



LIVE RICH: *JOY*

One of the great encouragements of Scripture is that God intends for Christians to be full of joy. But what is joy? Is it possible that Jesus has a different definition than the world we live in? Why does it seem that those who should have the most joy have little, and those who should have little are overflowing? Ultimately, how can we have joy overflowing in our own lives?

Joy (re)Defined

Joy is a complicated thing. I don't know many people who would admit that they don't want joy in their life. However, when we take a close look we don't see too many people who would be described as having a life filled with joy. So what's the problem? It could be that the way our world defines joy is in conflict with how Scripture defines it. Webster's dictionary defines joy as, "the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possession of what one desires." It seems that the Bible might have a different take on where joy originates.

Study the Scriptures

Romans 12:1–13 NIV

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. ⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in

proportion to his faith. ⁷If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

⁹Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹²Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Reflection

- What insight does this passage give about where joy comes from?
- On a sheet of paper, make a column of items that bring joy from a worldly perspective and another column listing items that bring joy from a Christian perspective.
- Verse 12 states that we should “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” On a practical level, how are these three attitudes connected?

Why does she have it, and he doesn't?

It is always interesting to observe certain people who should be oozing with joy, but instead seem to be filled with sadness. On the other hand is someone who has every excuse to be bitter and yet has joy overflowing. It's hard not to compare the lives of a modern day Joy Queen to an Ancient Bummer.

Reflection

It had been a long day, and Father Andrew M. Greeley was frustrated and grouchy as he climbed into a hot cab with Mother Teresa. More than 30 years later, he still remembered their hour-long ride through southern Ohio.

“She was the happiest human being I had ever met,” he recalled when she died in 1997.

No other saint spoke or wrote as much about smiling as Mother Teresa did. We always saw her smiling. Friends said she had a quick, often self-deprecating, sense of humor, and sometimes she'd double over from laughing so hard.

We learned too that, Mother Teresa's prayer life was one of dark, pitiless silence. She lived her entire public life—all that time we saw her smiling and talking about joy—panicked that God had rejected her, or worse, that he was out there in the dark hiking from her.

Finding Joy in the Darkest Night: The Divine Abandonment of Mother Teresa, by David Scott

How can this duality of joy and doubt co-exist? The answer may be found when she said, “Joy is a sign of union with God—of God’s presence.... It is always hard, all the more reason why we should try to acquire it and make it grow in our heart.”

In contrast to Mother Teresa is the rich man who had a disappointing conversation with Jesus.

Study the Scriptures

Read Mark 10:17–22 NIV

¹⁷As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁸“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.

¹⁹You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

²⁰“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

²¹Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²²At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Reflection

What confuses me about this story is that this man went away sad. He made his own choice and in the end he got to keep all his stuff. So what’s the problem? Comparing the two, it seems Mother Teresa took the hard path and found joy even in suffering, yet the rich man found sadness while choosing wealth.

- Do you think the rich man purposely chose sadness?
- Share with the group ways in your life where you chose sadness over joy.
- What is keeping you from choosing joy?

As you close, pray for one another that you will find real joy this Christmas season and will daily find practical ways to help others find joy in their lives.