

Joy is a Lifestyle, Not a Conditional Response

Sometimes we get it all wrong. It is natural to be joyful and upbeat when things are going well but visibly distraught when they are not. We tie Joy in our hearts to our circumstances at the time. We let our feelings of Joy be conditional to the lack of a crisis in our lives. That approach is a recipe for a roller coaster ride. In reality, life is full of ups and downs – for all of us. Even in the best of times, bad news is just around the corner. The book of Proverbs has a way of describing the extremes of life. Here is what it said about being of good cheer: *A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones* (Proverbs 17:22).



I don't want "dry bones". How do we avoid a crushed spirit? Is this what Jesus wants for our lives? Of course not. Jesus wants us to be at peace, in spite of our circumstances. The reality is that life is a mixture of happiness and tears. When circumstances control our sense of Joy and Peace, we shut Jesus out and try to deal with situations ourselves. Jesus wants us to live a life of Joy, knowing that He is beside us in good times *and* bad. Jesus teaches us that Joy is based on our relationship with Him and our trust that He will be with us always.

Being Joyful is not a facade, smiling on the outside while hiding tears on the inside. Instead, Joy is the inner reality that transforms how we respond to life. It is rising above our circumstances, knowing that Jesus loves us, and has great plans for us. Joy is a lifestyle. It is how He wants us to lead our earthly lives, knowing that our eternal lives are secure.



During the Advent season, we focus on the interrelated pillars of faith: Hope, Love, Joy and Peace, with Jesus as the foundation of them all. We have a Hope that is in Jesus Christ. Because He loves us, we can have peace and joy. Traditional Christmas hymns get it right. We sing "Joy to the World, the Lord has come," with gusto, usually at the beginning of a Christmas service. A second familiar hymn is "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." The words we sing the loudest are the refrain, "Rejoice, Rejoice, Emanuel." Emmanuel means "God with Us." We can be joyful because God is with us.

Joy is a gift from Jesus. Receive that gift and make it your lifestyle. It will change how you experience life, even during difficult times.

The Bible Says: *I have told you this so that my Joy may be in you and that your Joy may be complete* (John 15:9-11)

Question: During the tough times, do you turn inward to yourselves or upward to God?

Prayer: Dear Lord. Life is full of ups and downs, but you are constantly with us through everything we face. Let us focus on You instead of on our problems. Amen.