

When You Are Sad, Christ Is Your Joy

Tragedy happens. We may as well face it. We shall encounter dark valleys in our lives. Not continually, thank God. But along with the days of sunshine will come long stretches of darkness. Unfortunately, some people seem to have more dark days than others; maybe you're among them. So, what is joy? Where can it be found - especially in the middle of sadness when there's no happiness in sight?

To find a path through sadness and adversity, you'll need to quit relying on your own inner resources to find it. Instead, you'll need to look to God's Word to guide you.

The word of God always does what it says. His word is active and powerful - God creates things by simply speaking them into existence. He merely spoke, "Let there be light," and immediately, light shone into the black emptiness of the initial creation (Genesis 1:2). You and I describe things with our words, but God's word makes things. That's what sets God's word apart from human language. I can tell you, "Don't worry," but that doesn't mean a lot. When Jesus says, "*Come to Me, all who labour and are heavily laden, and I shall give you rest*" He actually lifts our burdens, calms our weary souls, and soothes our frazzled hearts (Matthew 11:28). The difference, of course, lies in who is speaking. I'm just another person like you, but Jesus is actually God in human flesh. And that makes all the difference in the world.

God's Word does what it says. It transforms sinners into saints by the forgiveness of their sins. It changed meaningless chaos into order at creation, and His Word can do the same for you. When you wrestle through personal tragedy and turmoil, it creates inner peace by prayerful meditation on what God tells you instead of what you tell yourself. Instead of obsessing over your fears, listen to Jesus instead: "*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid*" (John 14:27).

If you want to make headway through stormy seas, fix your troubled heart on God's Word instead of on your inner feelings. Read His Word out loud, silencing your relentless mental rehearsal of your inmost fears. Then pray out loud as well, relieving your pent-up private pain while giving voice to your complaints as you pour out your heart before Him. Please note: this inner peace I'm talking about is not just putting on your game face. Prayerful meditation isn't about pretending everything's fine when it's not. It's not about developing resilience by getting through tough spots using your inner resolve and determination. You can get through for a while by pretending. But you'll wear yourself out first emotionally, then physically. Ultimately, you'll be a spiritual wreck as well. Masks are fine for preventing respiratory infection, but life is no masquerade; honesty is always your best policy.

Tragically, we often carry bravely on trying to mask our true feelings. Like Anna in the classic American musical *The King and I*, we whistle a happy tune outwardly while inwardly there's no happiness to be found. "Whenever I feel afraid" she sang, "*I whistle a happy tune and every single time the happiness in that tune convinces me that I'm not afraid.*" That charade comes with a high price tag, though. It takes a lot of emotional energy to fake happiness when all you've got inside is fear and sadness.

Life is too short to keep faking it. Christians don't need to pretend that tragedies never happen or suffering isn't miserable or pain doesn't hurt. We can afford to be honest with God, because He knows the depth of human suffering. We can confidently cry out to Him from the bottom of our anxious hearts, knowing we have a Father in heaven who shows compassion to His children (Psalm 103:13). We have a Saviour who wept at the grave of His dear friend Lazarus (John 11:35). When we're at a loss for words, the Holy Spirit takes over, interceding for us Himself (Romans 8:26).

God tenderly invites our prayers, promising His attentive ear: "*Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall deliver you, and you will glorify Me*" (Psalm 50:15). There's no need to pretend that we're happy

when we're not. Happiness is often in short supply in this world; it comes and goes depending on the circumstances. But joy? That's a whole different matter. Joy abounds in every circumstance if we just have eyes to see it.

We'll need to sort out the difference between joy and happiness. Happiness depends largely on our experiences. It fluctuates with our emotional state - a sort of barometer for our emotions, you may say. In contrast, joy is firmly rooted in God and His promises. That's why it remains steady despite the ups and downs of life. Happiness is great while it lasts. But that's just it - happiness doesn't last. It's here today and gone tomorrow. It's momentary and fleeting. Just when you think total happiness is finally within your reach, it slips out of your grip. Happiness ebbs and flows with the seasons of life.

Yet joy remains even when happiness fades. No matter the circumstance, Christians who plant their hope in God can harvest genuine joy in the rocky soil of adversity or in the deepest, darkest valley of pain. Joy and faith are linked, writes the apostle James: "*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*" (James 1:2-4).

See what James did there? "Count it all joy" he advises. James is no fool. The life of the disciples was no walk in the park. If we are to believe tradition, only one of them - John - died in bed, while all the rest met violent deaths at the hands of persecutors. From their own canonical writings as well as the testimonies of their contemporaries, they faced opposition at every turn, hounded by the enemies of the Gospel inside and outside the church. So for James, joy was an exercise in faith. "Count it all joy" he says. All those trials of various kinds he chalked up under the "joy" column in his life, even though those trials robbed him of happiness.

That's quite a trick. Isn't that merely playing mind games? Another version of pretending? James wouldn't say so. He goes on to say that these trials are actually God's testing program. When you test positive for faith, it's a very good thing. Faith was first planted in you by the Holy Spirit, and it grows steadfast under fire, strengthening your grip on Jesus and His cross. In the end such growing steadfastness will bring to fruition what God first began in you by His grace.

Never be afraid to give voice to your deepest distress when in the darkest valleys of your life. God is actively at work even there, producing in you what is well-pleasing in His sight. Sadly, calamity is bound to come your way in this broken world. When tragedy happens, it's easy to lose your way. We're walking here by faith, after all, and the sadness all around you obstructs your view of the Lord, who bought you with His blood. Peter helps us see the whole picture clearly: "*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*" (1 Peter 1:8).

So Christ and calamity are bound together within the grace of God. Trusting His sure word, He will see you through your present sadness into everlasting joy on the day of His coming.