

## A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Thursday, July 23, 2020

# *The Necessity of Joy*

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. —Philippians 4:4-5*

Time in the Bible and prayer is always a great way to start the day, and one of the advantages of morning prayer is that one can hold before God the tasks of that day. This is especially meaningful when an awaiting chore is great and challenging, or when one simply lacks energy or enthusiasm. We ask that by God's grace we will meet the challenge at hand, and then we trust that God shall graciously answer our prayer. Having prayed that prayer, and even after trusting in God's answer, I often find that another prayer is needed. "God, give me joy in this task."

This may sound like a selfish request, and indeed, joy is a wonderful experience, but the petition for joy is anything but selfish for only as we perform a task joyfully can we truly give glory to God! Whether it be mowing the lawn or teaching a Bible lesson, joy is an absolute requirement. To mow the lawn with a scowl, topped off with a complaint about the misery of the work involved, does not gladden my wife's heart, nor does it please God. Teaching a Bible lesson with a flat and joyless heart does not genuinely communicate the truth of God's Word.

Joy is needed if God is to be glorified, and it is especially needed in these days. Do you realize just how starved for joy so many people are in these times of frustration and sadness? Joy is a sign of faith, hope and love which the world needs to see. I was recently pleased to find a great quote from Maltbie Babcock, the man best known for his hymn, "This is My Father's World": "A Christian life that is joyless is a discredit to God and a disgrace to itself." Amen. And so, I pray for the witness of joy.

"But how" One will ask, "are we to attain this virtue?" Joy does not always come easily or naturally, and *this is why we pray!* We are also aware that a fake kind of joy is the last thing that those around us need to experience. To be a joyous witness for Christ does not mean wearing a saccharin kind of smile and looking like a satisfied customer off of a television commercial. When I realize a need for joy in the day's work I pause if I am able, and ask God for the special grace of gladness. Pause before God. Consider the importance of the request. Remember God's grace in your life and faithfulness over your every day of service in His Name. Your prayer may come to an end without your feeling any kind of joy, but do not consider the prayer useless. Get on with your day and trust in the Spirit's work.

God's work must be done with joy (and all our work should be God's work, done for His glory and praise) and to not have joy is to fail. Perhaps this all reminds you of Paul in the "Love Chapter," 1 Corinthians 13, when he made it clear that without love, all that he does is as good as nothing, for only love makes it truly God's work.

We must always bear in mind just how desperately the world needs to see and be touched by joy. This cannot be overstated! From the weary commuter, to the overwhelmed boss, to the disgruntled family member or the exasperated waitress—all are experiencing joy deficits of troubling depths. Lend them a little joy, for whether we feel it or not, we have plenty to spare. Paul told the Philippian believers that as they rejoice, the world can see their gentle spirits and know that God is with them. That advice still stands. Let us be joyful.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

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*Help me, my God, to be joyful always, to pray at all times, and be thankful in all circumstances.* —1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (Good News Bible, adapted in the form of a prayer)

*Lord, renew our spirits and draw our hearts unto thyself, that our work may not be to us a burden, but a delight. Oh, let us not serve thee with a spirit of bondage as slaves, but with the cheerfulness and gladness of children, delighting ourselves in thee, and rejoicing in thy work.* —Benjamin Jenks, 1646-1724