

generating JOY!

By Florence MacKenzie

A quiz show contestant had just won a magnificent prize. The audience went wild with delight. “This is the happiest day of my life!” the contestant exclaimed. Then the tears started to flow – not tears of sadness, she told the interviewer later, but tears of joy.

We often confuse joy and happiness. We all want our fair share of happiness, but because feeling happy is linked to favorable circumstances, it is often short-lived. Joy, on the other hand, can exist – and even flourish – in very difficult situations. But what is joy? I suggest it is an internal sense of well-being and an external demonstration of gladness that is largely independent of circumstances, but is profoundly dependent on God’s Spirit. Joy is a fruit that He produces (Gal.5:22). How can we demonstrate this joy in our everyday lives, even when we might not feel particularly happy?

- 1. FESS UP!** One of the biggest hindrances to joy is unconfessed sin in our lives. Any wrong attitudes, words, or actions that we haven’t allowed God to deal with will suck the joy out of us. Other times our joy can be diminished, not because of bad things we’ve done, but because of good things we’ve not done! We need to identify what these are and own up to them, too. If any type of unconfessed sin is attacking your joy, the best response is to admit it and quit it!
- 2. STAY CONNECTED.** Moving house a few years ago put a geographical distance between us and many of our friends and, despite promises to keep in touch, it wasn’t long before we failed to stay connected on a consistent basis. The same can happen in our relationship with God when, spiritually speaking, we find ourselves living at a distance from Him. We lose our delight in speaking to and hearing from God. Our joy has become a casualty. Let’s make staying connected to God one of our main priorities.
- 3. PRIORITIZE TASKS.** I sometimes feel so overwhelmed by the various jobs needing my attention that I don’t seem to have time to be joyful! One way of responding to this is to identify really important tasks. Which ones need to be dealt with today? What can wait? Can I delegate some tasks? Whenever I prioritize tasks, I tend to work much more efficiently... and this leaves more room for joy to surface!



- 4. CELEBRATE WITH OTHERS.** The Bible encourages us to “rejoice with those who rejoice...” (Rom.12:15). Rejoicing in another’s joy brings several benefits: it strengthens relationships, it spreads to those around us, and it focuses our attention on others rather than on ourselves. Is there anyone whose joy you could be part of right now?
- 5. BE OBEDIENT.** Two Biblical commands regarding joy are: “Rejoice in the Lord!” (Phil.3:1) and “Be joyful always” (1 Thess.5:16). There are many times when we might not feel like rejoicing, but by making a conscious decision to be obedient to what God says, we can rejoice. A fairly simple and practical way to start doing this is by praising Him for who He is. You might find it helpful to download 31 Days of Praise from our ministry website, www.equippedforliving.org. I use this resource to help me focus on a different aspect of God’s character every day of the month. Who knows what feelings of joy will start to appear as you get into the habit of consistently praising God?

I mentioned earlier that joy is largely independent of circumstances. If this is true, then experiencing some of life’s harsh realities should not destroy our joy, even if those unpleasant events can sometimes leave us reeling and desperately searching for answers to the pain they often bring. In fact, surprising at it may seem, sorrow and joy can exist together! When the Apostle Paul writes about his hardships, he refers to being “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor.6:10). A similar theme is picked up in James (1:2-4) where we’re encouraged to consider it pure joy when we face all kinds of trials because of the potentially positive outcome that can result. When the bottom falls out of our world we can still choose to keep close to Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of joy in our lives – that deep, abiding satisfaction in God. I wonder if our quiz contestant knew anything of this...