



guidelines for living

a 5 minute message

December 19, 2017

CATCH THE CHRISTMAS JOY

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

No emotion is more connected to Christmas than joy—the universal language of an overflowing heart. Notice the gleam in the eyes of children as they open gifts, or stand on their tiptoes to see the display in the store window as they focus on dolls and sleds, on trains and toys. But it shouldn't simply be children whose hearts are filled with joy. To the contrary, joy should be every person's response to God's great gift.

For a moment, think about a special gift that you gave someone this season—possibly your sweetheart, or your husband, your mother, or the child who wouldn't have had a Christmas gift but you heard about the need and saw that gifts were delivered. Made you feel good, right? What you felt was joy. But which was greater? The joy that you felt, or the joy which the person experienced who received the gift?

Though we seldom think about it, there had to be joy in the heart of the Father when He gave heaven's most precious gift: His Son. Angels sang joyfully, and those who heard the song rejoiced with exceeding great joy--the kind that goes to the depth of your soul.

He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, as Isaiah wrote long before His coming to Bethlehem; nonetheless, while He lived among us joy was the strength of Jesus' life. Have you forgotten that Paul tells us the "kingdom of God is... joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). The writer of Hebrews says that "for the joy that was set before him Jesus endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). What joy? The joy which would be His when He again came through the door of heaven.

Now, for a moment let's go back to the child who opens that very special gift that you gave him or her. The child's eyes light up in a way that no painter could ever express, and then come the giggles of delight, the laughter of joy, and that touches your heart, too. Right? Of course. That's the way God made us.



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Twice Isaiah says that our response to God's redemption should be to rejoice and even break forth in joyful singing. Here's what he said: "Sing for joy, O heavens, for the LORD has done this; shout aloud, O earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, he displays his glory in Israel" (Isaiah 44:23).

One of the sad things about the busyness of the Christmas season is that by the time Christmas day arrives, we are often so weary physically that we find it difficult to have much joy. And I confess that today's Guidelines may come too late for you to do much about it; but there is one thing you can do. From this moment on you can begin to catch the joy you have been missing in your life.

It begins by receiving the great gift which brought joy to the heart of the Father in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. "But to all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to do was to trust him to save them" says John 1:12 in *The Living Bible*. G. K. Chesterton at the close of one of his books says that "joy...is the gigantic secret of the Christian." He isn't suggesting that Christians hide it, as people put valuables in a safe deposit vault so others will not see or take them. He is saying that those who do not know the Christ who was born at Bethlehem just cannot experience the joy that is within, knowing that He will never leave you or forsake you.

Joy in your heart, in your personal life, is part of the gift of Christmas, the gift which difficulty, or pain, or even loneliness should never take from you. Christmas joy is the abiding presence of a living Christ. May it be yours today.

Resource reading: John 1:1-14