

Settled Heart

For some, Christmas can't come quick enough. For others, it brings more stress and the feeling of being overwhelmed. We all need Christmas, but what is it about Christmas that we need? We all need to know that "all is well" because of the peace we celebrate, the hope that arrived and joy we can embrace.



INTRODUCTION

What if joy IS possible? The Good News is it is! And JOY is for ALL PEOPLE! The Angels said so!

STARTER QUESTION

When we see the joy of Christmas in a child's expression, why is it often not the same for us? Is it still possible for us to see the joy of Christmas as a child does?

INTO THE WORD

1. Read Jeremiah 32:41, 1 Peter 1:8, and 2 Samuel 22:47-51. What are some "joy robbers"? How do we protect ourselves from "joy robbers"?
2. Read Habakkuk 3:17-19. Can sorrow and joy co-exist in our lives? Habakkuk is an example expressing the co-existence of joy and hardship in his life. How do you think he managed to do that?
3. Read 1 Peter 1:6-9 and Hebrews 12:2. When we get distracted from our joy, we have the potential to drift further from God. But if what Pastor David said is true, that "joy is baked into" followers of God, how does this happen? What is our wakeup call? How do we regain our joy? Where do we turn?

APPLICATION

4. Sin can make us old and die. Conversely, joy makes us young and alive. If you have known people who present these extremes, what were key behaviors or attitudes you observed that caused such a dichotomy?
5. What gives us the courage to act with joy during both times of goodness and turmoil? What gave Jesus the courage to face the Cross? Why did He pray "beyond" His disciples, thinking of us, asking for protection AND to keep us safe while in the world?
6. We tend to walk in joy and sorrow at the same time as they run on parallel tracks. How do we manage both and not teeter totter through life?

PRAYER

Father, we pray for the Peace that passes all understanding and that our Joy is made complete. Help us to show this Joy to others during this Advent season and beyond. Amen

SUGGESTED ANSWER GUIDE / MORE FOOD FOR THOUGHT FOR SELECTED QUESTIONS:

In reference to the starter question:

Perhaps, cynically, we believe kids are only thinking of Santa Claus and presents. In John 17:13-18 Jesus is praying to God the Father on our behalf. Specifically, we read, "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them...My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one...They are not of the world, even as I am not of it."

These verses encourage us to know joy even in the world as it is. In the Bible commentary we read that joy is a common theme in Christ's teachings – he wants us to be joyful. The key to immeasurable joy is living in intimate contact with Christ, the source of all joy.

In reference to question 1:

Joy robbers tend to be people who are without a lot of peace in their lives. Maybe they are people who like to have others join in their misery. One solution would be to avoid joy robbers, but while avoiding them, we need to pray for them so that they can have the full experience of joy in their lives. To protect ourselves from the "joy robbers" read Jeremiah 32:41 and 1 Peter 1:8.

Joy robbers would tend to be emotional reactions to people or events that hurt or disappoint. However, the believer's joy is based on a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, who is the Rock of our Salvation, so our joy is based on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, and not the whim of emotion. Read 2 Samuel 22:47-51.

In reference to question 2:

As we go through life, we are going to experience sorrow sometimes because it is part of life, but in John 17:13 Jesus says, "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them."

Hebrews 12:2: Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, 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.

Philippians 4:4: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice!

We can say that Jesus was certain that it is possible to rejoice no matter the suffering we may experience in life. He was aware that life can be painful and discouraging since He lived as a man in this world. So, yes, we can experience His (Jesus's) joy independently of what other human emotions come along as life goes on.

In reference to Habakkuk 3:17-19, Habakkuk has his eyes fixed on God, he had a connection and relationship with God, and he knew that at the end of the day God would deliver and restore him.

In reference to question 3:

We accept as fact, by faith, what the Angels announced, that the Good News is the person of Jesus Christ, our living hope. 1 Peter 6-9: "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your soul."

Hebrews 12:2: ...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

In reference to question 4:

Refer to John 17:13-18. Those who have a “settled heart” are also “young at heart” and tend to have less stress. Conversely, those with a “restless heart” cannot find peace and may spend time, energy and resources seeking in all the wrong and hurtful places to feel peace.

2 Corinthians' 7:10: For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

In reference to question 5:

Knowing Jesus would go through the crucifixion, knowing how dreadful the experience would be to take on our sins should be enough to give us courage, but even better, Jesus KNEW what was beyond the Cross. That knowledge fortified his courage. Likewise, we have God's promises, and we know there is more waiting for us on the other side of this life. Therefore, that should give us the courage to face our earthly challenges and keep our joy gauges full.

Read Psalm 149:2, 14:7, 97:12, 100:2, 32:11, and 67:4,11; Isaiah 53:3; Matthew 5:12; Luke 6:23, 10:20, 15:6-9.

In reference to question 6:

Staying connected to God no matter the circumstances is the only way to maintain a full measure of joy.

Psalm 30:5: “For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

Isaiah 35:10: And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and some to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”