

# “The Spiritual Practice of Joyful Celebration”

2 Corinthians 9:5-15; 1 Chronicles 29:1-20

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A few years ago the band Sixpence None the Richer was invited to the Late Show with David Letterman. Letterman asked Nash the lead singer where the name for their band came from. She explained, “it comes from a book by C. S. Lewis called *Mere Christianity*. A little boy asked his father if he can get a sixpence - a small amount of English currency - to go and get a gift for his father. The father gladly accepts the gift and he is really happy with it, but he also realizes that he is not any richer for the transaction...” “He bought his own gift,” Letterman responded. “That’s right,” Nash continued. “C.S. Lewis was comparing that to his belief that God has given him, and us, everything, and to serve God the way we should, we should do it humbly...realizing how we got everything in the first place.” “Well, that’s beautiful,” Letterman stammered, with uncharacteristic earnestness. “If we could just keep that little sliver of enlightenment with us, things would be so much better...”

Both King David and the Apostle Paul realized that everything they had was a gift from God. **The Old Testament proclaims. 1 Chronicles 29:1-20** “Then King David turned to the entire assembly and said, “My son Solomon, whom God has clearly chosen as the next king of Israel, is still young and inexperienced. The work ahead of him is enormous, for the Temple he will build is not for mere mortals—it is for the Lord God! Using every resource at my command, I have gathered as much as I could for building the Temple of my God. Now there is enough gold, silver, bronze, iron, and wood, as well as great quantities of onyx, other precious stones, costly jewels, and all kinds of fine stone and marble. “And now, because of my devotion to the Temple of my God, I am giving all of my own private treasures of gold and silver to help in the construction. This is in addition to the building materials I have already collected for God’s holy Temple. I am donating more than 112 tons of gold from Ophir and 262 tons of refined silver to be used for overlaying the walls of the buildings and for the other gold and silver work to be done by the craftsmen. Now then, who will follow my example and give offerings to the Lord today?” Then the family leaders, the leaders of the tribes of Israel, the generals and captains of the army, and the king’s administrative officers all gave willingly. For the construction of the Temple of God, they gave about 188 tons of gold, 10,000 gold coins, 375 tons of silver, 675 tons of bronze, and 3,750 tons of iron. They also contributed numerous precious stones, which were deposited in the treasury of the house of the Lord under the care of Jehiel, a descendant of Gershon. The people rejoiced over the offerings, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord, and King David was filled with joy. Then David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly: “O Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, may you be praised forever and ever! Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O Lord, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things. Wealth and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything. Power and might are in your hand, and at your discretion people are made great and given strength. “O our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name! But who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you?

Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us! We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a passing shadow, gone so soon without a trace. “O Lord our God, even this material we have gathered to build a Temple to honor your holy name comes from you! It all belongs to you! I know, my God, that you examine our hearts and rejoice when you find integrity there. You know I have done all this with good motives, and I have watched your people offer their gifts willingly and joyously. “O Lord, the God of our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, make your people always want to obey you. See to it that their love for you never changes. Give my son Solomon the wholehearted desire to obey all your commands, laws, and decrees, and to do everything necessary to build this Temple, for which I have made these preparations.” Then David said to the whole assembly, “Give praise to the Lord your God!” And the entire assembly praised the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and they bowed low and knelt before the Lord and the king.

Sixpence none the richer, however both God and the giver are more joyful. The Apostle Paul often writes of “the wonderful grace of God”, the free forgiveness and love God lavishes upon us and “thanking God for Jesus—a gift to wonderful for words!” Paul writes. **2 Corinthians 9:5-15** “**So I thought I should send these brothers ahead of me to make sure the gift you promised is ready. But I want it to be a willing gift, not one given grudgingly. Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.” And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. As the Scriptures say, “They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever.” For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, God will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God. As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!**”

Sixpence none the richer, however both God and the giver are more joyful. We ask our heavenly mother for many blessings and have received and will continue to receive an abundance of blessings much, much, more than we ask for, or can even imagine. God smiles, delights, rejoices, takes pleasure, whenever we share, or give, even a small portion back to God.

Each and every one of our gifts produces enormous joy. After David gave his personal treasure and many people followed his example he was exuberant. Scripture says, **1 Chronicles 29:9** “**The people rejoiced over the offerings for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord, and King David was filled with joy.**” The apostle Paul says, **2 Corinthians 9:7** “**God takes pleasure in a cheerful giver.**”

These are curious times in the United States. Many of us live in nice homes with an abundance of technology and gadgets designed to make our life easier and happier. We have huge incomes in relation to the rest of the world. Yes food is getting more expensive, however within a few miles of here you can find several stores that have aisles and aisles of food to delight our taste. Our health and life expectancy has never been better or longer, yet many people are feeling worse. Despite the bad news that sells and dominates our news programs, crime rates are down, even discrimination, divorce, teen

pregnancy and drug use are all decreasing. Yet anxiety, depression and suicide are at an all time high, and raising. Perhaps Charles Dickens words ring true today more than ever “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times”

It has often been said, “money can’t buy happiness”. The apostle Paul wrote to the wealthy Greek city of Corinth in essence saying, true joy is found in giving, delight is found in sharing. It is a stewardship paradox. Love thrives when love is given. Paul says it is like planting seeds. If you plant only a few seeds you will have only a few plants but if you plant a lot of seeds you will have a lot of plants. The connection between planting and harvesting makes good logical sense but the link between giving and joy is not as clear.

Patrick Johnson discovered the link one day when he was writing out a check for an air-conditioner that would be installed in a Christian homeless shelter. As he wrote the check he started praying and thinking about the immense joy that God was feeling as he gave to this worthy cause. He started thinking about the joy that would be felt by the homeless men as they slept in an air-conditioned room in the sweltering Mississippi heat. He then started thinking about the joy these men would feel when they gave their hearts to Jesus and felt God’s love maybe for the first times. As Patrick wrote the check, joy overwhelmed him and he broke out in laughter. It was spontaneous laughter, born out of the joy that was being experienced by God, by the homeless men, and by Patrick, himself, due to one small gift.

So, when was the last time that you actually joyful laughed as you gave a gift? It has been said that you should give until it feels good, until you can sense the joy of God. This is what happened to King David and the Israelites as they rejoiced, celebrated and praised God for the opportunity to give and build the temple. Biblical Scholar Leslie Allen reflected on this scripture and points out, “Consumers experience self gratification in their spending and so do misers in their saving but givers know a deeper joy and a greater gain.”

Pastor John Ortberg in his book, “*The Life You’ve Always Wanted*” believes the first and most important Spiritual disciple is the practice of joyful celebration. John writes, “When we celebrate we exercise our ability to see and feel goodness in the simplest gifts of God. Then, we are able to delight today in something we didn’t even noticed yesterday and our capacity for joy increases.”

The biggest hindrance to joyful celebration is a preoccupation with self. Selfishness keeps us from noticing and delighting in the abundance of gifts God gives us each day. Selfishness keeps us from savoring the joy of giving. Selfishness is fixated on consuming more and more to alleviate boredom. Walker Percy defines boredom as “the self stuffed with the self.”

God is the greatest giver. Joy is at the heart of God. Jesus left heaven and gave of himself to bring us joy. Jesus gave his life on a cross so we can have eternal joy. God rejoices in giving us every gift. G. K. Chesterton writes, “God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, Do it again to the sun; and every evening, Do it again to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daises alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but God has never got tired of making them.”

On the first day God gave. God said, “Let there be light” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God did a little dance and rejoiced giving the Son and the Holy Spirit a high five. The next day God gave again saying to the light “do it again” and God rejoiced. God is the happiest being in the universe. God also knows sorrow and grief. But the sorrow of God, like the anger of God, is God’s temporary response to a fallen world. That sorrow will be banished forever from God’s heart on the day God finishes the redemption of the world. Joy is God’s basic character. Joy is God’s eternal destiny. God’s intent is that all of us, and all of creation, would mirror God’s joy. Jesus said, **John 15:11** “**I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.**”

The apostle Paul wrote, **Philippians 4:4** “**Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.**” Lewis Smedes puts it this way, “To miss out on joy is to miss out on the reason for your existence.” C. S. Lewis wrote, Joy is the serious business of heaven.” In prison Dietrick Bonhoeffer said, “God is calling us to rejoice.” A fellow prisoner said, “Bonhoeffer always spread an atmosphere of happiness and joy over the least incident and profound gratitude for the mere fact that he was alive”

Joy is a command. Joylessness is a serious sin, one that religious people are particularly prone to indulge in. Perhaps joylessness is the most readily tolerated sin by the church. There is a being in this universe who wants you to live in sorrow, but it is not God. Francis de Sales wrote, “The evil one is pleased with sadness and melancholy because he himself is sad and melancholy, and will be so for all eternity. Hence he desires that everyone should be like himself.”

We are invited to rejoice in every moment of life because every moment of life is a gift. Joy is a spiritual discipline, a learned skill, an attitude. You must take responsibility for your joy. Not your friend, not your parent, not your spouse, not your kids, not your boss—your joy is your responsibility.

The psalmist says, **Psalms 118:24** “**This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.**” The psalmist doesn’t say yesterday, or back in the good old days, how joyful I was then. Nor does the psalmist say tomorrow will be a great day or next year or after this or that or after I accomplish something, or finish something, or pay off a debit, or am on vacation, then I will be joyful. The psalmist does not say I will endure a tough day then be joyful tomorrow. No, the psalmist says, “This day let us rejoice.” This moment and every moment let us rejoice. This day will all its shortcomings, brokenness and problems. This day, right now, even if it is your worst moment, let us rejoice and be glad.” It is a cruel illusion that we need to wait for joy to come to us someday when conditions change, go our way or when everything is just right. This is God’s day. A day that God has joyfully given you. A day that Jesus has redeemed for you. If we are going to know joy it must be in this day—today. But what about the world there is so much pain and suffering? Is it right to be joyful in a world of hunger, violence and injustice? What if today is a miserable day for you, the worst day you have ever experienced? One test for authentic joy is its compatibility with pain. Joy in this world is always joy in spite of something. Joy is as the theologian Karl Barth put it a “defiant nevertheless” set at a full stop against bitterness and resentment. If we wait until conditions are perfect, we will still be waiting when we die. If we are going to grow in the practice of joyful celebration, if we are going to shine with the image of God’s joy, then we must rejoice today and everyday. Scripture is clear being joyful is God’s desire for everyone, every moment.

Have you noticed how joy is a theme throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament there is great emphasis on feast days and the jubilee years. It is gathering with people we love, eating and drinking, singing and dancing. Spiritual celebration means celebrating and reflecting on our wonderful, joyful God who has given us such wonderful gifts. Our word holiday comes from the practice of joyfully celebrating “holy days”

The stewardship paradox, joy comes to those who have devoted their lives to something greater than personal happiness, greater than themselves. King David and the people were filled with joy as they gave to build a temple for God. They rejoiced at the opportunity to give and pass on their faith to the next generation.

Today we celebrate. We joyfully give thanks for our spiritual fore fathers and mothers. For 125 years people have joyfully given to North Presbyterian Church so we can discover joy and share joy with others. We marvel in our joyful God who never tires of giving us wonderful gifts. We celebrate because we are able to give, spreading even more joy. Let us rejoice and be glad. Amen