

## **Joy is a Choice & an Attitude**

Psalm 118:1-2 & 14-24, Mark 8:31-38, Philipians 4:8

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Happiness is dependent on circumstances and circumstances are fleeting. Joy is a choice, an attitude and a gift of the Holy Spirit. Often we are filled with joy when we sacrifice and are selfless in love.

I was filled with joy when I sacrificed an afternoon to show my love for Leslie on one of our early dates. I knew one of her favorite meals was spaghetti so I invited Leslie over for dinner. Since Leslie was a special lady, no ordinary sauce from a jar would be adequate. I researched recipes, went shopping for all the ingredients, chopped, diced, measured and prepared a spaghetti dinner with salad, cheesy garlic bread and sparkling cider. I cleaned the dining room, ironed the best table cloth and napkins, cleaned the best china, polished the silverware, lit candles and played a record softly. Despite the busy preparations, work and nervousness, I was filled with joy as I imagined our dinner together. Leslie has been filling my life with joy ever since.

That afternoon I could have done a variety of things that would have made me happy and I would have still had time to take Leslie out to eat or I could have thrown together a less delicious meal by warming up pre-prepared food. Instead I choose to be joyful by showing my love for Leslie. Often one will experience abundant joy when they are bold in love.

Jesus was willing to risk it all for love, to lose his life, to pour it out for love. Jesus became love incarnate. Jesus loved with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. Jesus joyously, extravagantly loved, even unto death on a cross. Jesus could have done that which made him happy, instead, Jesus was so passionately in love with you and everyone, that Jesus took up the cross. Jesus sacrificed his life so you and everyone else could have eternal, abundant life.

The gospel of Mark explains, **Mark 8:31-38** “**Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. Jesus said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, Jesus rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me,**

**Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."**

Deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Jesus. Save your life by losing it. These are Jesus words to you. If you strive to live them, you will discover more and more joy, love and abundant life.

Deny yourself. Deny searching for joy in popularity, materialism, apathy, money, escapism, safety, alcohol, media, drugs, video games, sex and on and on. Deny yourself sleeping in on Sunday morning and find joy through your worship. Deny yourself buying something and find joy in donating money. Deny yourself going to a movie and find joy in listening to a friend. Deny yourself going out for dinner and find joy in serving dinner to those without shelter through Project Home. Deny yourself playing video games, texting, or facebooking and find joy in reading scripture.

Taking up your cross is making a sacrifice so another can be forgiven and loved. Take up your cross, sacrifice winning the argument and find joy in the relationship. Take up your cross, sacrifice an afternoon of leisure and find joy in helping someone with their project. Take up your cross, sacrifice doing exactly what you want on vacation and find joy in doing what those you are traveling with want to do. Take up your cross, sacrifice enforcing the rules so you can find joy in forgiving others. Take up your cross, sacrifice a week of vacation, comfort and convenience and find joy in serving, educating, empowering children through mission work through Remember Niger.

Save your life by losing it. Losing your life involves taking risks so you can find joy in freedom. Lose your life, risk helping an outcast so you find the joy in loving them. Lose your life, risk letting go of doing everything to preserve your career, your home, let go of trying to be in control, so you can find joy in unexpected opportunities, blessings, in letting come, in letting God be in control. Lose your life, risk not pleasing others so you can find the joy in being yourself, in being who God created you to be. If you knew this was your last day on earth what would you do? God's grace frees us to be bold, passionate and extravagant in love.

Martin Luther wrote, "...God's grace makes people glad, and bold and joyous in dealing with God and with all creatures. This is the work the Holy Spirit performs in faith. Because of it, without compulsion, people are ready and glad to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of love and praise to God who has shown them this grace."

Jesus rebuked Peter for setting his mind on human things rather than divine things. Jesus could have thought about the betrayals, the beatings, the lies, the trail, the humiliation, the intense pain and agony of the cross, his death. Instead Jesus thought of the joy of forgiving you, the joy of healing you, the joy of spending eternity with you in heaven. Jesus had a choice. Jesus could have chosen to go back to heaven in an instance where he would be filled with the joy and glory of heaven for eternity. Instead Jesus knew there would be more joy in momentarily denying himself, in taking up the cross so he could share the joy and glory of heaven with you and everyone for eternity.

Every year I am inspired and filled with joy by the youth and adults who deny themselves, take up their cross, follow Jesus, save their life by losing it and think about divine things rather than human things by going to workcamp. They deny themselves a week of vacation, being with family and friends, sports, extracurricular activities and a variety of wonderful happenings to find the joy in loving those in need. They sacrifice \$400 and the value of their labor to find the joy in giving away building materials to make other peoples' lives better through their home improvements. They sacrifice soft comfortable beds, great restroom facilities and delicious food and find joy in serving with strangers. They lose their life, risk opening up to strangers to save their life finding joy in new relationships. They lose their life, risk looking silly by dancing and singing "God lifts me up" and being bold in worship to save their life finding abundant joy in God.

I have taken hundreds of youth and adults to workcamps and a few did not discover deep and lasting joy. They were the ones that became obsessed with human things and could not bring themselves to think about Divine things. They thought primarily about the hard floor, the hot, dirty and hard work, how awkward it was to work with strangers, how different was the worship and all that they had given up. They thought about human things instead of divine things. For the most part they were not thinking about how the worship was renewing and perfecting their lives; How loving people very different from themselves was expanding their ability to love, enriching their life; How their service was refurbishing not just homes, but lives and the community giving people hope; How their service was inspiring others to pass their love and service on and on making a tremendous difference in the world, making the world more like

heaven; How their care cards, their affirmations of others was building people up more and more into the likeness of Jesus; How their love, service and worship was opening up themselves to experience God's abundant joy.

Richard Foster wrote a book that has become a popular classic entitled "*Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*" Foster wrote, "The decision to set the mind on the higher things of life is an act of the will. That is why celebration is a Discipline. It is the result of a consciously chosen way of thinking and living. When we choose this way, the healing and redemption in Christ will break into the inner recesses of our lives and relationships and the inevitable result will be joy."

The Apostle Paul wrote a manual on how to be joyful, called Philippians. There is a chapter on joy in suffering, a chapter on joy in serving, a chapter on joy in believing and a chapter on joy in giving. Paul closes his letter. **Philippians 4:8 "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."**

We are bombarded with talk about human things instead of divine things. Often the media wants us to be afraid instead of being joyful that we live very safe lives. Advertisers want us to think about purchasing stuff instead of being joyful over all we already have. Conversations can focus on what is wrong with the world and us, instead of being joyful about the beauty in the world and what we are doing to make all the more so. We can get stuck in pointing out another's faults instead of being joyful over their good traits. Politics can divide and discourage instead of being joyful that we have free speech, can vote and can make an already great country exceptional.

Foster wrote, "God has established a created order full of excellent and good things and it follows naturally that as we give our attention to those things we will be joyful. That is God's appointed way to joy. If we fill our lives with simple good things and constantly thank God for them, we will be joyful, that is full of joy. And what about our problems? When we determine to dwell on the good and excellent things in life, we will be so full of those things that they will tend to swallow our problems."

Joy is a precursor of resurrection. On Easter the joy of God swallowed all the suffering, sin and brokenness of the world. Joy swallowed death. In time joy will swallow all that is not perfect about you and your life. Jesus came to fill you with joy. The psalmist declares **Psalm 118:1, & 23-24 "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. God's steadfast love endures forever! This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."** Amen