

Rejoice in the Lord Always



Animating The Heart With Joy, Praise, and Gratitude

“A joyful heart is life itself;
rejoicing lengthens one’s life span.”
(Ecclesiasticus 30.22)

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Introduction

The pursuit of happiness seems so compelling yet so elusive in our day. There are so many promises of happiness in the media. Can pleasures, possessions, experiences, or relationships truly bring lasting joy? What are happiness, fulfillment and joy in the context of the Christian life? This series of meditations seeks to explore this theme, drawing inspiration from Scripture and the writings of the Saints.

In considering these reflections, may you find the light of grace to discover the fullness of joy and hope in the Spirit of Christ Jesus.

The Drain of Sin

Can joy be found in a heart burdened with the search for the false joys of pleasure and comfort? Happiness is never found in sin. Sin leads to enslavement, emptiness, and pain. The search for joy must rise above the quest for comforting pain-killers.

"So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6.11-14)

Saccharine

The saccharines of sin entice
The heart to abdicate its place;
Against the conscience's advice,
The heart consents to fall from grace.

The temptations of vanity --
Of pride in one's own means and ways --
Supplants joy with idolatry,
And offerings of selfish praise.

The temptations of gluttony,
A tyranny of wanton need,
Consumes the heart relentlessly --
Joy is displaced by zealous greed.

The heart which harbours hard feelings
Of judgements, jealousy, and lust,
Denies pure love in its dealings --
And drains their neighbor's joy and trust.

Sin, with its consequence, destroys
The heart's true fulfillment and joys.

"Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord! ... Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins." (Psalm 25.7,18)

Lord, open my heart to know the truth of sin in my life. Have mercy on me and purify me, that I may be prepared to share in Your joy. Amen.

Purifying the Virtues

How imperfect we find ourselves as we try to live a good Christian life! Imperfections, weaknesses, and failures can dishearten and extinguish joy. If the heart is willing to persevere in learning to live God's ways, His grace will provide more than enough strength to gradually purify the heart and prepare it to live the Christian life in joy.

"Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart."
(Psalm 97.11)

Tainted

When love's tainted with selfishness,
Expecting something in return,
Love's left bereft of true kindness --
Where is the joy amidst this churn?

Faith which dallies with disbelief,
Ignores the truth and goes astray;
The Lord's power, lost to this thief,
Dissipates in the disarray.

Hope that allows doubt or despair,
Denies the Lord's power and grace
To move the heart or to draw near,
And hold the soul in His embrace.

Faith, hope, and love, in their pure form,
Yield joy which wells eternally.
For the Christian, joy is the norm
In triumph and in tragedy.

Virtues are gifts of grace which cleanse
The heart's weakness as it transcends.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit." (Psalm 51.10-12)

Lord, may my heart's intentions be purified, so that the gifts of Your virtues may not be compromised in my love for You and humankind. Amen.

What Is Hope?

So many false hopes fill our hearts! Dreams of what-might-be fill our minds with fantasy. True hope does not depend on chance or dream. True hope meets us in our present circumstance and guides us towards what we are meant-to-be.

"For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." (Romans 8.24-25)

Raising Eyes

Is hope only a distant dream:
A delusion of what might be,
An illusion of false esteem
For myths held but tenuously?

Can hope be found amidst the pain,
Of hearts beset by grief and loss?
Where is the sun, when all is rain,
For souls who only see the cross?

Hope is the promise of rebirth;
Like springtime sun on winter snows.
Hope, in spirit, renews the earth --
A force of life which ever flows.

Hope draws life from what's meant-to-be:
Meaning's infused in the moment;
Eyes are raised to eternity --
Knowing God lives in the present.

Though the journey's a slipp'ry slope;
God's love is here -- He is our hope!

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."
(Romans 15.13)

Lord, lift up my eyes to find you in the midst of my present troubles, and be Yourself my steadfast hope. Amen.

What Is Joy?

When we think of joy, many mixed messages of the pursuit of happiness come to mind. True joy is not based on affection for creatures and things of this world. A Bible scholar defined joy as: "The Greek word for joy is **chara**, which is the experience of God's presence in our lives, an experience of gladness and peace." The only source of true and lasting joy is the Lord.

"You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of gladness with your presence." (Acts 2.28)

Affections of the Heart

The heart's affections ebb and flow
At whim where'er desires lead;
Drawing other hearts to and fro --
So many conflicts have this seed.

All earthly things will pass away;
Hearts set on them will never rest.
Is peace lost in this disarray?
Is the heart's joy fleeting at best?

The Lord is love -- He's eternal;
Peace ever flows from His domain.
In His presence, joy can be full --
By grace and truth He will sustain.

The heart should strive to redirect
All its affections to the Lord;
In Him all hearts can reconnect
To truth and love in one accord.

In Him, joy can flow full and free;
For hearts set on eternity.

"*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.*" (Philippians 4.5)

Lord, gather the scattered affections of my heart into your hands, and hold them near you, that my heart may find all its joy in You alone. Amen

Gratitude Opens The Heart

Joy is one of the first fruits of the Spirit to be abandoned in the face of difficulties. Difficulties can overwhelm the heart as we instinctively try to flee or control the situation. How quick we are to forget that God's love is bigger than all our problems. If we but trust in Him, we can find the strength to cling to His hand come what may. We can learn to always find something to be thankful for, so that our joy may return, even in the midst of pain.

"My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1.2-4)

Thank Him Who Calms The Sea

How hard it is to be thankful,
For a cross filled with grief and pain;
The heart's instinct is to grumble:
"Why me? Why now?" beneath the strain.

The thankful heart finds room to breathe;
God's love is given latitude.
The heart's instincts no longer seethe --
Grace and peace grow with gratitude.

The grateful heart can find meaning,
Even as trials overwhelm;
Rather than take blows careening,
The Lord's trusted to take the helm.

In Him the grateful heart shelters,
As wind and wave rage on and foam;
His Spirit rests on the waters --
In Him, all hearts find their way home.

The humbled heart can make the choice,
To trust in God's hand and rejoice.

"May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from His glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light." (Colossians 1.11-12)

O Lord, thank you for your abundant gifts of grace wrapped in the terrible packaging of my trials. May I always find You near and may I taste Your joy again in the midst of suffering, for I trust that You always know what's best for me. Amen.

Rejoicing In Praise of God

Too often, our hearts are downcast in considering things of this earth which pass away. We were created to live in praise of God's glory. Praise lifts the heart out of its doldrums so that it may sing to the heavens. Who cannot rejoice in the midst of praising God?

"Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise!" (Psalm 95.2)

In Praise of God's Love

God's love is the greatest treasure:
A cosmos of creative grace,
Spawning new life beyond measure --
Encompassing all time and space.

God's love's embodied in the Word
Made Flesh -- in Him who loved us first;
The heart which praises Him is stirred,
To long for Him with a great thirst.

Yearning uplifts the heart to hear
The Word -- engendering His love
And life in the soul who's drawn near
This fount of joy which wells above.

Joy is the fruit of love which flows,
Through souls in streams of grace outpoured;
The heart which prays most surely knows
This joy in praising Christ the Lord!

The heart which praises Him beholds
Creation's joy as love unfolds.

"My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God." (Psalm 84.2)

Holy Spirit, animate my heart with joy in praise and song! May a melody of joy forever play in our hearts. Amen.

Joy In His Presence

Joy can be nurtured in the heart and cultivated continually in the Lord's presence. This should happen, not apart from daily life, but

in the midst of the everyday. The heart which rejoices in His presence can flourish in the life of His Spirit at all times.

"Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His presence continually." (Psalm 105.3b-4)

Joyful Heart

The joyful heart rises above,
Life's baggage and complexity,
With one purpose -- to live in love,
Entrenched in its reality.

The joyful heart accepts its place,
Trusting fully in the Lord's hand:
He will provide guidance and grace;
He knows what's best -- His will is planned.

The joyful heart strives to abide,
In His presence at that moment --
So soul and Spirit may confide,
In grace and peace at His descent.

In His presence, joy flourishes;
Peace shields the heart from sun and storm;
Love stokes the heart and nourishes
The soul -- in all, joy is the norm.

In joy, truth and love intertwine,
As God's will and the heart align.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4.4-7)

Lord, strengthen my heart in Your presence and preserve me in Your peace, that joy may overflow in my heart at all times. Amen.

The Joy of Serving God

The heart clings to many affections which scatter its attention away from God. God is the source of all our joys. To set the heart on God alone is to love Him above the earthly affections which draw the heart away from Him. To love God is to serve Him. In serving Him, the heart is freed to taste the true joy which flows from eternal life.

"Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour." (John 12.24-26)

Purest Joy

The purest form of joy is found,
In humble service to the Lord:
In Him, eternal joys abound;
From Him, fulfillment is outpoured.

All other joys yield vanity:
Wealth and prestige shackle the heart;
Attachments breed idolatry,
Which drives the soul and God apart.

The heart which serves Him in all things,
With a gentle humility,
Stays with Him in whate'er life brings --
The servant knows true liberty.

To not serve is to turn away;
Dulled and blinded to what is right;
With heart scattered, to further stray
From God -- extinguishing the light.

Uproot affections at their source;
Serve God alone and stay the course.

"You show me the path of life. In Your presence there is fullness of joy; in Your right hand are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16.11)

Lord, may all my joys find their source in You, that I may know life's fullness in serving You all my days. Amen.

Risen Joy

The burden of the cross weighs down the heart and seems to extinguish its hope. For the heart which recognizes the cross as a sign of God's love in its midst, hope is preserved. Joy becomes possible even in suffering. The hope of the resurrection reassures the heart and reaffirms faith which is its strength.

"May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves". (Psalm 126.5-6)

Shadow To Sunrise

Beneath the shadow of the cross,
Seeds of resurrection are sown;
For hearts which persevere through loss,
The Spirit rolls away the stone.

Beneath the shadow, joy is found:
As faith suspends doubts and despair,
And love amends, though wounds abound,
And hope transcends the angst and fear.

The early dawn of Easter morn,
Illuminates its silhouette:
The cross yields Christ as its firstborn --
The first of all He will beget.

The children of the Risen Lord,
Share in the Son's grace and glory,
In His Spirit, which is outpoured,
For all who hope in His mercy.

Though cross may weigh hearts and destroy;
The risen heart's gilded with joy.

"So the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."
(Isaiah 51.11)

Lord, reassure my heart with hope, and plant seeds of joy in the midst of my suffering, that I may never lose sight of Your Easter victory. Amen.

Heaven Is Our Hope

The Lord promises eternal life to all who believe in Him and hope in His mercy. How can the heart turn away from such immensity of love? The hope of eternal life can sustain and uplift us in all the joys and sorrows of this short life. Death awaits us all, but will we choose to accept the gift of life eternal?

"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." (Isaiah 12.3)

Eternal Joy

Joy is the taste of love rising;
Purified soul and Risen Son;
Spirits enmeshed in their being --
Eternal life lived out as one.

Salvation's hope will be realized,
And only tears of joy will flow;
Though heaven's joy is but surmised,
The Risen Lord is what we know.

When we rise, we'll be as He is;
Sharing in His glory and grace,
Abiding in love and pure bliss,
He has prepared the dwelling place!

Eternal life is tasted here,
In joys that flow Spirit to soul.
The heart dances as He draws near;
He is essence that makes us whole.

Our hearts will overflow with praise;
Rejoicing in the Lord always.

"Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship Him day and night within His temple, and the One who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of the water of life and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'" (Revelations 7.14b-17)

O Risen Lord, draw me hope to Your eternal throne. May we be one, in all, made whole for all eternity. Amen.

The Joy of Morning

Psalm 95 is the customary opening psalm prayed in the Liturgy of the Hours to mark the beginning of the day. It is a song of praise, joy, and worship in our God. What better way to begin each day than with joy?

Morning begins with a fresh start.
Opening psalm lifts a night-weary heart.
Songbirds beckon open sleepy eyes.
The Heart quickens as old bones arise.
A Smile greets a weathered face.
Heaven has truly touched this place.

"O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise!" (Psalm 95.1)

Rising Sun

Joy is the substance of meaning;
The flow of hope's eternal breath;
The essence of the heart's being
Which beats beyond the reach of death.

Joy is inhaled like night at dawn:
Absorbing darkness and despair;
Filling the soul with fresh intone --
A psalm of morning fills the air.

How can the birds not sing for joy
As dew refreshes all the earth,
And the first rays of light deploy
Heaven in hearts which sing with mirth?

And what fulfillment can there be
Apart from ONE who blesses all?
Whose denouement's eternity
With all His creatures great and small?

Now, sing for joy, God's little one!
Shine with your heart -- the rising sun.

"Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing!" (Isaiah 49.13a)

Lord, smile in me for all I meet this day. Breathe hope into all our disarray. Amen.

Epilogue

Joy is the fruit of fulfillment of life in Christ. Joy, even in the midst of suffering, is the hallmark of the Christian. Praise and thanksgiving overflow in the heart opened fully to the Lord. There is no greater meaning and fulfillment in this life than knowing and loving the Lord Jesus Christ.

"I have said these things to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." (John 15.11)

May joy in the Risen Lord fill your heart and overflow, welling up to eternity. Amen.

References

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