

Roadblocks to Joy

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As believers, we are to experience the Joy of the Lord because the fruit of the spirit is Joy. Why do we fail to experience this profound delight of being attached to our Lord and Savior? To take joy in is to delight in, to take happiness in and gladness in. What then blocks us on the path to experiencing and expressing joy?

Here are some roadblocks to joy:

1. When we are unwilling to do a moral inventory of our sins. Our quiet time may be filled with thoughts of others, stressful situations and problems, or a zillion distractions, but we fail to look inward and ask the Lord to reveal the ways we have failed Him and ourselves. To be in silence before the Lord, to take time to linger there, and listen for His promptings and leadings is vital to our growth in Christ. If we cannot face our sinful selves, then we deny the power of the resurrection and grace in our lives. We begin operating on auto-pilot. Our hearts get hardened. Self righteousness and pride take over, or self loathing and despair, and there is no room for "the joy of my salvation" (Psalm 51:12). We must learn to live with our failures and the triumph God gives us over them. The depth of our need for God and His grace gives us a stronger desire to cling to God daily. When we find God, we find JOY!!!

2. When we compartmentalize God. God lives in us and with us. "If you keep my commandments you will abide in My love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you and your joy may be full." (NKJ) When you live with someone, and make a life with them, they are in your thoughts many times a day. One way to look at the power of our attachment to others is to measure the ability we have to hold them close in our thoughts and memory throughout the day. I often think about my husband and children throughout the day. Who they are and what they are experiencing matters to me. I feel a connection even when they are removed from my presence. How about Jesus? Are you in the habit of only thinking about Him when trouble strikes? Or only at night when you are going to bed? Or mostly on Sundays because it is "church day"? Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. We belong to Him. We need to take Him along with us throughout our day. "Good morning, Lord. . . hey I need to do groceries today. What do you think?" When we live in a deeper awareness of His presence with us, we become more closely connected and bonded to Him. It is what "abiding" and "remaining" in Him is about. Our awareness of His delight in us is magnified over time. We begin to experience His love in a real way. His joy makes us giggle. We delight in Him and He delights in us. Watch out, here comes the joy!

3. When we are exhausted. We run ourselves ragged, as if we really are the energizer bunny. NOT! We fail to pay attention to our gas tank. The tank light may be on for days or weeks but we ignore it. Our bodies are screaming for rest but we persist 'not now.' We tell ourselves "there are more important things to take care of besides you." The

real trick here is that as we run down to nothing, so does our patience, kindness, goodness, ability to listen, sensitivity to others, and often our health. We are training those around us to be professional Martha's and not "receive the good part" that Mary chose. (Luke 10:42) We have trouble facing our limitations, and are performance junkies. Jesus calls out to us-"come all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest". (Mt. 11:28). Rest is a time to restore, to replenish, to recreate, to renew, to nap, to listen to music, to laugh with a friend and so much more. When we are in a receiving position, we can receive the joy of the Lord.

4. When we are lonely and we isolate. Isolation here is about shutting ourselves down to any outside influence or any inside influence. Because we are believers, God's Spirit lives in us. But we shut out the presence of the Lord. We stop trusting that His intentions toward us are for good and not for evil-to give us a future and a hope. Often this happens when we feel pain, sadness, failure, trauma, and confusion. We could really use a kind word or someone to listen, but we choose to cut ourselves off from receiving help. We are afraid to let anyone in. God's word in Isaiah 42:3 says "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench". He will listen attentively, and graciously to all your cares. Choose to trust. Even if it is for a minute, let Jesus in. He will open a window to let light and a fresh breeze enter into your heart. It will bring joy to your bones.

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