

Joy-Filled Giving, cont.

Intro.

1. Review
2. Feb. Verse of the Month – Rom.14.17. Joy is a characteristic of the Kingdom.
3. Like a victorious locker room, church is a place to exult, to give thanks, to celebrate the great news that all is forgiven, that God is love, that victory is certain.
4. Video – The Stethoscope
5. The world should see joy exuding from the church esp during turbulent times. Everyone is seeking joy during times of stress. In America, endless activity, and constant stimulation are needed to prop up joy. Food, experiences, travel, alcohol, communication, etc are the stimulants needed by our culture to keep it happy.
6. How can believers stay “in joy”?

Be Aware of the Joy – Robbers

1. Fear based thoughts – you worry about the unknown, future, health, safety, job, retirement, etc. The enemy or issue is so big and the circumstances are so bad. Exodus 14.9-14.
2. Focusing on sin and the past.
 - a. Some of you can't move past your past. You live in constant regret, hurt or pain and God has already moved on. You keep dwelling on that which God has
 - b. If you spend more time in your prayers seeking forgiveness or bemoaning your brokenness rather than in praise and thanksgiving to God then you have a problem. It's like you have to verbally flog yourself before you can move forward with God. Some of you are good at dragging others here too. You won't let them live down any failure.
 - c. I want to qualify this if you're living in sin.
 - d. Matt.27 - Judas
 - e. Summary: The problem with both #1 & #2 is that you're not seeing life from God's perspective. You have a very low view of God and high view of the problems, issues or sin you face.
3. Problems with others – Luke 15.25-32. If you're living tension with others it is hard to sustain joy. You're half way mad and you want them to feel a little of the sting of your anger. You need to reconcile or release.
4. Greediness – Nabal, 1 Sam.25. Nabal was wealthy and he didn't want to share with anyone. It is a fact of life that generous people live longer than greedy one.
 - a. Summary of #3 & #4. You aren't living from God's perspective.

Activities of Joyful People

1. You reflect & abide on what you have in the Lord
 - a. You are grateful for all that He's done for you and all that He's given you.
 - b. You live daily from who you are in Christ & what He's deposited in your life.
 - c. John 15.11 – Jesus imparted truth to us so that our joy would be complete. As we meditate upon the truth of what He's given for & to us, it makes our heart swell with joy.
 - d. Illust – Taking Caden & Julianna to Brazos River county Park and they excitedly ran to every piece of playground equipment. They weren't bored, but so excited.
 - e. Thankfulness is a habit of joyful people.
 - f. It seems that people who aren't joyful focus more on what they don't have or how bad everything is, etc.
 - g. We're in the month of Adar in the Jewish calendar. It is the month of joy. It is tied to the story of Esther. God protected the Jews from extermination at the hands of wicked Haman through the courageous efforts of this Jewish girl. Jews today celebrate the Feast of Purim as a way of commemorating how the Jews sorrow turned to joy. They reflect on what the Lord did for them and it brings joy.
 - h. We who have better covenant should consistently live in joy.
2. Be being filled with the Spirit – Eph.5.18.
 - a. The HS is the source of joy in the life of the believer. The more we can stay full of him the more we can stay filled with joy.
 - b. Acts 13.52 – even in hardship they had joy.
 - c. Acts 16.22-28 – beaten & bruised they were still joyful.
 - d. When you are filled with the Spirit you spill the Spirit. John 7 & the rivers of living water.
3. Choose joy – Phil.4.4-9
 - a. Joy is a choice just like faith, forgiveness & love are choices.
 - b. Deut.28.47f – Reverse it. B/c you chose joy...
 - c. Mourning, somberness shouldn't be our lifestyle. We are to have compassion and sympathize with hurting people, but we don't stay there. Celebration should be. We are to live "on earth as it is in Heaven." It's a place full of joy, hope and thanksgiving. We are pretending hardship doesn't exist, but we are embracing a greater reality that God loves me – Zeph 3 & Rom.6.
 - d. We can't let circumstances and people determine our level of joy. It's easier to have joy when your bills are paid, everyone's happy with you and there are no problems, but joy has its source in the Lord. Therefore, if things aren't going well I can still walk in joy.
 - e. Story of the three condemned men in Uganda:

Colin Chapman, in *The Case for Christianity*, quotes Ugandan bishop Festo Kivengere's account of the 1973 execution by firing squad of three men from his diocese:

February 10 began as a sad day for us in Kabale. People were commanded to come to the stadium and witness the execution. Death permeated the atmosphere. A silent crowd of about three thousand was there to watch. I had permission from the authorities to speak to the men before they died, and two of my fellow ministers were with me.

They brought the men in a truck and unloaded them. They were handcuffed and their feet were chained. The firing squad stood at attention. As we walked into the center of the stadium, I was wondering what to say. How do you give the gospel to doomed men who are probably seething with rage?

We approached them from behind, and as they turned to look at us, what a sight! Their faces were all alight with an unmistakable glow and radiance.

Before we could say anything, one of them burst out: "Bishop, thank you for coming! I wanted to tell you. The day I was arrested, in my prison cell, I asked the Lord Jesus to come into my heart. He came in and forgave me all my sins! Heaven is now open, and there is nothing between me and my God! Please tell my wife and children that I am going to be with Jesus. Ask them to accept him into their lives as I did." The other two men told similar stories, excitedly raising their hands which rattled their handcuffs.

I felt that what I needed to do was to talk to the soldiers, not to the condemned. So I translated what the men had said into a language the soldiers understood. The military men were standing there with guns cocked and bewilderment on their faces. They were so dumbfounded that they forgot to put the hoods over the men's faces! The three faced the firing squad standing close together. They looked toward the people and began to wave, handcuffs and all. The people waved back. Then shots were fired, and the three were with Jesus.

We stood in front of them, our own hearts throbbing with joy, mingled with tears. It was a day never to be forgotten. Though dead, the men spoke loudly to all of Kigezi District and beyond, so that there was an upsurge of life in Christ, which challenges death and defeats it.

The next Sunday, I was preaching to a huge crowd in the hometown of one of the executed men. Again, the feel of death was over the congregation. But when I gave them the testimony of their man, and how he died, there erupted a great song of praise to Jesus! Many turned to the Lord there.

4. Give – It's more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20.35)
 - a. Other transl – It makes one happier to give than to receive; happiness lies more in giving than receiving.
 - b. Joy is about releasing. You can't contain joy. It's meant to be expressed. Giving is one of those ways joy is released. It's giving like Abel – only the best & the first part.
 - c. Acts 4.32-35 pictures joyful giving.

d. Giving is an ongoing activity of joyful people, just as withholding is an activity of selfish people.

In *Run with the Horses*, Eugene Peterson tells how he saw a family of birds teaching their young to fly. Three young swallows were perched on a dead branch that stretched out over a lake. "One adult swallow got alongside the chicks and started shoving them out toward the end of the branch--pushing, pushing, pushing. The end one fell off. Somewhere between the branch and the water four feet below, the wings started working, and the fledgling was off on his own. Then the second one.

"The third was not to be bullied. At the last possible moment his grip on the branch loosened just enough so that he swung downward, then tightened again, bulldog tenacious. The parent was without sentiment. He pecked at the desperately clinging talons until it was more painful for the poor chick to hang on than risk the insecurities of flying. The grip was released, and the inexperienced wings began pumping. The mature swallow knew what the chick did not--that it would fly--that there was no danger in making it do what it was perfectly designed to do.

"Birds have feet and can walk. Birds have talons and can grasp a branch securely. They can walk; they can cling. But flying is their characteristic action, and not until they fly are they living at their best, gracefully and beautifully.

"Giving is what we do best. It is the air into which we were born. It is the action that was designed into us before our birth. ... Some of us try desperately to hold on to ourselves, to live for ourselves. We look so bedraggled and pathetic doing it, hanging on to the dead branch of a bank account for dear life, afraid to risk ourselves on the untried wings of giving. We don't think we can live generously because we have never tried. But the sooner we start, the better, for we are going to have to give up our lives finally, and the longer we wait, the less time we have for the soaring and swooping life of grace."