

“Dancing with Joy”

Psalm 47 (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+15)
I Peter 1:7-9 (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+15)
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What is Joy?

1. The emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying; keen pleasure; elation.
2. A source or cause of keen pleasure or delight; something or someone greatly valued or appreciated.

Fr. Dwight has a **beautiful reflection** on the reality of joy in the life of a Christian. He writes:

I'm not sure exactly how to describe joy, but I know what it's not. It's not mere happiness or feeling fine. Neither is it giddiness, hilarity or what some people call 'evangelical perma-grin' (that everlastingly smug smile some pious people paste on) Neither is it a sentimental, twee religious happy time, nor some spooky religious high that you sometimes find in devotees of Eastern religions.

Instead Christian joy is a tough, shrewd realism built on a bedrock of optimism. The energy and determination of joy is formidable. Joy is a steam engine that is unstoppable. Joy laughs quickly, but it also weeps quickly in compassion. Joy is an authentic clarity of vision, a simplicity of style and a direct way of speaking in total honesty, but without a touch of malice. It is honest, open, attractive and infectious. Joy is more than a lift of the heart or the buoyancy of spirit that comes from external circumstances. Joy springs up from the depths of a heart that has been truly converted by the power of the resurrection.

To me **Joy is a CHOICE!** It is the outcome of choosing to forge and nurture your faith and relationship with Christ.

My story of joy: When I had been married 6 years my husband went back to Vet school. I still had 2yrs of residency remaining, and we had 2 children, aged 1 and 3. It was a tumultuous time of stress and fatigue. Rather than looking for the good, living in the moment, and truly living, I put my life on hold. I told myself to just live through the next 4yrs, to put my head down and soldier on, to endure to the end. I pinned all my hopes and dreams and joy onto the moment 4yrs later, when he would graduate Vet school and we could have a “normal” family life. I even planned a trip to Disney with the kids, a family anniversary and celebration of surviving. Then, at 3 ½ yrs, he walked out – unhappy with the way our lives had been going. I was devastated. I saw this as an end to my future, now I would never experience joy, because the vision I had kept in my mind was now gone forever. Then, I got mad at myself. You see, I had wasted 3 ½ yrs of when I could have been enjoying my young children, my new career, of experiencing joy. Never again will I give up living in the here and now, waiting until some distant time when I might experience joy. I will always choose NOW to enjoy each moment.

True inner joy is self - created.
It does not depend on outer circumstances.
A river is flowing in and through you carrying the message of joy.
This divine joy is the sole purpose of life.

Sri Chinmoy

THICH NHAT HANH: Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.

You see, you can make your own joy. Have you heard: "fake it until you make it?" Well sometimes we need to focus purposefully on joy, to fake being happy, then we will be.

At work, everyone knows when I am in a bad mood, because I walk around dancing and singing. You see, I know that if I fake a good mood, I fool myself and soon I have forgotten all about my bad mood. And in the meantime I share joy with those around me.

Learn to enjoy what you do; rather than do what you enjoy. It is not always possible to do things that one enjoys. But if you learn the art of joyful living, even seemingly boring chores can bring you joy.

Bertrand Russell

The sign hangs on the wall of a bagel shop: "Don't forget to be happy." Sometimes we get so bogged down in dealing with feelings, issues, problems --- the realities and details of our lives --- we forget to be happy. Often happiness can be ours if we just *remember* to be happy. Joy is a choice --- a deliberate, conscious choice. That choice is available to us each day. Our joy isn't controlled by others or by outward circumstances. Joy comes from a deeper place, a place of security within ourselves. It's an attitude, not a transitory emotion.

"Journey to the Heart" by Melody Beattie

Benefits of Joy:

1. Joy is contagious

New research from Harvard Medical School and the University of California, San Diego suggests that happiness is influenced not only by the people you know, but by the people they know.

The study showed that happiness spreads through social networks, sort of like a virus, meaning that your happiness could influence the happiness of someone you've never even met.

Sadness spreads too, but much less efficiently, says study co-author James H. Fowler, PhD, of the University of California-San Diego.

"We have known for a long time that there is a direct relationship between one person's happiness and another's," Fowler tells WebMD.

"But this study shows that indirect **relationships** also affect happiness. We found a statistical relationship not just between your happiness and your friends' happiness, but between your happiness and your friends' friends' friends' happiness."

To the third degree this happiness propagates itself. My choosing to be joyful this morning can impact all of you, then go on to impact those you interact with, and onward. Have you seen the commercial where one person does a good deed, witnessed by a person who then does a good deed, witnessed by another, and so on. The benefit isn't just the recipient, but also those just observing.

-- Ayya Khema

I was in a little village once where there was a special bell attached to the temple. Whenever anyone in that village had some good fortune, they would go and ring that bell. If the harvest was brought in, or the daughter got married, if someone came back from the hospital, or a good business deal had been arranged, if the roof had been reshingled, anything at all that gave them joy. When the bell was rung everybody would come out, look in the direction of the person who was ringing the bell and say, 'Well done. Well done.' The one who was ringing the bell was blessing others by making it possible for the others to share his joy. The others were blessed by sharing another's joy.

Think of laughter. On YouTube there is a scene at a comedy club. The comedian brings 3 men up on stage to interview and to make fun of. He starts with the first man, but soon all on stage are cracking up. The comedian gets a mike and puts it in front of the middle man. His laugh is so funny that the whole audience starts laughing, making the man laugh even more. The comedian is laughing so hard, he can no longer talk. This goes on for 5 min, everyone laughing along with a contagious laugh.

2. Joy brings people together

The Replacements is a movie based on the 1987 football strike. A group of players are pulled together from all over and told to play as a team. However, they barely know each other and aren't cohesive. After a bar fight with the striking players, the replacement players end up in jail. Watch them becoming a team. – play clip of Replacements here

AUDRE LORDE: The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.

When we were in Israel, the moments of Joy were shared – watching the sunrise over Mt. Sinai, a communion service on the Sea of Galilee. The joy at the communion service erupted into singing and hugging, as each member of the group embraced every other member of the group. This created a bond between each and every one of us, a joyous sharing in the resurrection. Just remembering those moments recreates a bond with the people I shared them with, even though most I will never meet again. There is a connection there we will never lose.

3. Joy distracts from worries

Worry is a special form of fear. To create worry, humans elongate fear with anticipation and memory, expand it in imagination, and fuel it with emotion. Worry is what humans do with simple fear once it reaches the cerebral cortex. They make it complex." "Worry = vulnerability + powerlessness" (Edward Hallowell)

It takes a lot of mental energy to worry. When you are focused on the joy of everyday life, on the possibilities all around you, on the beauty of God's creation, you use your mental energy and don't leave any left over for worry.

Let's try it. Each of us has brought a set of worries into church today. Something that we get caught up in and distracts us from the service. Now close your eyes and picture yourself in a garden, smell the flowers, feel the wind in your hair, hear the birds chirping. While doing this, the worry is displaced from our conscious thoughts; it is gone for this time. And this is choice is always before us – we can always choose to focus on the beautiful, displacing the worry.

God promised us that he would care for us, at least as well as the flowers in the fields and sparrows in the air. What need have we for worry? He is with us every moment of every day, we need only stop and sense his presence to re-experience the joy of his resurrection.

4. Joy has benefits for health

In a study of more than five hundred African-American men conducted by Wayne State University in Detroit, there was a significant correlation between the participants' religious involvement and their health. The researchers identified a number of indicators of true religious commitment, including overall religiosity and church attendance. They found these were linked to various beneficial health effects, such as less depression, little or no smoking, and infrequency of alcohol consumption.

Healthier Mothers And Babies

Maternity patients with a strong religious commitment, and their newborns, who were studied at the Department of Family Medicine, East Carolina University, and found fewer medical complications than maternity patients without a religious affiliation.

Brain imaging studies have shown the brain activity changes during prayer, and research has shown that blood pressure and heart rate can decrease as a result of praying.¹

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In a 7-year study of seniors, religious involvement was associated with less physical disability and less depression.²

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Another study showed that the elderly who regularly attend religious services had healthier immune systems than those who did not attend.³

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Patients undergoing open-heart surgery who received strength and comfort from their religion were three times more likely to survive than those having no religious ties.⁴

Hormones: Laughter reduces the level of stress hormones like **cortisol**, **epinephrine (adrenaline)**, dopamine and growth hormone. It also increases the level of health-enhancing hormones like endorphins, and neurotransmitters. Laughter increases the number of antibody-producing cells and enhances the effectiveness of T cells. All this means a stronger immune system, as well as fewer physical effects of stress.

What can laughter do?

- Lower blood pressure
- Increase vascular blood flow and oxygenation of the blood
- Give a workout to the diaphragm and abdominal, respiratory, facial, leg, and back muscles
- Reduce certain stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline
- Increase the response of tumor- and disease-killing cells such as Gamma-interferon and T-cells
- Defend against respiratory infections—even reducing the frequency of colds—by immunoglobulin in saliva.
- Increase memory and learning; in a study at Johns Hopkins University Medical School, humor during instruction led to increased test scores
- Improve alertness, creativity, and memory

You see, a joyful life, has many affirming benefits: Health and mental well-being, social connection, but most importantly, a foremost focus on God and the reason for our joy, Christ's life and death and resurrection for us.

Joy is a glimpse of heaven; the Lord's kingdom on earth.