

More Joy

Robert C. Jennings

[I asked Bob Jennings, a devoted pastor and friend, to explain what he most wishes he had done differently in his life now that he is battling life-threatening cancer. Here is his carefully thought-out answer. Jim Elliff]

God has graciously given me 41 years to walk before Him (Gen 17:1), to walk with Him (Gen 5:22), and to walk after Him (2 Kg 23:3). What an incredible privilege God gives His sons and daughters. Looking back now, with terminal cancer for the past two years, here is one thing I would like to have done better – I'd like to have enjoyed my walk with the Lord yet more.

God wants that, as it is written, "Serve the Lord with gladness" (Ps 100:2), and again, "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart" (Dt. 28:47). Every father feels that foot-dragging obedience from the child is sad and short.



Joy is a distinguishing mark of Christianity. False religions chant and whine. They don't sing with joyful lips and melody (Ps 107:22). We are those who "rejoice in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:3).

Paul defines the goal of his ministry as joy. "Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy" (2 Cor. 1:24). He measured the progress of the believer by this virtue. "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith" (Phil 1:25). And so that the Philippians would not miss the point, he repeats his exhortation, "Again, I say, 'Rejoice'" (4:4).

The Lord Jesus was a "man of sorrows," but yet excelled in joy. It was a mark of His supreme anointing, as it is written, "Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions" (Heb 1:9b).

But I feel I made the Christian life too hard. Sure, we are in a battle. Sure, we are called to hate our own lives (Lk 14:26). But there is a sense in which good days are all right, as it is written, "For he that will love life, and see good days"

(1 Peter 3:10). What happens? Fears and unbelief rob us of our joy. Joy comes through believing (Rom 15:13). Especially as a pastor, if I'd had a bigger view of God, I could have lain back some, left the results with Him, and enjoyed the scenery more. After all, I am His. It is His church. It is all His. He can handle it. Not only do fear and unbelief rob us, subtle as they are, but "dead works" hinder. "I don't want to be too happy, and if I'm carrying a burden, surely that makes me more worthy of the ministry and more worthy of the support received in the ministry."

Oh, we husbands ought to enjoy our wives (Prov. 5:18). Our time together with our dear lover is over so soon. Don't miss it. Make each meal to be a 'date'. We fathers ought to enjoy our children. When our first child was born, we were carrying him out of the hospital and the nurse shouted, "Enjoy him." It was good advice. And you children, a lot of what God wants from you is to just make your father and mother glad (Prov. 23:25). Look up the exhortations in the book of Proverbs. It is replete. We believers ought to enjoy one another (Acts 2:46). We are under command to not be selfish, but we are to share. Share what? Our joys with one another (Phil 2:17&18). Turn loose. Let go. Get out of yourself.

What friends we have! No, they are not perfect, but nevertheless they are real and in any true church, they make up such a real part of our lives. God ordained it so. The brother who is wrapped up in his own life – to that degree he is simply going to miss much of God by not spending time with the people of God— their joys, their victories, their insights, their answers to prayer.

Solid joys are ours—sins forgiven, Christ indwelling, immortality, good deeds, good words and sufferings rewarded with extreme glory, all things are ours, and our names are written in heaven (Lk. 10:20)! "Rejoice in this!" And the Lord Jesus at that time "rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit." Why? God's sovereignty in salvation! Joy unspeakable belongs to us! Let every tear be dry. It is a powerful testimony to the watching world, as these words tell us: "Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting; Then they said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them'" (Ps 126:2).

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