles we guard and keep secret. We thus deny ourselves the help and comfort

available from within the fellowship we share. Sadly, the issue is often only revealed when it is too far gone and beyond repair. We need each other to help encourage one another, and we should have the character and reputation to be discreet when another confides and shares their problem with us.

The fundamental principle at the heart of the Last Supper is fellowship, where Jesus institutes the Breaking of bread and drinking of wine, tokens of remembrance for the disciples and the believers who joined the ecclesia through their preaching. We belong together as a fellowship and a loving spiritual family of believers, thus fulfilling the prophetic teaching and intention of Jesus' prayer to the Father when he prayed:

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. (John 17:21-23 KJV).

Casmon Gordon,
Manhattan Ecclesia, NY

1 All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless specifically noted.

THE JOY IN COMMUNITY

By Seth Thomas



Made for Community

WHAT would you answer if I asked you what the five most popular words used in Scripture are? Perhaps love, sin, or law? Brother Brian Adams posed this question during one of his classes at the Ladore CYC weekend last year. He revealed that, excluding common words like and, the, etc., the top five most used words are: LORD, God, man, Israel, and people. It's intriguing how these words almost form a complete sentence, revealing

God's overarching plan and purpose for creation: "The Lord God created Man and chose Israel to be his special People." It underscores the idea of a special community, a family, into which we are blessed to be grafted by God's wonderful grace.

Recently, I watched the new Wonka movie, and in the final scene, he finally unwraps the chocolate bar his mom gave him before she passed. The golden ticket on it has a secret message, revealing the words, "It's

not the chocolate that matters. It's the people you share it with." With tears in his eyes, he breaks off pieces of the chocolate and shares it with his dear friends. Although it's not a very serious movie, it was a powerful reminder that life's significant moments would feel incomplete without companions to share them with. God didn't create us to be solitary beings; He designed us for companionship and community. From the beginning of creation, God provided a help meet for Adam because it was not good for him to be alone. It's the very same for us. We inherently long to belong, to have people to call our own. God has instilled in us a desire to be part of something greater, to give and receive love from others.

Unsurprisingly, some moments in my life that have brought me the most joy were community centered.

Joy in Community from Grand to Ordinary

Lifetime

In the Winter of 2022, my wife Bekah Thomas (Entwistle at the time) and I went to South Africa and were blessed to volunteer with a Christadelphian non-profit called Cuddle Trust. It was a life-changing, joy-filled experience serving the local community and preaching through action and service. There were seemingly countless moments of pure joy that filled each day we were there. One of these moments was when twenty-three of us gathered to paint the walls of a creche (a preschool), adding vibrant colors and elementary shapes to the small school. It was remarkable to see the difference we made working

side by side as a group, and we could tell it meant the world to the kind older couple who ran the school. I can still hear the infectious laughter of young ones who tirelessly chased me around the blueberry farm in one of the townships where we spent time.

One of the days, we drove out to visit a family in the faith that lived in isolation to dig and plant a garden in the family's small dirt yard. After a few hours of working out in the sun, the father of the house disappeared for a few minutes and came out with a bottle of juice and a bag of chips. With a big smile stretched across his face, he sang the song "Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You" and offered us all his heartfelt expression of gratitude. The brother was living out Paul's call to "*singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*" (Colossians 3:16).¹ It was a potent moment I will never forget.

One of my favorite things was called "Clean up for Christ," where we gathered a group of people, garbage bags, and gloves, picked a beach or park, and spent a couple of hours picking up trash together. We wore matching shirts that made us look like a noticeable group, and we had people come up to us and ask who we were, which gave us the perfect steppingstone to preach. It was a great way to put our faith into action and preach by doing! Even if no one came up to us, it was just a couple of hours out of our day, cleaning up God's creation he calls us to care for and bonding with our brothers and sisters in our group! One day, while

waiting for dinner, we decided to jump into the ice-cold ocean. Earlier in the day, we had tried to clean a park, but there was little to no trash there for our group to pick up. However, we found the busy beach we went to littered with trash. One thing led to another, and we had the whole group out on the beach doing an impromptu cleanup with our trash bags in the truck! It was the most special cleanup I have ever participated in, and it was so clear to see how God was at work! We had wonderful conversations about faith with locals on the beach, and someone even approached us for trash bags to join our beach cleanup! My heart was warmed to see how our small faith action had inspired others to follow suit.

I will forever be grateful for the memories we created and the warmth the Scheeper family embraced us within their homes. Their children and grandchildren were constant companions in their united efforts, mirroring their outstanding example of serving with joy. Whether eleven or three, they eagerly participated in crafting activities, playing with children, and enthusiastically joined in our Clean Up for Christ efforts. As our time together drew to a close, we found ourselves belting out unfamiliar tunes on long car rides with our newfound companions. I was left with not only a treasure trove of memories but also a precious handmade cloth figure gifted by nine-year-old Lexi. This simple yet heartfelt gesture symbolized the deep bonds formed and the unforgettable moments shared during our joyous journey of a lifetime.

Yearly

Each year since January 2020, a group of young Christadelphian brothers have made the long drive to the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. What began as a simple desire among our group of friends to reunite during the winter break of the college semester has blossomed, by God's abundant grace, into a cherished tradition of joyful fellowship and spiritual upliftment.

Over the past four years, the group has grown from a small group of already close-knit friends to an expanding group that makes finding a large enough Airbnb to host us a tall order. The weekend is full of Bible study, great food, goofy games often involving hot sauce, outdoor adventures, and plentiful heartfelt conversations. It has been a weekend that I eagerly look forward to each year and a great source of joy in often dreary winter months. After our trip in 2020, many of us in the group decided to extend the invitation to others. Over the past few years, the Poconos Weekend has brought brothers together who may have lacked connection with others in our faith community outside their local area. It has even connected several young brothers who might not have ever met! The weekend has offered a sense of belonging and has fulfilled a need for fellowship outside our ecclesial walls.

Over these past four years, I have a collection of fond memories. I recall a disc golf outing when one of the guys made a really long putt, and we all ran around yelping with joy in the snow. I reflect on the time spent in God's beautiful creation as we catch up with each other's lives and share meaningful,



heartfelt conversations. From our yearly tradition of taking a silly prom picture as we check out of our Airbnb to our acapella rendition of “Seek Ye First” sung in the van, complete with off-key notes galore, every moment has been a genuine blessing. These core memories made with my brothers in Christ have brought immeasurable joy to my life.

Our shared hope in Christ is the cornerstone of our gathering and is the primary source of joy each year. It's remarkable how our morning devotions and discussions often spill over into the afternoon, fueled by our desire to share spiritual insights and ideas. I vividly recall a moment in 2022, seated in the living room, gazing from one familiar face to another, overwhelmed with emotion as I reflected on the privilege of spending precious time with friends who all were earnestly trying their best to follow Christ. As David beautifully expresses in Psalm 133:1, *“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity.”* I couldn't agree more.

It is truly powerful to witness brothers who had never met before the weekend develop special bonds and grow a special closeness, making all the hours of planning and coordinating more than worth it. For some of us, it might not be another year until we see each other again, but we cling to the joy of our fellowship together until we meet again.

Monthly

Since this past September, Bekah and I have been hosting a monthly CYC, which young people from all the New England ecclesias have attended. We have a different brother speak each month, addressing the overarching topic of “Why Choose God?” We've been blessed with twenty to twenty-five attendees, and the kids have even been bringing their friends from school! There are CYC-age kids in most of the ecclesias in New England, but there isn't a single ecclesia with more than five or so kids, and it seemed to fill a need in the community. For myself, going to CYC was foundational to the

development of my faith, and I'm not sure where I'd be without it. It provided the opportunity to connect with other young people in the faith and helped foster a sense of belonging and community.

Even before CYC officially launched eight months ago, it was a source of immense joy for me. We reached out to the ten young brothers, asking if they would be willing to contribute by giving a class, and each one responded enthusiastically, "Yes." I can still picture the Zoom call, listening to each brother express the significance of CYC in their lives and their gratitude for the opportunity to support it for the next generation. Since its inception, witnessing the impact of CYC on the kids has been incredibly rewarding. It's heartening to see members traveling long distances, some driving nearly three hours each way from different states, just for a few hours of fellowship at CYC. Some have gotten rides from non-family members in their ecclesia who willingly give their time to make attending CYC possible for the young people in their area.

Just this past month, when one of the girls spotted a car arriving that she recognized, she immediately jumped up and ran to give her friend, who she hadn't seen in a month, a big hug. The aspect that brings me the most joy is seeing how much the kids want to be there. Even though CYC "officially" wraps up at 8:30 pm each month, the kids do not want to pack up. Instead, they continue chatting and enjoying each other's company for as long as possible. This past month after CYC ended, the kids randomly started

playing duck, duck, goose together for nearly an hour, all of their own volition, smiling from ear to ear. What they do doesn't matter, even if they're just playing a simple kid's game. They just want to be together, and it is priceless to witness.

Countless moments have brought me such joy—from Justin (a thirteen-year-old) asking that we promise to continue CYC next year, to a thank you text from a parent dubbing us "magic workers" because she saw her daughter smile, and four young brothers commit their lives to God in baptism. There truly is no greater joy than to witness God's children walking in truth (3 John 1:4). I feel beyond blessed for this monthly injection of joy these young people have brought to my life.

Weekly

Joy within a community doesn't solely rely on grand, infrequent events. It often shows up in the ordinary moments we share, such as gathering together on a Sunday morning or for midweek Bible Class. In Acts 2:46 (NASB), we witness the rapid expansion of the faith in Jerusalem and find that the believers were "*day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.*" These early Christians found profound joy in their community's simple act of fellowship, making it a regular part of their lives.

God made us with a need to share fellowship with our brothers and sisters to encourage each other on our shared walk to the Kingdom. In Paul's letter to the Hebrews (10:24-25), he calls the believers to "*consider how to*

stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” We simply can’t neglect to meet together. We need the encouragement and joy that our fellowship and community bring.

It is often the little moments that bring the purest joy. The hug that you hold for those few extra seconds. The smile that you get when you lock eyes with a loved one. For me, it’s running up and down the stairs of our hall with baby Jonah as we both shriek with excitement. It’s staying at the hall after Bible class until 10 pm, talking about anything under the sun, and just soaking up each other’s company. It’s the simple but special handshake I do with my ten-year-old buddy Ben when we see each other on Sunday mornings. It makes me smile just thinking about it. It’s when an older brother at the ecclesia I recently joined looks at me sincerely and says, “I love you.” It’s singing hymns about the coming Kingdom as a collective group that lifts me up and transports me to the day, we will sing hymns of praise all together in Jerusalem. We read in Isaiah 55:12 that we *“shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”* I get chills just thinking about it! It’s the laughter and intimate conversations shared over a potluck lunch. The night before his crucifixion, Jesus wanted most to share the joy of

fellowship with his disciples. Jesus took great joy from the community he found in the fellowship and friendship of those twelve men. Do we appreciate the joy of sharing a meal with our brothers and sisters like our dear Lord did?

We often need these small weekly moments of joy from our fellowship to sustain us until the following week. These moments of joy are a shadow of the unimaginable joys we have set before us in God’s coming Kingdom—the very same joy to which Jesus clung to endure the cross and despise the shame, as we read in Hebrews 12:2.

Sharing Joy in Christ

Whether big or small, grand or ordinary, we find joy together in Christ. There is joy in the hope we have in Christ. *“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say Rejoice.”* (Philippians 4:4 KJV). The gospel and the hope we have in Christ are the true sources of our joy, and the community we share in Christ fuels the flame of our joy. In our faith community, we find joy in being a part of God’s family, a family that offers true companionship and belonging. Whether it is in the once-a-lifetime trips across the world, yearly weekends of intimate fellowship, monthly youth groups, or the weekly ecclesial events, we can all find priceless moments of joy in a community that give us a glimpse of the joy we hope to share in God’s coming Kingdom.

Seth Thomas,
Cranston Ecclesia, RI

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless specifically noted.

JOY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

OUR JOYFUL IDENTITY IN CHRIST

By Steve Davis

By Steve Davis

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What defines you?

IN my professional life, I work as a financial advisor, counseling couples nearing retirement. People often come to me when they are contemplating leaving the workforce. The idea of retirement is exciting for most people because it means freedom from work routines and responsibilities. But it can be a scary time too, since retirement also means the paychecks stop forever. My work involves helping clients discover their “retirement readiness,” and my experience tells me that retirement readiness involves much more than the financial question of whether one can afford to retire. Sometimes, the people who can most afford to stop work are least prepared to do so. That’s because so much of their identity is inextricably linked to their work. People who have devoted their lives to their careers sometimes wonder, “If I’m no longer a [insert job title here], then who am I?”

Where Do You Find Identity?

When a retiring doctor or banker feels insecure about losing a job title, it’s because their **identity** is uncertain or threatened. We often construct our identities based on various factors—professions, marital status, parental roles, or hobbies. For example, I can say I’m a husband, a father, a grandfather, a son, a brother, and a loyal friend. I might also say I’m a cyclist, a woodworker, and a business owner. However, do these roles and labels truly define me? Perhaps not.

It has been said that if you base your identity on people or things, you are setting yourself up for an identity crisis. While these things may feel like solid

foundations, none are permanent or guaranteed. People die, interests fade, and health is fleeting.

God, however, is unchanging. He is reliable. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. One of the great joys of a life in Christ is knowing God has chosen us to be his sons and daughters. At our core, we are Christ’s brothers and sisters, and because we have responded to our calling through baptism, we have taken on a new identity. *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”* (Galatians 2:20 ESV). Our identity is in Christ, *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* (Galatians 3:27 ESV).

Our New Identity in Christ

Our authentic identity is who we understand ourselves to be at the core. Identity reveals what truly matters to us—what we love, what we want, and what we believe offers us hope and security.

Your baptism was a public declaration that your deepest convictions revolved around God and His Son. When you entered the waters of baptism, you wanted to publicly demonstrate your desire to renounce your old way of life and live a new life. Baptism changes our entire perspective on life. Instead of worrying about the concerns of the world that will not last, we can focus on matters of eternal significance—faith, hope, and love of God and neighbor. Here’s what the Apostle Paul wrote:

For Christ’s love compels us... He [Christ] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again...

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:14-17 NIV).

What a joy it is to be united with Christ! Our identity is not in our past sin or present struggles. It is in Jesus. And because of our association with him, we are children of God. *“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that’s what we are!”* (1 John 3:1 NIV).

We fear examining our new identity because we’re afraid doing so will ***confirm our deepest fears about ourselves***, that we are hypocritical, inadequate, insignificant — failures!

Tension and Insecurity Resolved through Christ

When we are honest with ourselves, doubts about how well we live up to our high calling will undoubtedly arise. We publicly proclaim we are born again and are living a new life in Christ, and yet deep down, we know the struggle with sin continues. We feel the weight of our weaknesses and failures. We fear examining our new identity because we’re afraid doing so will confirm our deepest fears about ourselves, that we are hypocritical, inadequate, insignificant— failures! Instinctively, we know all too well that we stand *“naked and exposed in the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”* (Hebrews 4:13 ESV).

The Apostle Paul felt this way, too, of course. He considered himself

chief among sinners and expressed something that we all sometimes think, *“nothing good dwells in me.”* If you’ve ever felt that way, you’re not alone. After Paul wrote about his struggle with sin in Romans 7:24 (NIV), he exclaimed, *“What a wretched man I am!”* But in making this exclamation, he was setting his readers up for the greatest rhetorical question in Scripture, *“Who will rescue me from this body of death?”* (ESV). The answer, of course, is God. Paul answered his own question and wrote,

“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (NET).

One of the great joys of a life in Christ is that we can resolve these feelings of insecurity through our Lord. When we remain in Christ and endure to the end, we can put the nagging insecurities of doubt behind us. Not because we are perfect but because God loves us and *“for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you [us].”* (Ephesians 4:32).

How God Sees You

In times of trouble, it’s easy to fall back and view yourself as broken and unworthy. What do you see when you look in the mirror, and how do you talk to yourself? When we are down and struggling, it’s not uncommon to say things to ourselves that we would never say to anyone else, even our worst

enemies. “I’m such a loser.” “I’m such a failure.” “I can’t do anything right.” This type of negative self-talk can be crippling, and when you say those types of things to yourself repeatedly, you’re bound actually to start believing them.

One way to align your self-perception is to think about how God sees you. Meditate on passages that describe your worth from God’s viewpoint. Seeing yourself as God sees you creates a powerful, joyful, and transformative perspective. Remember, God has blessed you with “*every spiritual blessing*.”

All Spiritual Blessings:

Here are seven spiritual blessings to consider. They are examples of how your Heavenly Father sees you:

1. You are credited with righteousness.

What does God see when He observes you struggling? Our Heavenly Father sees the righteousness of His own Son instead. Because you are in Christ, God sees Christ’s righteousness covering you.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:22-24 NIV).

2. You are a Saint.

Even though we still struggle with

sin, our core identity is as saints, not sinners. As believers, we acknowledge our ongoing battles with sin, yet we also hold onto the truth that God has declared us righteous through Christ. Despite our struggles, God sees us as saints—set apart for His purpose.

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. (Ephesians 2:19 ESV).

3. You are chosen.

Before our Lord’s crucifixion, Jesus gathered his disciples to comfort and motivate them to continue glorifying God. He said, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit.*” (John 15:16 NIV). Being chosen signifies that you have a divine calling and role to play in God’s plan. God views you as having a significant purpose.

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9 NIV).

4. You are strong.

Life can be challenging, as we all know. Paul says, “*We must go through hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.*” And when God looks at you, he doesn’t see you facing these things alone. No, God sees you with an army of angels commanded by Jesus to help you in your time of need. It’s for this reason that we can echo the words of Paul from Philippians 4:13 (NIV):

I can do all things through him who gives me strength.

5. You are loved.

Hymn 132, O Perfect Love, was written for a wedding and included the wish “that theirs may be the love that knows no ending.” Sadly, even the very best marriages end in death, leaving the survivors longing for the love they once enjoyed. God wants you to know there is no end to his love for you.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39 NIV).

6. You are part of God’s family.

God’s love is eternal, and it was there for you from the beginning when He selected you for adoption into His family. God sees something in you that caused Him to choose you as a beneficiary of His great and precious promises.

In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise

of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Ephesians 1:4-6 NIV).

7. You are victorious.

We all have days when life seems anything but victorious. But God sees the end from the beginning and wants to assure you that you are and will be victorious by remaining faithful!

For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 John 5:4-5 NIV).

Conclusion

It is a great joy to live a life in Christ. It gives us meaning and purpose, hope in times of trouble, and a family of believers who support and encourage us. But most of all, a life in Christ gives us an enduring identity. We are God’s children and heirs of salvation. May our lives reflect our thankfulness to God for these indescribable blessings.

*Steve Davis,
Boston Ecclesia, MA*



JOY IN CHRIST: PERSPECTIVES FROM YOUNGER YEARS

Compiled by Dan Ryan

HELLO, I'm Bro. Medar. I was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and am now living and working in Baltimore. I have six younger siblings, and I often think

about how my choices influence them. That's something that happens when you're the eldest. God chose me to be the eldest, and it's a good thing to lead my brothers and sisters.

I can't say I'm perfect, but every day, I'm trying to be 1% better, to grow, to be a valuable person in including and influencing others by the choices I make.

One of the most important choices I made recently was getting baptized. It was a decision that took a lot of reflection, and I made the decision based on what I wanted to stand for. I felt lonely, confused, and unworthy, but I remembered that if you seek him with all your heart, you will find him. Lots of things impacted my choice to get baptized. Yes, there were lessons, conversations, and youth weekends. But for me, it was when I felt the presence of God outside in the middle of the night while gazing at the stars. The joy was like none other. It's one of those feelings you can't really describe. Knowing that I'm a sinner, and through Jesus, I am forgiven. This brings great joy!

Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. (Psalm 126:5 NIV).

Medar Ebengo,
Baltimore Ecclesia, MD



WHEN I think of joy, I can't help but think of baptism. I like to say that it's just the beginning, but it's the best decision that anyone will ever make—the best day of someone's life on this side of the Kingdom. In the last year, I have been blessed with the honor and privilege of participating in the baptisms of four young men. These have all been days of the highest emotion. A father choked up, offering the right hand of fellowship to his son. Jubilant hymns of rejoicing were sung. The most passionate wet hugs were given. At each baptism, I couldn't help but think of all these young men had been through as God shaped and molded each of them. It had all led to that moment. Nothing fills my heart more than seeing those I love choose God.

In 3 John 1:4, John exclaims, *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."* John is talking about those whom he'd guided in the faith. I feel the same way. There is no greater joy than to see God's family grow as another child of His commits his life to him.

Seth Thomas,
Cranston Ecclesia, MA



SOMETHING that gives great joy in Christ is having a worldwide community of Christadelphians. It is truly special to visit other cities or countries worldwide and share fellowship with brothers and sisters who believe the same gospel truth, whether we know them or not. It brings joy because though we may have different cultures, languages, and challenges, we are all trying to follow Jesus Christ and waiting for his return. Bible schools, youth conferences, study weeks, or preaching efforts bring together people from all backgrounds.

The Apostle Paul experienced the joy of such fellowship: *“For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God.”* (1 Thessalonians 3:9). It creates so much joy and encouragement to praise God, study his word, and serve him as a group of believers united through the hope we share. Because *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”* (Ephesians 4:4-6 NKJV).

Kezia Robinson,
Brighton Ecclesia, SA



A vivid picture of pure joy for me comes when I remember the song and praise night of the Brisbane Youth Conference 2019. The conference room was packed with 350 young people and was the last night of an encouraging week studying John the Baptist. The song and praise program had finished, and there was a special carnival night supper set up outside, but the praise just kept going on. Song after song, people continued to make requests, and we all continued singing. The supper was neglected outside as everyone moved from their neat rows and allocated seats to squish up to the front of the room, arms around each other, some people with tears of joy at the opportunity to experience a little taste of the Kingdom, of a group of people with one mind and faith who just wanted to praise God. I remember feeling like there was no place in the world I would rather be, and reminiscing on that moment of connection to God with such a large group of His believers fills me with joy every time I think about it.

Lily Nicholls,
Brighton Ecclesia, SA



WE were wrapping up our mid-week Bible class, putting our hymn books back on the shelf as we do each evening. “You hear God in the Bible,” Teddy says quietly, almost as if he is still working out his thoughts.

I looked down at my three-year-old son, who was waiting for me to confirm that what he had said was right. It was. It is. Where did he get this from, I wondered?

Raising small children can be an all-consuming, exhausting, and sometimes thankless job. Even more, it is one of the greatest joys of my life. Each day brings new joy as I see his mind grow and process this world. I find myself jotting down his little expressions each day, so I don’t miss a thing. I love hearing him relay what he hears about God from his parents, his family, Sunday School teachers, and our ecclesial family. Keep talking to the children about our wonderful God and his son. They are keen to listen and to learn.

I echo the words of the Apostle John, but am talking about my literal children: “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*” (3 John 1:4).

*Anna Hewitson,
Baltimore Ecclesia, MD*



WHEN I reflect on joy, an example that comes to mind is being a Sunday school teacher. I have two students, who are four and three. I feel a deep sense of joy when I teach these two kids each week. Firstly, they are so fun! I find myself laughing so much with them! Secondly, I love watching them learn about the Bible. They are so earnest as they listen and reflect back on what they’re learning. They are joyful and eager to learn. It makes me think about what Jesus meant when he said we should be like little children. Perhaps it’s about fully trusting in God and having joy and wonder! Right now, these are just stories for them, but I know that God is at work, and these stories have the potential to become lessons that impact how they will live as they grow up.

*Janet Taylor,
Baltimore Ecclesia, MD*



WHEN I think of joy, I can’t help but think of the Apostle Paul and his letter to the Philippians. What inspires me most about this letter is that Paul seems to be overflowing with joy, but he is writing it from prison in what we would consider one of the worst environments and places to be. But the word Paul uses for joy

is *chara*—a "calm delight," an inner joy not based on circumstances. The truth is, because of our hope, joy can exist despite our circumstances, and this brings me so much comfort in hard times. I think of Christ, who was able to set his eyes on the joy that was before him and, therefore, endure the pain of the cross (Hebrews 12:2). One of my favorite verses is Nehemiah 8:10: "*The Joy of the LORD is your strength.*" There is joy in our hope, and we have a beautiful tomorrow to look forward to, singing with thousands of immortal voices, serving without the limitations of our frail mortal bodies and minds. We are so blessed with little cameos of the joy of the Kingdom now: praising God with our brothers and sisters, admiring the beauty of creation, gathering at Bible Schools, the joy of watching young people commit their lives to God. I can't wait for the time when the joy we experience now will be magnified by a thousand!

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (Philippians 4:4 ESV).

Cilla Tuckson,
Norfolk Ecclesia, VA



AS I collected snapshots of "joy in Christ," it sparked intriguing conversations. Not everyone could contribute, but "joy in Christ" resonates uniquely for each. My father-in-law sometimes hosts evenings titled "Why I'm glad I'm a Christadelphian," and the varied interpretations are inspiring. What about you? You won't make this article in time, but I'd love to hear your thoughts—dananddassie@gmail.com.

For me? We've all heard "joy shared is joy doubled." But the joy in Christ is at the next level. Especially in marriage (Proverbs 18:22). As Hadassah and I navigate life's adventures, there's joy in heartfelt advice (Proverbs 27:9), and each day holds little jewels (Proverbs 31:10-12 ESV).

Solomon wrote:

An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. (Proverbs 31:10-12 ESV).

Dan Ryan,
Baltimore Ecclesia, MD



REFLECTIONS

JOY IN CHRIST: PERSPECTIVES FROM *LATER YEARS*

Compiled by Alan Markwith

My Joy in the Lord

THE rich and abiding joy of knowing and serving God draws deeply on basic principles of faith.

1. I believe in God because of His marvelous creation that surrounds us.
2. I trust God because of His clear and abiding purpose, described in the Biblical record.
3. I have confidence in God because of His unlimited power, knowledge, and wisdom.
4. I have faith in God because of His consistency, reliability, and universal presence.
5. I love God through the teaching, example, and sacrifice of Jesus, God's Son.

There are countless books, speeches, graphic arts, poetry, and a variety of music that contribute to our knowledge and appreciation of God. Perhaps the best and most helpful of these vast resources are the simple things that teach us, such as flowers, mountains, the sky, the oceans, and the seasons of the year. These help us appreciate the presence and power of Almighty God.

In the end, however, the simple teaching of the Word of God will teach, remind, encourage, correct, and motivate us in our daily lives. These principles will guide our service to the God of life and

love. Simple principles of instruction and truth, of purpose and faith in the eternal God. These are things that bring lasting joy in my life in Christ.

*Ken Curry,
Toronto East Ecclesia, ON*



God's Hand in Our Lives

AFTER losing our youngest son in Panama in 1978, we returned home feeling quite depressed. At least we had each other for support, but our older son, Ivan, was struggling. He had no one who understood or could console him. His brother had been his best friend, and now he felt alone and lost.

Three years later, due to the encouragement and influence of Bro. Bob Lloyd, he was baptized.

For a year or two, he had friends in the ecclesia. But over time, his friends all had girlfriends and were getting married, and he found himself the odd man out. He eventually found

In the end, however, the simple teaching of the Word of God will teach, remind, encourage, correct, and motivate us in our daily lives.

solace with his friends in the world and started playing snooker and baseball on Sundays. He stopped going to the meeting, instead spending time with his worldly friends, drifting away from the Truth. This situation continued for eighteen years. Sometimes, he visited us and occasionally sat down and did Bible readings with us. But eventually, he just never found the time to read with us. There were times when we didn't even know where he was living. For all those years, we have never given up praying for him.

Eventually, he met Marsha, whom he married. She was dissatisfied with many people who were selfish and ungodly. She was looking for something more in life, so Ivan introduced her to some ongoing Bible classes in our small town. When the seminar finished, she started taking classes with others in our home and became so enthusiastic that she began reading the Bible by herself. Soon after they were married, she was baptized. It was such a happy occasion, and we were thankful for God's hand in their lives.

For us, the highlight was the day Ivan came with Marsha to share fellowship with the brothers and sisters in Christ. We were overwhelmed with thankfulness and joy that after all these years, our prayers had been answered, bringing Ivan back and our daughter-in-law, too. She is such a blessed addition to our small family, as well as comfort, love, and companionship to our son, who continues to be a useful brother in the ecclesia. He talks about God to everyone he meets and works with.

The lesson for us and others is never to

stop praying. Our time is different from our Heavenly Father's. He is a God of compassion, and He always hears the petitions of His children.

*Peter and Margaret Stonell,
North Bay Ecclesia, ON*



Joy in Purpose, Vision, and Hope

THE Joys of my life in Christ started with being in a grade nine classroom with a young person (Diane Abel, now Siegler). We talked about her background (Christadelphian-raised) and my background (Catholic-raised). We hit it off the first day with an incredible connection, which I truly believe was God-driven. She invited me to their CYC youth group, and I did not hesitate. My single-parent mother was very religious (Catholic) but believed that all of her six children should have the freedom of choice in their lives, and so was very supportive of me attending CYC. From those first moments, I've never stopped believing that God was directing my life in a way that ventured forward with purpose and meaning.

Through CYC, I met my future husband, David Birchall, who moved from England and joined our CYC. Life paves a path by God's direction and forms an incredible bond of

unity and commonality that will not be broken to this very day—married going on 53 years this July 2024. We were put on a path to London, Ontario, where we were part of a small but eager ecclesia that focused on Sunday School involvement and active workers.

Our move was such that we formed an incredible purpose by starting the Christadelphian Save the Children Fund (christadelphianchildren.com), which, to this very day, still provides Bible learning supplies to countries throughout the ecclesial world, touching 34 countries last count. Our bond as a couple did not form children of our own, but in Christ we received such joy that is hard to fully express as we both became spiritual parents to children throughout the world who needed spiritual support and purpose. Never underestimate the power that one can form in the lives of others thousands of miles away. The story's moral (not finished but continuous in purpose) is to find your niche and grow according to God's purpose in your life. Be helpful, be vibrant, be willing to serve and be served, and grow thereby. Remember the past, honor the present, and look forward to the future in everything you do. When one begins to walk the path of spiritual urgency in the lives of those in isolation, one soon learns how to make a difference and carry the chain of importance in spreading the Truth of the gospel message. This, too, is a joy in my life in Christ.

Fast forward to today, God's blessing has come closer to home with African

children and families from Tanzania, twenty-eight in all, swelling our small ecclesia, Sunday School, and CYC groups and allowing us to share our precious gift of grace. Always thank God that He calls His own to be part of the vision of the Kingdom. May we all be ambassadors of this blessed message that Jesus died for our sins and was raised to eternal life to bring a vision clearly to mind. (Habakkuk 2:3). May we all behold the vision of hope, consolation, and especially eternal salvation through God the Father of all and Jesus Christ Our Lord. Let us all have a purpose, vision, hope, and eternal glory.

*David and Louise (Cecy) Birchall,
London Ecclesia, ON*



Where There is Life, There is Hope

IM Sis Myra Lucke from the Victoria Ecclesia in British Columbia, Canada. One of the most joyous occasions I have experienced in my life in Christ is witnessing my mother's baptism. Mother always felt she was fine, thank you very much, without God. I left home at seventeen and ended up, by God's hand, working in my life, living with a very faithful

Be helpful, be vibrant, be willing to serve and be served,
and grow thereby. Remember the past, honor the present,
and look forward to the future in everything you do.

Christadelphian family, much to the chagrin of my mother. I was being brainwashed, she felt.

Roll forward twenty-five years, and the only glimmer of hope I could see was that Mother felt there was something in Israel, this tiny country that was always in the news. I would tell her why, but that fell on deaf ears. Through some extraordinary situations, a sister in Vernon, BC invited my mom to attend a Learn to Read the Bible Effectively seminar. During the next phone call, my mom, who was a voracious reader, was telling me all about this amazing story of Esther in the Bible. I wondered if I had called the right number!

Then, things changed dramatically. She was diagnosed with lung cancer. She came to Victoria for treatment, where she continued to have classes with a sister in my meeting. Mom eventually went home to Vernon, where she lived a relatively active life for the next few months. In the Fall, we had to put her in a care home, as the cancer had metastasized to the brain. But she continued to go to classes and to meeting. All the while, my sister wasn't too sure of all this religious activity my mom was getting involved in but went along with it. Both of us visited for Christmas and Mom couldn't speak very well by then. After dinner one night, I took Mom home, and when I came back, my aunt

and sister were sitting there waiting for me. When I walked in, out of the blue, they asked me if my mom might like to get baptized. I was thrilled. So the next day, I asked Mom, and she said yes. By now, she was in a wheelchair, not able to walk very well. So, I phoned the recording brother, explaining my mom wanted to get baptized. He phoned me back after talking to the ABs, and they decided to have a cup of tea with her and chat about her beliefs in a very simple way.

I was grateful for their kindness and sensitivity. The baptism was arranged in two weeks. She was baptized on a Saturday, and the following Monday, she fell into a coma and never regained consciousness. My only regret was that I didn't have more time to spend with her as a sister in Christ. I always say that where there is life, there is hope.

*Myra Lucke,
Victoria Ecclesia, BC*



My Joy at 95

I was baptized in 1940 and was active in the ecclesia. I gave exhortations, lectured on Sunday evenings, and taught Sunday School. I brought my wife into the truth. I was quite active in preaching activities. I worked with Truth Corps for twenty years, leading a team for five or six years in the US, Canada, and Panama. I did all of those things that a “good” Christadelphian was supposed to do. I knew about God: He was the Creator, immortal, all-powerful, and merciful. I knew what Jesus had done, working miracles, and that he was sacrificed so that believers could be forgiven and saved in the coming Kingdom. I knew these things, but something seemed to be missing.

I was taught that faith was the first principle and that it led to eternal life in the Kingdom. I know these things are essential, not ends in themselves but truths that lead us to understanding.

One day, I read John 17:3: *“This is eternal life, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”* To know someone doesn’t mean just meeting someone, but much more. It means understanding that person’s purposes for life and how they thought about you. That gave me something to ponder. That is when I realized I knew about God and Jesus but didn’t **know** them. I loved them academically but not personally. I didn’t really have a relationship with them. I had read

that God is love but didn’t appreciate that He loved me. That He was very concerned about me and wanted to give me eternal life if I committed to His ways.

I realized His purpose was to fill the earth with people dedicated to bringing Him glory and that this is what He wanted for me. I read 2 Peter. 3:9, *“The Lord is not slack concerning the promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”* Now I know God and Jesus, rejoicing in their love, forgiveness and care as I wait for the Kingdom to come when I can love and serve with Jesus and honor my God throughout eternity in the promised Kingdom. This knowledge is my greatest Joy because now I love the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent. God gave me a long life so that I could come to that realization.

*Russell Patterson,
Verdugo Hills Ecclesia, CA*



EVERYDAY JOYS

By John Perks



AS believers in the Gospel, we should all have the foundational joy of knowing that our Heavenly Father has a plan and purpose for this earth and that He has invited us to be a part of a future world that has been fully restored (Revelation 21:1-5). That joy should allow us to endure the dark days we will inevitably face. This was the joy that was set before Jesus,

enabling him to endure the cross and despise the shame (Hebrews 12:2). But what about finding joy in the everyday experiences of this life?

We know that God created the earth with indescribable beauty and variety. He then placed us into this world with extraordinary senses that allow us to experience His creation in awe-inspiring ways. Surely, all this

creation was done for our benefit and enjoyment: flowers radiant with beauty, the deafening roar of a magnificent waterfall, the aroma of baking bread, and the softness of a newborn baby's skin. He's also given us the joy of hundreds of pleasurable flavors. In addition to this, He has given us relationships such as spouses, family, and community to experience love, friendship, loyalty, and security. Indeed, these are all gifts from our Heavenly Father intended to bring us joy and to fill our hearts with praise and gratitude.

Paul noticed the joys we experience in everyday life when he spoke to the people of Lystra. He instructed them that the good things of this world are a witness to God's presence and His goodness.

In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. (Acts 14:16-17).¹

Paul's words echo David's expression of gratitude when he wrote,

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Psalm 145:15-16).

King Solomon also said,

I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they

live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man. (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13).

Based on these truths, we should cherish and meditate on the many joyful moments we experience daily and then use them to fuel our praise and gratitude. However, I'm guessing that most of us are not cherishing these joyful moments to the extent we should, or perhaps we're not even perceiving them. Why is this the case, and what is the remedy?

There may be many reasons why we fail to recognize God's gifts, but I suggest that for the majority of us, it is simply because we pay attention to things that don't bring joy. Like children in a cereal aisle at the grocery store, we focus on and end up consuming products that are packed with sugar but bereft of any nutritional value. We expose ourselves to content that increases feelings of covetousness, anxiety, sadness, anger, and/or helplessness.

But as serious an issue is the amount of time we throw away. Hour after hour, day after day, we choose to fill our time with unfruitful activities. Andrew Sullivan is an author who chose to go into a meditation retreat to help him heal from his technology addiction. In an article about his experience called *I Used To Be Human*, he made an insightful and sobering comment about the disintegration of faith in the Western world.

The reason we live in a culture increasingly without faith is not because science has somehow

disproved the unprovable, but because the white noise of secularism has removed the very stillness in which it might endure or be reborn.”²

I believe the same can be said for joy. If we struggle to find joy in our days, perhaps we need to recognize the amount of white noise in our lives and start aggressively carving out **times of stillness**. “*Be still, and know that I am God.*” (Psalm 46:10).

We can work towards this goal by spending more time in the environment God has created for us. Take the time to see, hear, smell, touch, and taste the wonders of creation. Sometimes, we see it in the great things like deep canyons, vast oceans, and majestic mountains. But we can also be in awe of the tiny things like honeybees, apple blossoms, and the aroma of lilacs. We can then challenge ourselves to meditate on the spiritual lessons each can bring us.

We can also look to Jesus. Too often, some have characterized him as a sullen and stoic person. However, there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest he was joyful. We know he wanted the young children to be near him and directed us to receive the Kingdom of God like a child (Luke 18:15-17). We know well the joy children express when receiving a gift. Jesus also spoke of the joy of finding treasures (Matthew 13:44-46) and things that were lost (Luke 15). Even an erroneous accusation of being a drunkard and a glutton (Luke 7:34) does suggest a man who would frequently be found smiling and laughing.

We can learn that despite the intense demands on his time and energy, he prioritized setting aside time for stillness.

But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.” (Luke 5:15-16).

Let’s prioritize following our Master by setting aside time each day to be with our God. Be insistent about setting a time each day to meet with God and His Son to read, pray, and meditate. Psalm 119:1-2 (NLT), which we know is primarily focused on the Word of God, begins this way:

***Joyful** are the people of integrity, who follow the instructions of the LORD. **Joyful** are those who obey His laws and search for Him with all their hearts.*

There is joy in the wonders of His word. Consider the intellectual challenges it presents, the wisdom it provides for daily living, and its infusion of meaning and purpose.

We also know Jesus was devoted to relationships and the associated joys that spring from them. The writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are filled with accounts of his travels, meals, conversations, and gatherings with people. Perhaps the most significant joys he experienced were the many times he healed people of their physical and spiritual infirmities and saw the looks of astonishment, thankfulness, and delight on their faces.

Are we ensuring that our interactions with brothers and sisters go beyond the short visits on a Sunday or at a midweek Bible Class? Our time together must be prioritized as it

was for Jesus with his disciples. When answering what the greatest commandment was, he took the time to direct our attention to a second great commandment. “*And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Matthew 22:39).

Let’s consider for a moment the implications of a life attuned to the joyful gifts of God. In a world of increasing anxiety, worry, and stress, where men’s hearts are failing themselves for fear, a Biblically joyful perspective can act as a circuit breaker. Our voice of positivity and joy can inject a different perspective, something more attractive than despair. Without denying that we live in a world under numerous threats, our anti-anxious perspective that focuses on the joys of each day can direct those around us to the fact that we have a loving Heavenly Father—a Father who is in control and has a plan and purpose, where things that are true, beautiful, and lovely are victorious.

Every four years, the world holds the Winter Olympics. On occasion, the hockey team I cheer for has made it to the gold medal game. During the final game, I am a bundle of nerves. My heart races, and my emotions surge from anger and despair to jubilation. I pace the floor and cry out at perceived injustices. Looking back, I can’t say I enjoyed the experience, and I don’t think people enjoy being around me.

However, if my team wins, there is something I do enjoy doing. I love to watch a replay of the game. While watching it a second time, knowing the positive outcome, I thoroughly enjoy every aspect. My anxiety, my anger, and my despair are all gone. I can smile at the ups and downs. Shouldn’t this be our perspective as we walk through this life? Shouldn’t we be overjoyed knowing the outcome?

*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. **But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*** (1 Corinthians 15:56-57).

There will be times in all of our lives when joys will be more challenging to see, smell, hear, taste, and feel. If we are diligent about carving out times of stillness, enjoying fellowship with our brothers and sisters, and spending time walking with our God, surely an attitude directed towards joy will shine through. May that persistent, joyful attitude bring glory to a God who loves us deeply.

Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NLT).

*John Perks,
Ottawa Ecclesia, ON*

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless specifically noted.

² *I Used to Be Human*, Andrew Sullivan, September 19, 2016, *New York Magazine*.

THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS

By Bryan Lloyd



WHILE growing up, I remember a time when my grandfather wasn't on speaking terms with his older brother. Decades later, I learned that there was a time when he and his younger brother weren't talking either. It baffled me. While I was occasionally miffed by my little sister, it never seemed to matter a few hours later. However, these were two grown men,

and my grandfather was one of the nicest people I knew—and this was in my cultural context of “Minnesota nice!” How could he be upset with his brother for so long?

Now, as I near the age my grandfather was at that time, I have seen more of life and more examples of loving people having been separated by offenses between one another. Even

loving people I respect greatly in the community of believers aren't immune to this. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. So, it should not be surprising that friction between brothers goes back to the beginning. It led to murder just outside the Garden. Problems between siblings were present in early Genesis, and they are a big part of the storyline of the patriarchs at the end as well. Joseph's older brothers stopped just short of killing him! Problems like these, then and now, rob people of joy and peace in their relationships, peace in the Hebrew sense of shalom, and the wholeness and health of the relationship.

In the epistles of the New Testament, we have warnings about unresolved conflict and how it negatively impacts us as we hold onto grievances. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of a root of bitterness that grows in our lives and robs us of joy:

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. (Hebrews 12:14-15).¹

Similarly, Paul exhorts us to:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32 ESV).

When we forgive, bitterness gets weeded out, and joy can bloom in our hearts instead.

If Joseph, in slavery and prison, could have dwelt on the wrong his brothers had done to him and let bitterness grow over the many years of separation he could have easily acted in a vengeful way. We don't know how much he wrestled with hurt and anger towards his brethren, but at some point, he let go of the offense and had the wisdom to recognize God's hand in the events to bring about salvation. He told his brothers, "*And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.*" (Genesis 45:5 ESV). His forgiving attitude set the stage for his joyful reunion with brothers who previously were so filled with jealousy and contempt that they "*hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.*" (Genesis 37:4). Now, as a result of Joseph's forgiveness and grace towards his brothers, their relationship has a new start amidst tears of joy. "*And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them.*" (Genesis 45:15). Notice that "*afterward his brothers talked with him.*" (v. 15). The text, in compact language, draws a contrast to the previous dysfunction in their relationship.

The emotive language helps us visualize the tearful embrace of brothers reconciled. It mirrors the joyful embrace of their father Jacob and his brother Esau, another beautiful image of reconciliation and healing coming to a relationship. "*But Esau ran to meet*

Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept." (Genesis 33:4). So too, joy can come with forgiveness on the horizontal plane in our lives, brother to brother, sister to sister, or brother to sister. With forgiveness, there is a healing of a rift that divides two parties in a relationship. The restoration of this relationship is a reason to be joyful.

Not only does joy come on the horizontal plane with our siblings in Jesus, but we also feel the joy with reconciliation on the vertical plane with forgiveness from God. This joy comes because repentance and forgiveness bring us back into connection with God after sin had driven a wedge between us and God. Adam and Eve were banished from the garden due to their sin, and Cain's sin led him to go *"out from the LORD's presence... in the land of Nod, east of Eden."* Similarly, our sin drives us further and further from God. But God's grace and forgiveness draw us back to the joy of fellowship with Him.

David, in Psalm 51, expresses the joy felt by the repentant sinner,

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. (Psalm 51:7-8).

David describes feeling crushed at the core of his being by the weight of his sin. Guilt, shame, and regret result from our sins. He longed for and prayed for the cleansing and forgiveness that brought joy and gladness to replace the feeling of brokenness.

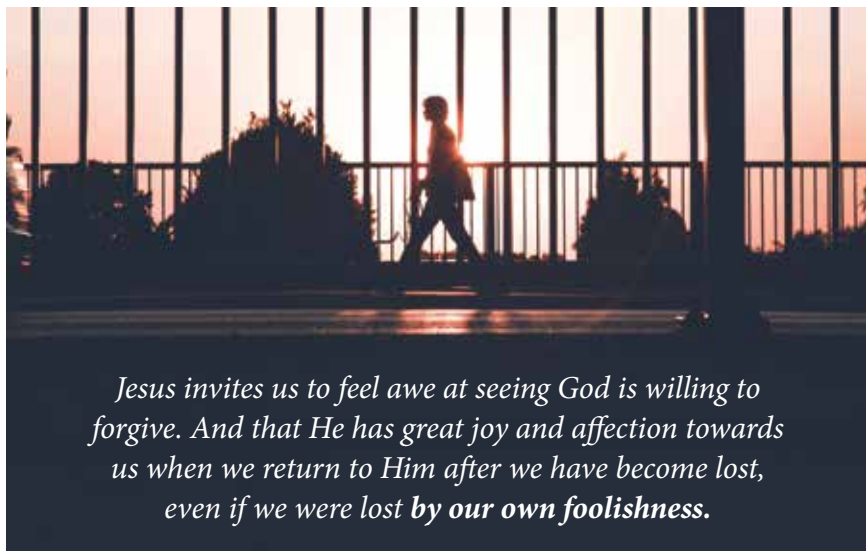
Shortly thereafter, David continues,

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (Psalm 51:10-12).

David recognized that his sin could have led to him being driven from God's presence but prayed instead for the joy of being restored.

In addition to the receiver of forgiveness, the one granting forgiveness also feels joy as the relationship is mended. The Scriptures reveal to us God's joy as the giver of forgiveness. This truth about the joy in heaven was revealed to us by our Master in three ways in the three parables of Luke 15. These lessons were given by Jesus in response to the muttering by the *"righteous"* about the *"sinners"* that Jesus was welcoming and eating with. (v. 2). The rich imagery of the masterful storyteller gives us a glimpse of the rejoicing and celebration that occurs when we, as sinners, turn and seek forgiveness. When the lost sheep was found, the diligently searching shepherd *"joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'"* (v. 5-6). Jesus continues, *"I tell you that in the same way, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."* (v. 7).

In the second parable, the woman who searched for the lost coin in the house finds it and *"calls her friends and*



*Jesus invites us to feel awe at seeing God is willing to forgive. And that He has great joy and affection towards us when we return to Him after we have become lost, even if we were lost **by our own foolishness.***

neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' (v. 9). Jesus comments, "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (v. 10).

Jesus paints another picture of this joy in the third parable, where the Father is watching for the lost son, hoping for his return, and sees him approaching from a distance. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." (v. 20). Interrupting his son's planned message, the father says, "'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate." (v. 22-24). This celebration included music and dancing with joy.

Consider how much of this imagery mirrors the story of Joseph.² Jesus, who immersed his mind in the Hebrew Scriptures, is activating links to remind us how much joy the father Jacob experienced when reunited with his lost son. It's one of the most deeply moving moments in Genesis. Joseph, the son previously dead in Jacob's mind, was now alive again, and he and his son joyfully embraced and kissed. "As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time." (Genesis 46:29). Consider the contrast that Jesus paints. Joseph was not separated from his father by his own doing. The prodigal, however, left of his own volition and made some pretty bad choices. He foolishly wasted resources while Joseph wisely stored them up and so was able to save numerous lives, including those of his father and brothers. Joseph was morally upright, fleeing from an adulterous approach.

The prodigal engaged in “*wild living*.” Jesus, by drawing this contrast—yet linking the welcoming arms of the two fathers—invites us to feel awe at seeing God is willing to forgive. And that He has great joy and affection towards us when we return to Him after we have become lost, even if we were lost by **our own foolishness**.

It is worth considering the two additional powerful links Jesus makes to Joseph's story when the elder brother speaks of prostitutes and jealously mentions that he never received a young goat. These elements bring us to the story of Judah, who sought out a prostitute, and Tamar, who never received the young goat as payment in Genesis 38. The narrative contrasts Joseph and Judah. Jesus is clearly using the echoes to reach the hearts of his audience. Jesus wants them to recognize that their attitude toward repentant sinners is just as improper as Judah's condemnatory, judgmental attitude toward Tamar. They, like Judah, should recognize that the other is “*more righteous than I*.” They, and we, must try to see from God's perspective when people are turning because of the call of Jesus. These are repentant sinners whom the Father welcomes with joyful arms; they and we should share in that joy. The religious leaders needed to see they were just as sinful and should be seeking mercy from God and not be so quick to condemn their brother.

Returning to my grandfather and great uncle, if I, a couple of generations beyond the conflicting brothers, felt sorrow about the strained relationship, then I can imagine how much more anguish would have been felt by my great grandfather had he lived to see his children divided from one another in this way. Jacob did live to see the great conflict between his sons. But he also was blessed to see the joy of their reconciliation. Think about how our heavenly Father feels sorrow, witnessing the conflict between His children and how our sins separate us from one another. But also how great the joy He feels when His children forgive and reconcile!

For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross. He saw the joy of forgiveness coming to lost people like us when reconciled to His Father. He knew the joy His Father and the angels would experience when we repent and return to Him. Jesus shares this joy as he sees the *shalom* in our relationship with God due to his sacrifice. With joyfulness, thankfulness, awe, and humility, let us always remember what God and Jesus have done to bring about this peace. So, let us seek the *shalom* and healing in our relationships and share the joy of forgiveness, bringing joy to our Father in heaven as He sees His children reconciled.

Bryan Lloyd,
Boston Ecclesia, MA

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version, unless specifically noted.

² Examining the many connections between this parable and the story of Joseph warrants another entire study; in the course of preparing this article, I have seen twelve thematic allusions and language connections that Jesus uses in the twenty-two verses of this parable to the Joseph story at the close of Genesis.

JOY IN ADVERSITY

By Benoit Mukendi



EXPERIENCES, difficulties, and accomplishments are all part of overcoming obstacles. These components collectively form the foundation that forges a person's route to success by faith in the Lord. Throughout their lives, people may encounter tough and demanding situations. These difficulties can occasionally become intolerable,

particularly when the odds are stacked against one. Nevertheless, defying all odds is something that anyone can accomplish. To overcome these obstacles, one must adopt a "never give up" mentality. Many individuals worldwide regularly encounter difficulties and impediments in their lives. Challenges and obstacles can take various forms, obstructing you

from achieving your temporary or permanent goal, depending on your personality. The desire to overcome these challenges will form a person's qualities, leading to a greater passion for Jesus Christ.

God is always present and caring, even amid our pleasures and sorrows or when we feel like life is no longer worth living. Psalm 46:1-3 says,

*God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore, we will not fear, though
the earth be removed, and though
the mountains be carried into
the midst of the sea; Though the
waters thereof roar and be troubled,
though the mountains shake with
the swelling thereof.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ is always in command. Life can contain either positive or negative events that extend or shorten it. But we must never lose sight of God's involvement.

We have been fortunate to welcome many of our brothers, sisters, and

family who were previously living in refugee camps to live in North America. These brothers and sisters had been in the camps for one or two decades, leaving behind some of their possessions, including land and extended families. These families left their country because of various factors, including unrest in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There, several rebel groups have been working with other powerful leaders to exploit the natural resources in the region. This unrest has led to the displacement of numerous families inside and outside the country. This danger is recalled by our dear Bro. Lewis, who lives in Rochester, USA. His child was a casualty of this war conflict, losing her hearing because of a bomb thrown 80 meters (about 260 feet) away from her location.

Due to the large-scale exodus of brothers and sisters and their families from Africa to North America, we must prepare for assorted situations, including locating them near an



ecclesia for their spiritual development and implementing the truth's work. Being close to an ecclesia allows them to fellowship with brothers and sisters, making them feel more at ease. In Acts 2:45-48 it is written:

They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

This Scripture encourages us to continue to fellowship with one another for the glory of the LORD.

However, some brothers and sisters experience isolation. To address these issues, we must establish a channel of communication among our community so information can be exchanged to assist those in need, including the recently immigrated brothers and sisters. Having said that, these people are arriving because of a variety of life experiences, including violence, conflict, war, fear of persecution, and other situations that necessitate a safe haven. Some refugees have spent nearly a decade or more living in camps, losing their homes, relatives, and cultural practices in the process. The majority of them are not given the option to select the location of their relocation, and very few are asked where they would prefer to move. Whether or not they are offered this option, the obstacles newcomers face

remains the same. Despite having fled from many obstacles and with diverse backgrounds, cultures, and nations, we have one thing in common: a genuine love for the Truth and one another that reflects a major commandment found in John 13:34-35:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

Regarding difficulties, one tale that illustrates these struggles is from Bro. Chris, a young brother. Bro. Chris was separated from the comforts of his native country to go to a foreign land. He set out on an unknown and difficult trip as a settler, but amid the mayhem, he found a steady companion in his trust in Christ. Bro. Chris's storyline starts in a Tanzanian refugee camp in the beautiful scenery near his home country, where he was raised in the Truth. He grew up surrounded by the rich customs and teachings of his faith, comfort, and support in the promises of the Bible. Still, Bro. Chris and his entire family were fortunate enough to be allowed to relocate to the US in 2017 when persistent war and conflict ravaged his native country for three decades.

Arriving in Des Moines, Iowa, Bro. Chris was overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of his new home. Everything felt unfamiliar, from the language spoken on the streets to the bustling crowds that hurried past him. But amidst the chaos, Bro. Chris clung to the promise of God's presence

in his life. Days became weeks, and weeks became months. Bro. Chris faced obstacles he never would have thought he would. Communication was hampered by language obstacles, and cultural differences frequently made him feel isolated and alone. Nevertheless, Bro Chris found comfort in the teachings of Scripture and the support of his ecclesia throughout it all.

Bro. Chris's faith was tested like never before by one specific trial. He was raised in a Sunday School home and learned early on the value of following the Bible's teachings, regardless of the backlash. But when he started university in his new country, he was met with a wide range of ideas and viewpoints that were diametrically opposed to his own. The need to embrace dominant cultural norms was one of his biggest obstacles, especially concerning matters of morality and sexuality. He found a strong pressure at his university to accept lives and behaviors that contradicted his faith convictions.

Bro. Chris discovered that there was a conflict between his faith and the secular perspective that was being preached at university. He struggled with identity and purpose issues, wondering how to live up to his first principles in a culture that was against them. He was exposed to instructors in his classes who publicly supported same-sex partnerships, putting out reasons that ran counter to the Biblical values he had grown up with. One passage from the Bible that he looked to and found encouraging, for instance, was:

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. (1 Peter 3: 14-15).

Bro. Chris remained faithful to his first principle in the face of pressure to fit in, finding strength in his connection with Christ and the encouragement of his ecclesial community. The words of Scripture comforted him because they served as a constant reminder of God's unfailing love and truth.

Another significant adversity he faced was the teaching of evolutionary theory in his science classes. As a Christadelphian, Bro. Chris had been taught to view the creation account in Genesis as exact truth, believing that God created the world. In Genesis 1:1-5 it states:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day."

However, in his university courses, he was confronted with scientific evidence contradicting his deeply held beliefs.

He struggled to reconcile his faith with the scientific theories presented in his classes, grappling with questions of origins and the nature of reality. Yet, even amid doubt and uncertainty, he clung to his faith in Christ, trusting that God's truth would prevail in the end.

Despite the hardships and challenges he faced; Bro. Chris' faith remained unshaken. He found joy in adversity, knowing that he was not alone in his struggles, but that God walked alongside him every step of the way, as we are

told in the Scripture that *"the angel of God encamps around those that love him."* (Psalm 34:7) And through it all, he discovered a deeper understanding of the true meaning of joy—not as the absence of hardship but as the application of his faith during adversity. As Bro. Chris reflects on his experiences as an immigrant now, he realizes that each hardship served as a springboard for happiness. His joy was refined via the trial of his faith, and it now shines brilliantly for everyone who knows him like a beacon of hope.

Ultimately, Bro. Chris's tale is one of triumph and victory rather than mere hardship and misfortune. He discovered a profound delight in Christ, a joy that endures through the worst of circumstances. Bro. Chris is aware that the happiness he has found

in Christ will last forever despite the difficulties he has faced along the way.

Life wouldn't be the same without conquering various adversities that shape you into a stronger Christ believer. God only allows situations

in your life that he knows you can manage. Everybody faces various challenges throughout their lives, and every person responds to these challenges in a unique way. While some people avoid their difficulties, others deal with them head-on to resolve these problems. We

need to create a means of connections among our fellow brethren to share information and help those in need, such as our recently immigrated brothers and sisters, in the bond of the Truth, and all brothers and sisters in North America. We long for a better day to come, when that joyous time without adversity fills the earth with His glory. Come, Lord Jesus!

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brethren to share
information and
help those in need.

Benoit Mukendi,
Cambridge Ecclesia, ON

JOY IN OUR WORSHIP

COMING HOME

By Kevin Flatley

Igrew up in a small seacoast village of fewer than 2,500 people on Cape Ann. Massachusetts has two capes, the larger one named after a fish and the much smaller one named after a queen. Like its more famous sibling (Cape Cod), Cape Ann juts out from the mainland into the Atlantic Ocean and is surrounded by water on three sides.

When you approach it from the south, there is a specific spot on the highway, a distinctive curve toward the east. When the wind is right, the instant you start to turn, the air changes. In the summertime, you can feel the temperature drop, smell the ocean, and hear the bells of navigation buoys and foghorns. It's a multi-sensory experience. Although I haven't lived there for over fifty years, when I return and hit that curve, I know I'm coming home. I get profound feelings of gladness, peace, and, especially, a sense of joy. I am aware of changes taking place within me, both emotional and physical, which, although hard to describe, are nonetheless real and powerful. Cares seem to drop away, and I get a sense of "all's right with the world" because of the joy I feel when coming home.

I suspect we all have a place like that: a place that generates warm associations. A place all at once familiar, imbued with fond memories, a place of family, comfort, acceptance, and nurture. As you think of that place, ask yourself three questions—Is that place **your** **ecclesia**? Do you **always** feel that way about your ecclesia? Do you **ever** feel that way about your ecclesia?

Some Christadelphians have pondered, "Are our Memorial Services too staid? Are they overly somber? Are they devoid of joy?" After all, we are encouraged to make a "*joyful noise unto the LORD*." And David danced before the Ark of the Covenant. But outward expressions of joy are very culturally driven, dependent on the personalities of the individuals. The Bible does have something to say about joy in worship, but it doesn't proscribe a one-size-fits-all approach. It focuses on inner joy and how we, as individual worshippers, feel as we, together with our brothers and sisters, come into our Creator's presence. Our communal worship is distinct from our personal worship and should engender different feelings.

Psalm 84 tells us much about that inner joy when in God's house and what it means to be there:

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts! My soul longs,
indeed it faints for the courts of
the LORD; my heart and my flesh
sing for joy to the living God. Even
the sparrow finds a home, and the
swallow a nest for herself, where she
may lay her young, at your altars,
O LORD of hosts, my King and
my God. Happy are those who live
in your house, ever singing your
praise. (Psalm 84:1-4).¹*

We know that God is everywhere, and He can even make His home **in us**. Jesus put it this way in John's Gospel: "*Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and **make our home with them**.*" (John 14:23). Paul tells us

*“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that **God’s Spirit dwells in you?**” (1 Corinthians 3:16). But there is something different and unique when we gather together to worship our Heavenly Father. This occurs when each of us comes home to God’s house, and we should feel the joy described in Psalm 84.*

The Psalmist really understood the idea of “going home” and the joy it brings, not just being home, but the journey towards home. When he says that God’s dwelling place is “lovely,” he is not referring to a grand temple. After all, when the Psalm was written, the dwelling place was just a tent rather than the ornate building shortly to be built. What made it lovely was the presence of God. This point is further emphasized in the use of the plural Hebrew word *mish-khan* for dwelling. Anywhere God is present is lovely. It isn’t the decorations or the architecture that makes it beautiful. God ennobles the humblest of circumstances just by being there. And since God is everywhere, we can find ourselves in lovely places wherever we, as a community, unite in worship. We don’t

have to make a long journey to some center of worship (e.g., Jerusalem) to go home to God. We can feel that inner joy wherever our ecclesia meets together.

This Psalm 84:2 doesn’t describe any outward manifestation of the joy being felt but uses the language of internal feelings: *“My soul longs, indeed it faints, or my heart and flesh sings,”* (body and soul, in some translations). This was the place where people would feel closest to God’s presence. No wonder they felt such joy that it had a physical manifestation described as fainting. Like a bird nesting safely, the Psalmist feels it is akin to living in God’s house.

Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion. (Psalm 84:5–7).

The valley of Baca is a place of sadness (*weeping* in Hebrew), but those who journey to God’s house on Zion’s highway turn tears of sorrow into



wellsprings of joy. Note the change from the singular in the first verses (*my heart, my soul*) to the plural (*they go*). We do not make our pilgrimage through life alone but rather in the company of believers. We strengthen each other against the cares and tribulations of the world. Like our Hymn 355 reminds us to press on in the face of adversity, to go “from strength to strength, go on, wrestle and fight and pray.”

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the LORD withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you. (Psalm 84:10–12).

A single day in God’s house in the company of our fellow believers is a joyous day, better than all the other days spent elsewhere combined. Time with God should be our most valued time; no other time compares, and

this should intensify when joined with others. God is our light and protector, our benefactor and generous Creator. Our trust in Him makes both Him and us joyful.

Given the learnings from Psalm 84, how do we manifest the joy we are instructed to have when we “come home” to God? Some feel we should approach Him with reverence and awe, conscious of the solemnity of the occasion, and “*work(ing) out (y) our salvation with trembling and fear.*” (Philippians 2:12) Others feel we should *make a joyful noise* or sing and dance, à la David before the Ark. It is easy for us to describe other religious groups’ worship as superficial or even phony. I wonder how many variations are culturally driven rather than reflecting religious diversity. I suspect Christadelphian Memorial Services in some parts of the world are not of the same form as in North America. I suppose the worship in Malawi takes a different local flavor than in Meriden (where I was baptized). Our religious culture now comes



from a UK background, put through a New England filter—think Scottish Presbyterian as interpreted by Puritans! In that light, I suppose we are lucky to have music still—but no guitars, please! My religious upbringing was as a Roman Catholic, where services were conducted in a foreign (dead) language. If you didn't have a missal that translated it, the service was incomprehensible. Yet, there were times I did feel at home.

Cultures exist on both macro and micro levels. Nations have cultures, as do religious bodies (macro), but so do individual ecclesias and families (micro). Psalm 84 is all about the joy believers should have but says little, if anything, about how that joy should be expressed.

It's impossible to imagine trying to develop a common worship culture across our worldwide group. In fact, this is a very good thing, perhaps even divinely inspired. The Bible has a lot to say about externals versus internals. Jesus upbraided the Pharisees like this,

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. (Matthew 23:27).

God told Samuel about Saul,

But the LORD said to Samuel, Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7).

Jesus told his disciples,

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. (Matthew 15:18).

James warns the early church about judging based on external appearances:

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? (James 2:1-4 NASB 1995).

What matters to God is the inner joy we are supposed to feel when coming home to Him. Do our hearts leap for joy? If so, it matters little if our feet do not. Do we have hymns of praise in our souls? If so, it matters little if our vocal cords do not. Questions like "Should we approach God with reverence and fear?" or "Should we make a joyful noise to God?" have an easy answer and the same answer—an emphatic **YES!**

Kevin Flatley,
Pittsburgh Ecclesia, PA

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, unless specifically noted.

THE JOY OF MUSIC

By Peter Davis

“The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul.”

I first saw this quote from Johann Sebastian Bach in a guitar method book shortly before I started college. I was months away from starting my undergraduate degree as a Music Education major, and these words kept ruminating. Over those next four years, I would be surrounded by music. I was encouraged to practice for several hours daily, examining my technique and musical expression with a fine-toothed comb to ensure my interpretation was perfect. In

many of my classes, we would take deep dives into the music theory of a piece of music, sometimes getting so far deep in the weeds that I would forget how beautiful the piece of music actually was. When I felt overwhelmed and burned out with school, I would remember these words and reflect on the true purpose of music. For many, music serves as a source of comfort and solace. During those times we’ve found ourselves overwhelmed, depressed, exhausted, or lonely surely, we can

think of a song that has comforted and sustained us. Music is there to refresh us, to comfort us, and to fill us with joy! Most importantly, it exists to give glory to our Heavenly Father, the same God who created sound and made it possible for us to listen and participate in music.

Looking at the Psalms, we see the healing and sustaining power of music at work in the Sons of Korah, where they write:

Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. (Psalm 42:7-11, ESV).

It's in this psalm that the writer expresses the deep pain they are in. They feel oppressed and taunted by their enemies, but worst of all, they feel forgotten by their God. These are familiar emotions to many of us, and it's comforting to read these verses and recognize that we are not alone in our struggles. However, this passage also gives us a glimpse into how God sustains His children. Much like Jesus, as he exclaimed from the cross, "My

God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1) the psalmist isn't truly forgotten. We read, "At night, his [God's] song is with me." With the waves of God breaking over him on one side and the ever-present feeling of abandonment on the other, the psalmist can find comfort in God's gift of music.

King Saul experienced this several times during his reign. Immediately following David's anointing, we're told the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul and was replaced with a harmful spirit from God that was tormenting him. In response to Saul's emotional distress, his servants suggested they find a musician for him.

Saul's servants then said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you. Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play the harp with his hand, and you will be well... So it came about whenever the evil spirit from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him." (1 Samuel 16:15-23, NASB 1995).

Once David began playing his music, Saul found peace and comfort because that's precisely what music does to us. At its core, music is a God-given gift that can comfort us in times of struggle, allowing us to feel His presence and remember His mercy.

The Joys of Giving Back

Speaking from my own experience, this is true not just as a listener of music but as a performer as well. When I pick up my guitar and begin strumming a few chords, I often get lost in the music, forgetting the problems and struggles of life. As far back as I can remember, playing music has always given me a great sense of joy. Whether by listening to a piece of music, singing, or playing an instrument, a beautiful melody can move people and evoke emotions in a way words can't. Music has made me smile and laugh, made me cry, and left me in awe at its immeasurable beauty.

But music doesn't exist solely to make us feel good. Rather, it exists to give back to God, who so graciously provided it for us. Psalm 147:1 (ESV) tells us, *"Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting."* Of course, it is good to sing and make music, but the psalmist emphasizes that it is especially good to sing praises to our God.

As a teenager in the New England CYC, I was always the "guitar around the campfire guy." Whether it was for our weekly CYC on Friday nights, CYC weekends, or Bible School, I always came prepared with a guitar and my tattered copy of the *Praise*

the Lord hymn book, and the whole group would gather around this one book to sing praises to God until we began losing our voices. Looking back, I realize just how special that time in my life was. Many of those experiences mark the times when I felt most musically and spiritually fulfilled. After giving it much thought, I finally know why.

It took me a while to truly combine my passion for music with my passion for God. In fact, these two facets of my life were compartmentalized for years. I only recently began learning to play

the piano, the traditional instrument to accompany hymns. When I was growing up, it was somewhat rare to see a guitar used in an ecclesial setting. When I started playing guitar for my CYC, it began to give my music a greater purpose. I finally felt I could use my talents to give back to God! Since then, I have had many more opportunities to serve musically in the community. I look back at the first time I played my guitar for the memorial meeting, or when I helped to record music for a Christadelphian album, or when I helped organize the Christadelphian Virtual Choir. I remember just how much joy these experiences gave me. It was not simply because I was making music but precisely because I was using my musical skills to give back to God and to serve the community.

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We ought to sing God’s praises together because God loves us. We need to praise God as a congregation because He will change us in the twinkling of an eye and glorify us with salvation.

The Joys of Communal Singing

One of my favorite hymns is Hymn 284, *The Days are Quickly Flying*, and I can vividly remember singing this song at Bible School one year. This particular experience moved me tremendously. So many brothers and sisters surrounded me, all of us raising our voices for the same purpose: to give thanks and praise to the Lord. There have been times in my life when singing hymns has given me

a glimpse of the Kingdom. Singing this song at the end of a Bible School and hearing hundreds of voices lifting their notes for Him, I felt choked up and moved to tears by the end of the hymn. Singing hymns is an essential part of our worship; in fact, it’s a frequent command in the Psalms. It’s important to never lose sight of the meaning of lifting our voices in praise. Psalm 149:1 (NASB) says to sing God’s praises “*in the congregation of the*

godly ones.” Why? “For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will glorify the lowly with salvation.” (Psalm 149:4 NASB). We ought to sing God’s praises together because God loves us. We need to praise God as a congregation because He will change us in the twinkling of an eye and glorify us with salvation. One of the points that the psalmist is making here is that when we sing songs of praise together, it should point our minds forward to the Kingdom.

When we consider our quote from the beginning again, one of the goals of music is indeed to refresh us, but there is a day coming when we will no longer need to be refreshed. There shall be a day when all suffering, torment, and sense of abandonment will be done away with. We will be permanently comforted.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. (Revelation 21:4 ESV).

On that day, there will be no need for music to comfort and refresh us, as it did for Saul and the sons of Korah. However, that doesn’t mean that music will cease to exist. On the contrary, we see in John’s Kingdom vision that a new song will be sung, and as a permanently refreshed people, we will join in that chorus. Not to comfort us from our sorrows but to give all praise and glory to God and His son.

And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.’ (Revelation 5:9-10 ESV).

So whenever we sing together, let’s embrace the joy it gives us today. We experience the excitement and connection felt when we lift our voices together to the same tune. It can ease our pain and seemingly take away our sorrows but for a few moments. But let these things also point our minds forward to the time when God will take away our pain and sorrow and grant us everlasting joy in His Kingdom. As we often sing,

Lord, come then in thy Kingdom,
Set up on earth thy throne;
And, lest they sheep grow weary,
Come take them for Thine own:
Now, when the night seems darkest,
Come in Thy glory bright;
Come to redeem Thine Israel,
And turn our faith to sight

Peter Davis,
Reseda Ecclesia, CA

JOY

A WALK THROUGH THE WORD ITSELF

By Peter Hemingray

AS I always do when studying a Biblical word, I turned to my trusty Young's Concordance, which showed that the English word joy translates from many different Hebrew words in the KJV, but primarily only one Greek word in the New Testament. And you can see that, depending on the translation, there are about 160 uses of the English "joy," with 60 or so of those in the New Testament. So

then I looked up Strong's to see how the most common Hebrew word, *simchah* (H8057), is translated in the KJV. I found about 90 uses, with 42 translated "joy." I realized "Joy" is a noun with cognate-related verbs, as joy and rejoice are nouns and verbs in English. The same is true of both Hebrew and Greek. So, if we add "rejoice," *samach*, H8055 in the OT, we get another 180 uses. In the case of Hebrew, for *simchah*

and *samach*, we see such words as gladness, joyfulness, pleasure, mirth, glad, as well as joy and rejoice used to translate both the Hebrew noun and verb to add a little variety.

In the Old Testament, it is somewhat challenging to distinguish between the several other Hebrew words used for joy. There are nine instances of joy directly, per the KJV, and fifteen if we include Hebrew words translated into words like joyful. Other derivatives of the same root seem largely to be synonyms, and all these very similar Hebrew words have similar meanings and represent the vast majority of the English terms for joy in the Old Testament.

We do not have to concern ourselves with roots in the New Testament. By far, the most common word in Greek is *chara* (noun) or *chairō* (verb); together, they represent most of the occurrences of joy and rejoicing. The exception is the rare verb *sugchairō* which emphasizes the shared nature of joy: *“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”* (1 Corinthians 12:26).¹ See also Philippians 2:17-18 and Luke 15:6, 9.

I am not a scholar of either Hebrew or Greek and when I looked at the Theological Dictionaries of both languages, I found the entries for each Hebrew and Greek word consisted of major essays in their own right. As they covered the use of the original language term in the multiple ways it is translated in the various versions. I decided to ignore their articles. So what you have

here is mainly an attempt to summarize what the Bible in English has to say on the subject of “joy” or “rejoice,” and not what the Hebrew and Greek behind its use might have to say.² And because each term appears hundreds of times, we cannot include all occurrences. We can only hope to roughly categorize the chief uses of the term in the Bible. The context of many verses deserves an article on its own, some of which will probably appear elsewhere in this issue. The overarching impression of the use of joy is gladness or rejoicing. Whether in times of victory or defeat, joy and happiness are expressed in both the LORD’s assistance in the immediate victory and confidence in his abiding presence.

Old Testament

The Old Testament (OT) uses the term in various ways, from the secular to the hope in the future, to joys at the Feasts and joy at the LORD’s help in battle, but the essential use is one of gladness. The message implicit in joy in the OT is to feel more than an inward sensation: it reveals itself in actions like singing, shouting, dancing, and leaping for joy to celebrate the happy occasions in the lives of the people, whether secular or religious, whether military, at the feasts of the LORD, or a marriage.

- **Feasts.** For example, in the OT, rejoicing is frequently expressed in connection with the feasts; in fact, they are called *“times of rejoicing.”* (Numbers 10:10 NIV). Recalling God’s marvelous act of delivering Israel from bondage, the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened

Bread were occasions of great joy (2 Chronicles 30:21-27; Ezra 6:22). Communal exultation also characterized the Feasts of Pentecost and Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:11, 14-15; Leviticus 23:40) at which times the people of Israel were enjoined to remember they were once slaves in Egypt (Deuteronomy 16:12). Similarly, the Feast of Purim was celebrated with joy and gladness

be seen especially in Isaiah 40-66, with numerous references to joy and rejoicing. This celebration is connected not only with the salvation of Israel (Isaiah 44:23; 65:14-19; cf. also Zephaniah 3:14-17; Zechariah 2:10). But with the gift of salvation God is preparing for all humankind (Isaiah 56:7). The righteous will ultimately experience everlasting joy (Isaiah 51:11).

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to celebrate divine deliverance from potential annihilation under Persian rule (Esther 8:17). And although the Sabbath was the day of “*solemn rest*,” the feasts were times of great joy.

- **Battle.** The LORD’s effective help in battle gave occasion for expressing joy (2 Chronicles 20:27), as often illustrated in the Psalms (Psalms 9:2; 13:4-6; 21:1; 109:28).
- **Protection in Distress.** The knowledge of the nearness and protection of God in times of need and distress brought joy (Psalm 16:8-9). David looked for forgiveness over his sin with Bathsheba (Psalms 51:12). He could find joy in sensing God’s presence at any time, as in Psalm 16:11.
- **Hope for the future.** The prophets point to the joy yet to be experienced. This future joy can

- **Musical Celebration.** Israel’s collective joy was commonly expressed in great celebration. Musical instruments often accompanied singing and dancing (1 Samuel 18:6). David appointed the Levites “*to raise sounds of joy*” to the accompaniment of musical instruments such as lyres, harps, and cymbals (1 Chronicles 15:16). An example is the anointing of Solomon as King of Israel (1 Kings 1:39-40). The book of Psalms gives numerous examples of the joyous songs of praise, or victory, sung by the people of God (e.g., Psalms 33 and 95).
- **The Rejoicing of God.** God himself is represented as rejoicing “*in his works*” (Psalm 104:31) and in his people (Deuteronomy 30:9; Psalms 147:11; 149:4; Zephaniah 3:17).

- **Secular Joy.** Joy does not always have religious connotations. Good wine can bring joy (Psalms 104:15; Judges 9:13), and so also can a birthday (Job 3:7) and the years of one's youth or old age (Ecclesiastes 11:8-9).

New Testament

The New Testament opens with the celebration of Christ's birth in Luke: "*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*" (Luke 2:10). His presence underlies the vast majority of its uses. Again, we can briefly categorize some of its uses.³

- **Joy in one who was lost and then found.** Among the first three gospels, Luke focuses on the joy of redemption. The parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son reveal the joyous response of the father (and the angels) when one sinner repents and is saved (Luke 15, esp. 5-7, 9-10, 32). Conversely, there is joy for the one who receives salvation (Luke 19:5-6; cf. Matthew 13:44).
- **Salvation for the Gentiles.** This time becomes a significant occasion of joy in Acts (Acts 11:20-23; 13:48; 15:3). The Gentiles who are saved are filled with joy: "*So there was much joy in that city.*" (Acts 8:5-8, 39).
- **Union with Christ.** Abiding in Christ ensures "*that your joy may be full,*" according to John (John 15:11). Paul likewise finds the ultimate source of the believer's

joy stemming from being "*in the Lord.*" (Philippians 3:1, 4:4). Paul encourages his followers to let joyfulness be a continuing characteristic of their daily lives (cf. also 1 Thessalonians 5:16). Paul also sees the experience of joy as a result of the indwelling of the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6; Romans 14:17; cf. also Acts 8:39). He describes joy as part of the fruit of the Spirit's presence (Galatians 5:22: "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.*").

- **Discipleship.** Joy comes not only from growing in the faith (e.g. Philippians 1:25) but also from helping others grow in the faith. Paul rejoiced when he saw the successful spread of the gospel (Philippians 1:18), and also on those occasions when he saw spiritual growth among the members of the churches: "*For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother.*" (Philemon 7); (Also 1 Thessalonians 3:9; Romans 16:19; Colossians 2:5). When Paul discerned a positive response on the part of the Corinthians to his tearful visit and sorrowful letter, he told them of his great joy (2 Corinthians 7:4, 7, 9, 13, 16). John likewise rejoiced in the obedience of his community (2 John 4; 3 John 3, 4).
- **Expressions of Joy.** Joy involves happiness, and we read of Paul singing hymns despite having been beaten and imprisoned (Acts

16:25). Hymns were part of the early Church's worship (Colossians 3:16) and would no doubt be full of the words of joy as expressed in many of the OT psalms. The NT stresses that joy should be shared (Romans 12:15; 2 Corinthians 7:13), as seen in the introduction.

- **Joy in Suffering.** The message of the NT is that Joy can even be experienced in suffering. This concept was the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:11-12) and the experience of the early Church (Acts 5:41; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:6). Paul experienced this possibility of joy in suffering in his own life (2 Corinthians 7:4; Colossians 1:24) and encouraged his churches to follow suit (Philippians 2:17-18). Suffering is prominent in the background to the statements concerning joy in 1 Peter and Hebrews. In Hebrews, it is clear that the hope of a future reward enables the joyful acceptance of deprivation *“You joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.”* (Hebrews 10:34). Peter also warned his readers of persecution, but to rejoice *“when his glory is revealed.”* (1 Peter 4:13). James says, *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.”* (James 1:2).

- **Joy at the Return of Christ.** The early Church looked forward to the second advent of Christ as a time of joy (Matthew 25:21, 23; 1 Peter 4:13). The ultimate triumph of God and *“the marriage of the Lamb”* will consummate the joy of God and all his people (19:7) and result in cries of *“Halleluiah!”* (Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, 6).

Conclusion

“Joy” in the English versions of the Bible is subject to the translators' opinions. Discussing the various original words is a task beyond an easy compass. It is experienced in pleasant times (marriage, victory in war, feasts) as well as persecution, sorrow, and distress—but then it is accompanied by the present protection of the LORD and the hope of the future Kingdom. And it is always in happiness, mirth, and song. It might be a personal experience, but it is never solemn. Our hymns are replete with the words, and we hope we always sing with gladness of heart and a smile on our lips. Whether or not we can discern traces of the hymns the early Church sang (apart from the Psalms) is unclear, but many indeed praise God and look forward to our salvation, as undoubtedly, they did 2,000 years ago—with joy in their hearts.

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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless specifically noted.

² Mostly translated rejoice.

³ Many of these categories in both the OT and NT are from the entry on “Joy” in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

THERE'S JOY AND THEN THERE'S "JOY"

By Jim Harper

TWO kinds of joy can be ours right now. One is related only to this life. The other is related to the things of God. One is only temporal. The other holds eternal promise. One is open to indulgence and abuse. The other is a safeguard against wrong. If the one is joy, the other is "Joy." God has created us to know both, to know the difference between them, and to gain the Joy that lifts us above everything else.

The Bible is full of joy and rejoicing in all kinds of settings. All sorts of lessons are there to guide us from joy to "Joy."

Haman and Esther's Banquet

Haman is a failure waiting to happen and he doesn't know it. Esther figures him out and determines exactly how to manipulate this enemy of her people. She lures him with joy to his own destruction.

Then Esther answered and said, "My petition and request is this: If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet

which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.” So **Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, and that he did**

not stand or tremble before him, **he was filled with indignation against Mordecai.** (Esther 5:7-9)¹

It's not hard to recognize the kind of joy that entices Haman. It looks like this:

Source:		Nature:		Impact:		Eternal Promise:	
man	God	joy	Joy	short-lived	lasting and transcending	none	much
✓		✓		✓		✓	

The immediate source of Haman’s joy is the flattering attention he suddenly gets from Queen Esther. Beneath it, though, is an enormous ego that can be flattered and exploited while he never suspects a thing.

The things that drive Haman are a window into the man: riches, pride of family, promotion, advancement above others, attention in high places, and honor (Esther 5:10-12; 6:6). And by his own admission, these are powerless to temper his hatred of Mordecai (Esther 5:13-14). Any joy he derives from position and prestige cannot cope with the other prejudices he harbors in his soul. As a result, he can plunge from joy to indignation in a heartbeat. Some life!

It is good to remember Haman and stop to consider what drives us when

we are drawn to the pleasures of the world around us. Rarely will these joys have the power to transcend our other feelings or see us through the next setback in life. Their fleeting nature tells us that they hold no eternal promise for us.

The Wise Men and the Star

*When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they **rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.*** (Matthew 2:9-10).

This situation is very different. It’s the other kind of “Joy,” and its impact leaves us with much to think about.

Source:		Nature:		Impact:		Eternal Promise:	
man	God	joy	Joy	short-lived	lasting and transcending	none	much
	✓		✓	(What do you think?)			✓

The star came and went and came again, exactly when it was needed and where it was needed. It was from God. And for the wise men, it had everything to do with the things of God. They are looking for Christ. They’ve come a long way on their journey, and God now helps them find him by means

over which they have no control. Their “Joy” springs from this immediate realization. The Joy also has eternal promise for them because they know that the child they seek is yet to be the king of the Jews.

The lessons transfer easily. God shows His hand in our lives, too. It may be

intermittent, but always happens at the right time and place. Do we see it, even in retrospect? It is cause for exceedingly great "Joy" because He is leading us to Christ. It reminds us that this is the journey He has set us on, and He will see us through to its end.

And what about the star's impact and the Joy it brought to the moment? The whole experience was temporary, like so many things in life. But would the wise men ever forget? How could they? This kind of Joy is not easily eclipsed. It will always be different from a banquet invitation that immediately goes bad. It will always be there, if only in the backs of their minds. It will always have the power to remind them, again and again, that God is with them whatever happens in life. This kind of "Joy" is both lasting and transcending.

Ahab and Naboth's Vineyard

The story of Ahab and Naboth's vineyard does not hint at joy, but it is a mirror for us to look in.

Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money." But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!" So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food. (1 Kings 21:1-4).

The story is about acquisition. It's about trying to get the things that we want in life. What kind of joy is Ahab after when he casts his eye on Naboth's vineyard? **Check the boxes on King Ahab.**

Source:		Nature:		Impact:		Eternal Promise:	
man	God	joy	Joy	short-lived	lasting and transcending	none	much

Ahab is hardly after the things of God. In fact, both kinds of joy elude him. He is denied the immediate joy of acquisition, and his petulance reveals a man who knows nothing about transcending Joy. He is completely unable to deal with the smallest setback in life.

We know how the story ends. Ahab gets what he wants anyway, or does he? The means of acquisition are

unconscionable, and instead of joy, he gets rebuke and regret. God sees to it.

Ahab didn't need Naboth's vineyard. He needed Joy in God. How differently would the story have ended if he had had it? It would have ended before it began! Godliness with contentment is great gain, and with it, Ahab would not have started down this tragic path. Surely, there are some takeaways in all of this.

Habakkuk

The only thing we know about the prophet Habakkuk is that his name means “to embrace.” Embrace what? Perhaps he is presented this way so we can identify with him and decide what is worth embracing. If this is the case, he certainly tells us:

*Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the
labor of the olive may fail, And the
fields yield no food; Though the flock
may be cut off from the fold, And*

*there be no herd in the stalls—Yet
**I will rejoice in the LORD, I will
joy in the God of my salvation.** The
LORD God is my strength; He will
make my feet like deer’s feet, And He
will make me walk on my high hills.*
(Habakkuk 3:17-19).

This man covets no vineyard, is enticed by no banquets, and considers these things pointless: there is no fruit on the vines or food to be had. Habakkuk has nothing, and he has everything. He has “Joy” with the largest possible ”J”.

Source:		Nature:		Impact:		Eternal Promise:	
man	God	joy	Joy	short-lived	lasting and transcending	none	much
	✓		✓		✓		✓

It is not easy to know this “Joy” when we have everything in life: health, prosperity, and apparent security against the future. An abundance of these blessings can be an end in itself and blind us to the need for much greater “Joy.”

It is often those in deep need who know far better what this Joy is. When everything is gone, when our backs are to the wall, the one thing that can never be taken from us—**when we have it**—is “Joy” in the God of our salvation.

It endures. It stays by us. It transcends everything in this life. And it holds the promise of eternal Joy to come when there will be no want for the people of God. God created us to know what “Joy” is so that we might find this Joy in Him and have it forever, no matter how difficult—or comfortable—our present lives may be.

The Joy of the Resurrection

Christ is alive from the dead. We can measure our faith by the” Joy” that this gives us. **Fill in the blanks below.**

Source:		Nature:		Impact:		Eternal Promise:	
man	God	joy	Joy	short-lived	lasting and transcending	none	much

There is no doubt about the ”Joy” that it gave to the earliest disciples as the absolute certainty of Christ’s resurrection took control of their lives.

At the empty tomb:

*But the angel answered and said
to the women, “Do not be afraid,
for I know that you seek Jesus who*

*was crucified. He is not here; for
He is risen, as He said. Come, see
the place where the Lord lay. ... So
they went out quickly from the
tomb with fear and great joy, and
ran to bring His disciples word.*
(Matthew 28:1-10).

Fear and great “Joy.” They are totally conflicted.

It is often those in deep need who know far better what this Joy is. When everything is gone, when our backs are to the wall, the one thing that can *never* be taken from us — when we have it — is “Joy” in the God of our salvation.

Behind locked doors:

*Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, “Peace to you.” But **they were terrified and frightened**, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, “**Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?** But while **they still did not believe for joy**, and marveled, He said to them, “Have you any food here?” So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence. (Luke 24:36-43).*

Terrified, frightened, troubled, irrepressible doubts, unbelief, and “Joy” and marveling. “Joy” is struggling for its place within them. And it will prevail.

At the ascension:

*And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And **they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy**, and were*

continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen. (Luke 24:50-53).

“Joy” has triumphed over fear and doubt.

And going forward:

*When they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. So **they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name**. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:40-42).*

Nothing can stop them now. Their Joy sweeps every adversary from the field. It drives them forward in Christ, come what may. It redefines life and is the promise of everlasting Joy to come.

It is the “Joy” that God created us to have, starting right now.

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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New King James Version, unless specifically noted.

THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL

By Jim Sullivan

AS a child, we used to vacation every summer at Hampton Beach in New Hampshire. It was a bustling if somewhat honkytonk little town. It had a long, sandy beach always packed with sunbathers and a busy boardwalk that ran the length of the beach on the other side of the main street. The boardwalk area was the heart of the town. It had several hotels, all types of restaurants, and innumerable gift shops and specialty stores. It had clothing stores, jewelry stores, ice cream parlors, and even two different penny arcades! As a kid, I loved to body surf the ocean waves, fly kites along the beach, play Skee Ball in the arcade, and watch the taffy being made by a special stretching machine in the window of the candy store. At night, we would stroll along the boardwalk as a family and stop for ice cream, taffy, or fried dough! It was a magical, joyful week, and the memories of it, even now, so many decades later, still bring a smile to my face.

The challenge of joy, of course, is that it is fleeting. For instance, most of us experience great joy on our wedding day, but that doesn't mean every day of marriage is joyful. Bro. Bob Lloyd used to talk about returning to work after Bible School with a "spiritual glow," only to realize after a few days of toil that the glow was gone! Sadly, this is often the case in our walk of faith, with spiritual highs followed by fleshly lows that can make our spiritual journey feel like we're riding a roller coaster. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could maintain joy in our hearts through all the trials of faith? Actually, the Bible speaks repeatedly about that very type

of enduring joy. It isn't the type of emotional, ecstatic joy you experience when your child is born or if you get a perfect score in Skee Ball, but it is an inner joy that comes from a complete faith that the weakness of the flesh can no longer be compromised.

John speaks about this enduring joy at the beginning of his first letter to his *"little children."* He tells them, *"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."* (1 John 1:3-4).

What John is offering them is the level of fellowship with the Father and the Son that he has already experienced, and that provides "full joy." What is this "fellowship?" That is what John expounds upon throughout the letter.

He starts by first explaining God's nature, that *"God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all."* (1 John 1:5). This is important to know because we naturally ascribe an element of darkness to God. We see the vengeance of God or the sufferings of this world (or the sufferings in our own lives) and think, "If God allows this, then it must be an element of His character. But by saying that God is light, John is not denying the darkness; he's only placing it where it belongs, in the hands of sinful man. God, in his infinite wisdom, is dealing with sin but in His way, through His Son. As the perfect manifestation of the Father, Jesus has revealed to us the true light of God

while exposing the darkness for what it truly is, the darkness of sinful flesh. As Jesus explained to Nicodemus about himself, *“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”* (John 3:19).

When we fully understand where light and darkness come from, we can more easily grasp how our actions reflect one or the other. John says, *“He that loveth his brother abideth in the light... but he that hateth his brother is in darkness.”* (1 John 2:10-11).

John places our love for each other as the proving ground of whether we understand and love God, but John goes further by explaining that our commitment to this truth also reflects our understanding of God’s love for us. In 1 John 3, he writes: *“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he [Christ] laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”* (1 John 3:16-17).

Again, our love and care for our brother not only reflects our love for God but also our understanding of God’s love for us, for none of us has earned the blessing that God has bestowed upon us, so how can we hate our brother upon whom God has bestowed that same grace? John says if we hate our brother, then we don’t know God. For if we hate our brother, then we have not incorporated into our hearts the fundamental truth that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all, and that the darkness lies in the heart of all

sinful flesh. We have also forgotten that Christ is the atonement, not just for our sins, but for the entire world’s sins. (1 John 2:2 NIV).

John then explains that in the same way God is light, He is also love, and our understanding of this is shown again by our love for one another. John says, *“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love.”* (1 John 4:7-8).

But again, John goes even further, saying that loving one another is not only *“of God”* but that it perfects God’s love in us. He writes, *“No man hath seen God at any time. If we love of His love is perfected in us.”* (1 John 4:12). He continues to speak of the power of perfect love saying: *“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”* (1 John 4:17-18).

Incredible! By saying, *“Because as he is, so are we in this world,”* John is teaching us how to be one with Christ, just as he and the other disciples were in perfect fellowship with him. Consequently, we can be so filled with the love of God that the flesh has no hold on us, no fear, no doubt, no shame. Complete joy in our hearts by knowing that we have full fellowship with the Father and the Son. This is what John knew about himself and the other chosen of Christ and what He’s offering to us, His *“little children.”*

Consider how this joy was reflected in

the lives of a few of Christ's disciples. Paul told the Corinthians, *"I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation."* We can easily read these words and think he doesn't really mean joyful; he means accepting that his tribulations further the truth. This thought may have been true, but that's not what he says. Instead, he emphasizes that he is *"exceedingly joyful"* in tribulation. How would you like to feel that way? The Apostle John says it is possible if you truly love your brother.

James, in his letter, instructs us to


Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh

patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

What a marvelous inner joy we can have if we, with patience, endure the trials of our faith.

Finally, let's consider a man we wouldn't usually associate with the idea of joy, never mind complete joy—John the Baptist. In John 3:27-30, his disciples come to him complaining that Jesus and his disciples were now baptizing more than John. John says,

A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I

A red lantern with a white glass chimney and a metal frame sits on a dark, textured rock. The lantern is lit, casting a warm glow. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting a night scene with some distant lights.

Our love and care for our brother not only reflects our love for God but also our understanding of God's love for us, for none of us has earned the blessing that God has bestowed upon us...

said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.

So much of what John says here is pregnant with meaning for us. Consider his words “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.” So many of our struggles in faith (and what keeps the full joy of God at bay) are our own feelings of inadequacy before God. How can I, the chiefest of sinners, ever feel worthy to experience full joy? John the Baptist’s words about himself provide the answer for all of us. Remember, John was no less a sinner than any of us, for Paul told us that he who sins once is a slave to sin, and it was no different for John. John surely was a more faithful man than you or me, but he was no less a sinner and needed redemption through Christ. Jesus said this of John, “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” (Matthew 11:11).

What John the Baptist says about his discipleship is true of all discipleship, “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him of God.” (John 3:27). God

has not asked us to be more than what we can be, He is only asking us to be all He has called us to be. This should give us great comfort as we strive to follow Jesus and as we seek for that inner joy and peace.

The same holds true about his words concerning the bridegroom and his friend. The friend is not the bridegroom, but he can rejoice with the greatest joy at the bridegroom’s marriage and message! This glorification of the bridegroom was all John ever wanted; seeing people now listening to and putting on Christ was the fulfilling of all John’s joy.

Just like John the Baptist, Jesus must increase in our lives, and we must decrease. Instead of focusing on where

we fall short, we’re called to focus on Jesus. Paul put it this way,

Complete joy is not just
happiness or contentment.
It’s so much more. It’s a
feeling of wonder that
God’s glory is right before
us, and we get to be daily
witnesses of His purpose
being fulfilled.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press

toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you... For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body,

that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. (Philippians 3:13-15; 20-21).

The Apostle John has called us to a full understanding of the love of God and to witness what is true. He writes,

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God... And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. (1 John 5:13, 19-20).

And complete joy is not just happiness or contentment. It's so much more. It's a feeling of wonder that God's glory is right before us, and we get to be daily witnesses of His purpose being fulfilled. It's marveling at all the small and beautiful things that shine before us every day because of the light of God. It's about being moved by the depth and power of His Word. It's about the daily reflection upon all we've been given in life, including the sacrifice and the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It's about realizing that in our hearts, we are living in the kingdom of heaven today! All this is possible right now if we believe with all our hearts that Jesus is the light of


the world sent from the Father of Light and that, despite our failings, we can remain in that light if we follow his commandments and love our brother as ourselves, just as John and all the other faithful witnesses have done.

Paul put it this way,

Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Not very long ago, I took a day trip back to Hampton Beach. It had been several decades since I had been there, and while the memories flooded back, the experience was not quite the same. Many hotels, restaurants, and touristy gift shops were still there, as well as the arcade, but the Skee Ball machines were gone. The beach, of course, was still there, but I didn't bring a kite, and I'm a little too old to body surf. The taffy store was still there, but the pulling machine was gone, so I contented myself with a nice, big piece of fried dough sprinkled with powdered sugar. I enjoyed it very much.

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THE JOY THAT LIES AHEAD

By Tecwyn Morgan

WHEN God rescued Abraham's descendants from their oppressed and burdened lives in Egypt, He was fulfilling His promises to the fathers and was beginning the establishment of His Kingdom. The people were not simply **brought out** of Egypt and separated from idolatry. They were **brought into** a relationship with God. He had separated them for Himself, to be His own *"treasured possession;"*¹ they were to be a *"kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* (Exodus 19:5,6). To enable them to show their appreciation for all that God had done and would yet do, God gave them laws that would both regulate their national life and help develop individual spirituality. It was like Eden all over again.

Israel in the Land

God's code of law, revealed and later interpreted by Moses, was neither onerous nor restrictive. It served the spiritual purpose of helping Israel to realize their sinfulness, and thus it encouraged them to come to God in prayer. But it was also designed to develop their sense of thankfulness so they could rejoice before God and marvel at His great unfolding purpose. With God as their king and military leader, they entered the land of promise, conquered it, settled it, and worshipped there. The infant nation had looked forward to everything God had promised—the joy that lay ahead for them—and when it was accomplished, they were given many opportunities to express their thankfulness and love

for the God who had called them to Himself. It took an outsider to articulate how blessed they were, for the Queen of Sheba who would say to Solomon:

Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness. (1 Kings 10:8–9 ESV).

That sort of appreciation was what God expected of Israel, and sometimes, they caught that spirit of joyful thankfulness. The Feast of Tabernacles—when everybody camped out—was designed to be joyful when all the harvest had been brought in:

You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns. (Deuteronomy 16:14).

Indeed, all of Israel's worship should have been joyful and appreciative, something we need to remember if we find it a chore to attend or serve at our place of worship. Spiritually minded people readily embraced that notion and bubbled over with appreciation. Thus, the Psalmists could say:

I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. (Psalm 13:5)

I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen

my affliction; you have known the distress of my soul. (Psalm 31:7).

Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart! (Psalm 32:11).

The people of Israel were part of God's unfolding purpose. After Joshua had led them into the land, there were judges—saviors whom God raised up to deliver them—then kings for over 400 years, and all the time, there were the promises God had made about establishing a kingdom that would last forever with a righteous king ruling over God's blessed people. When members of the exiled nation returned to the land, now under Persian rule and with no prospect of them returning to self-rule, it was the divine promise of a better future that kept their spirits high, and this was embodied in their hymn book, the Fifth Book of the Psalms:

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad. (Psalm 126:1–3).

No wonder the Apostle Paul could catalog so many blessings when he looked back over Israel's many privileges as the people of God:

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:4–5).

Over to Us!

Paul goes on, in Romans 9-11, to explain that for the time being, God's purpose has moved in a different direction, given Israel's refusal to accept Jesus as their Messiah. Now, Gentiles (including those of us who are not Jews) have been given the same privileges. The apostle Peter transfers the very commissioning words of Exodus 19—when Israel was called to be God's own people—and applies them to Christian believers:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10).

It follows that everything that God asked of Israel regarding their appreciation—thankful and joyful worship—He now expects of us, perhaps more so. For we are the inheritors of their history, with everything that happened to them as our guides for life, and we can see the unfolded purpose of God centered in the Lord Jesus Christ. His life, loving, sacrificial death, glorious resurrection, ascension to heaven, and all of God's promises are now centered in him. No wonder the apostle Paul can say:

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you... was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. (2 Corinthians 1:19-20).

What a joyful people we should be! One of our hymns catches exactly that note:

Why should his people now be sad?
None has such reason to be glad,
As reconciled to God:
Jesus, the mighty Saviour, lives:
To them eternal life he gives—
The purchase of his blood.

I'm not sure that we always sing such uplifting words all that joyfully. Perhaps it's because we are struggling to get the harmonies right! But we should be the happiest of people knowing, as we do, what God has already done for us and what He has in store for all His people when the Lord Jesus returns. He will then begin the much-needed work of recovery and reformation that the world's people so much need. We are so privileged to know and believe all that God has in store and to be able to put our complete trust and confidence in Him.

It Was So For Jesus

The birth of Jesus was heralded by angels who told the shepherds of Bethlehem that they had a message of great joy for all people (Luke 2:10) and, over thirty years later, the gospel of Luke ends with these words:

While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God. (Luke 24:51-53).

Luke's gospel has been called "the gospel of joy," and one writer computed that of the 326 occurrences of the word "joy" in the New Testament, 53 of them appear in this gospel, with even more

in Luke's Acts of the Apostles. The gospel is, of course, a record of the life of our Lord, sometimes called "The Man of Joy," for he certainly made many people joyful because of everything he said, did, and was. But how did he maintain such a calm and confident manner despite everything happening to him, including growing opposition, the disbelief of his own people, and the detailed knowledge he had of what lay before him? We have a hymn that says:

We could not bear to hear
complete the tale,
If it were told;
Enough to know Thy mercies
cannot fail,
Nor love grow cold.

We like to take each day as it comes. But Jesus lived with the knowledge that he was meant to live a sinless, sacrificial life and to surrender that life when it was the will of God for him to do so. Marvelously, he never faltered, although we get a glimpse of the pressure he endured in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his crucifixion. The prophetic psalms give us an insight into the Lord's innermost thoughts, and one, which is undoubtedly Messianic, contains this verse:

I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You

make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:7–11).

We know that Jesus was able to endure the horror of the cross by keeping his mind focused on what lay beyond it:

Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2).

Psalm 16 explains that the Lord lived his whole life with a joyful and thankful demeanor, rejoicing in God. Of course, his sensitivity to the presence and influence of his Father far exceeds our own—he was always on his Father's wavelength and enjoyed very close communion. But, as ever, our Lord's example is meant to encourage us to focus on the things that matter in life. When he knew he was about to die, Bro. Harry Tennant left a message to be read at his funeral, which simply said, "The Best is Yet to Come." Of course, we all believe that absolutely. But the things we already enjoy, in fellowship with God and one another, should make us the most joyful people who ever lived. For we are living on the brink of God's Coming Kingdom and hope every day for the Lord to return from heaven and to call us to himself.

Let the Apostle Paul have the last word:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (Philippians 4:4).

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