

What to do when you don't know what to do # 6: Release the Joy that Refreshes

Sermon for Sunday, March 14, 2010
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-7 Galatians 5:22-23

1) Have you got the joy down in your heart?

Someone wrote, “*Happiness* depends on what *happens* to us. Joy is an attitude which stays with us regardless of the circumstances around us.” I’m not sure if I agree with that definition of happiness; but the point is certainly true: if we allow the winds of circumstance to control our lives, we will never amount to anything. When we choose to live by faith and by joy, then we can keep moving in the worst situation. Here’s an example.

Viktor Frankl, author of the book *Man’s Search For Meaning*, was imprisoned by the Nazis in the Second World War because he was a Jew. His wife, his children, and his parents were all killed in the holocaust. The Gestapo made him strip. He stood there totally naked. As they cut away his wedding ring, Viktor said to himself. “You can take away my wife, you can take away my children, you can strip me of my clothes and my freedom, but there is one thing no person can EVER take away from me — and that is my freedom to choose how I will react to what happens to me!”

This message is part of a series of sermons I’ve titled “What to do when you don’t know what to do.” It’s about how we can cope with calamities; how we can deal with defeat; how we can not just survive, but *thrive*, even in the worst circumstances. Today: Release the Joy that Refreshes.

I have always marvelled at the letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians. He wrote it while he was in prison, not knowing whether he would be released or be executed. Yet it is a letter that has more encouragement, more hope — more joy — than anything else in the Bible! Today I’m talking about having joy in the midst of darkness. Paul *lived* it! This isn’t a bunch of airy-fairy pie-in-the-sky talk. This is rooted in reality.

Philippians 4:4-7, Today’s English Version:

May you always be joyful in your life in the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!

Show a gentle attitude toward all. The Lord is coming soon. Don’t worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. And God’s peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe, in union with Christ Jesus.

Always be joyful. When we choose to live by faith and by joy, then we can keep moving in the worst situation. This is why we sing the song *I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.*

2) Where can you get joy?

A magazine article quoted a survey done in the United States. The key question was this: “What are you looking for most in life?” When the results were compiled, the analysts were surprised. Most of them had expected answers like money, health, a good job, but the top three things that people wanted in life were love, joy, and peace!

Where can we find love, joy and peace when things are going wrong and life seems dark? Listen to what the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians:

Galatians 5:22-23, New International Version:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

When we ask Jesus Christ to come into our lives and be our Lord, he does this through the Holy Spirit. And guess what are the first three things the Holy Spirit changes in our lives: love, joy and peace — the very things that people want in their lives!

3) Release the joy that refreshes

Let’s review. You can summarize what I’ve said so far in two points:

- a) Choose to be joyful, whatever the circumstances.
- b) The Holy Spirit brings joy into our lives.

So, if you are a Christian — that is, you’ve asked Jesus Christ to come into your life and be your Lord and Saviour — then you have the Holy Spirit. You have the joy in you. It’s already there. What we need to do is to release that joy. We need to choose joy — as opposed to choosing pride, or bitterness, or just plain grumpiness.

I want to suggest three ways to help you release the joy that refreshes.

a) Pray that God will keep the promise

Galatians 5:22 assures us that the Holy Spirit gives us joy. This is a promise; we can depend on God to keep that promise.

We can pray, and tell God that we want to receive Jesus Christ, that we want to follow Jesus and obey him, that we want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, that we want to live by the Spirit, that we want to live by joy. Just ask God to let that joy flow in your life, as you open yourself to be led by the Holy Spirit.

b) Enjoy the joys God has given you

Philippians 4:4 tells us to live in joy:

May you always be joyful in your life in the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!

Stop listening to the voices that try to steal your joy; God knows there are enough of them! That doesn't mean you shut your eyes and ears to the world around you. God forbid! Just don't let them make you lose sight of the one who gives joy.

Bertrand Russell, the atheist philosopher, one day was moody and thinking deeply. A friend noticed and asked if anything was wrong. Russell replied, "I've made an odd discovery. Every time I talk to a savant [wise scholar] I feel quite sure that happiness is no longer a possibility. Yet when I talk with my gardener, I'm convinced of the opposite."

When Bertrand Russell died, he said he was as one without any hope or joy. If only he had listened to his gardener!

c) Give joy to others

A gifted public speaker was asked to recall his most difficult speaking assignment. He said, "That's easy. It was an address I gave to the National Conference of Undertakers. The topic they gave me was 'How To Look Sad At A Ten Thousand Dollar Funeral.'"

Instead of giving away sadness, we can give joy! People would be willing to pay large sums of money in order to have the kind of joy we can have as follower of Jesus. But we give away this good news for free!

My friends, I want to encourage you today: be filled with the Holy Spirit; choose to live by joy. And you will shine like a light!

Theme for today: Why are some people crabby and others joyful? It doesn't seem to be related to how much money they have (lots of rich people are crabby, but so are lots of poor people). Same with health. Ditto for age. Probably a lot of it has to do with what they learned when they were children, or the circumstances they have faced in life. But even that isn't always true: siblings from the same family and people in the same situations can be totally different in their attitudes. We can rule out every variable, and are left with just one possibility:

People are like that because they choose to be like that;

in other words, they *want* to be like that! Maybe you've never thought of it that way. You might even find that insulting. But just think... if it's true, then you don't have to go through life in a dark cloud. You can *choose* to let the sunshine in. You can *choose* to be a person of joy. You can *choose* to let God touch you, change you, heal you, and restore the joy.