

BEHOLD

ADVENT

A CROSS POINT DEVOTIONAL



JOY



CHARA (GREEK) —
JOY, GLADNESS



SUNDAY: GOD: THE MOST JOYFUL BEING IN THE UNIVERSE

Have you ever met someone who exudes joy? Not in an inauthentic or “out of touch with reality” way, but with sincerity *and* strength and with a perspective on life that seems abnormal? My daughter is like that. I often call her my “joy mentor.” She carries with her wonder and an infectious confidence. Her joy causes me to ask, “What is joy and how do you get it?”

Joy is often associated with a feeling of happiness or an emotion that comes from desires fulfilled.

A popular exercise over the years has been to compare and contrast joy and happiness. Much ink has been spilled on the differences (real or perceived) between the two, but generally speaking both involve a feeling, sense or state of being. Rather than speculate on the difference between the two, the Bible has several words that describe nuances associated with this emotion or state of being. But there is one overwhelming conclusion the Scriptures draw about true joy, and that is its *source*.

During this Advent season, it's critical to remember how Jesus

entering our story as a human is tied to real and lasting joy. The Christmas season can very easily lure us into thinking joy is bound up in gifts and relationships, and while those things can produce *some* joy, they can also be great sources of pain. It is vital that we trace joy back to its source this Christmas. Author Lewis Smedes said in *The Life You Always Wanted*, “To miss out on joy is to miss out on the reason for your existence.”¹ We certainly don't want to do that. Our reflections this week, then, will explore some of the reasons for the absence of joy, Jesus' connection with joy, and some of the ways to cultivate, and live with, true joy.

Here's what we know from Scripture: God is the most joyful being in the universe. In fact, C. S. Lewis said in *Letters to Malcolm*, “Joy is the serious business of Heaven.”² So serious that God the Father sent God the Son on a rescue mission to His creation so a restoration of joy would commence.

¹ Ortberg, J. (2015). *The life you've always wanted: Spiritual disciplines for ordinary people*. Zondervan.

² Lewis, C. S. (1998). *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*. (n.p.) Fount.

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY

"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence, there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

PSALM 16:11 ESV

MONDAY: UNNECESSARY WEIGHT

There are days when my neck just hurts and it is difficult to turn my head or more importantly, to lift it. While sleeping position, “tech-neck,” and lack of exercise are contributors, I’ve stopped wondering what causes it, because I know. It’s my backpack. I have a tendency to carry around unnecessary weight, which puts pressure on my neck and causes me to keep my head down.

The lack of joy works similarly. It drops the shoulders and makes our steps sluggish. It leads to navel gazing. The neck becomes heavy and the extra weight is often a preoccupation with self. Whatever is sought to experience joy proves to not sustain the desire for it. This is how the prince of darkness and sin collude to keep people joyless.

Francis de Sales, a Genevan bishop in the 1500s, wrote in his book *Introduction to the Devout Life*,³ “The prince of darkness is pleased with sadness and melancholy because he is and shall be sad and melancholy to all eternity; therefore he desires that everyone may be like himself.”

³ de Sales, F. (1885). *Introduction to the Devout Life*. MH Gill and Son.

One of the main reasons Christ came was to put a stop to this, to lift the heads of His people, and restore joy to His image bearers—which He has been doing since the beginning and will continue to do until the day He returns to earth.

Meditation for the Day:

"Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."

1 JOHN 3:8 ESV

**TUESDAY:
CONSIDER YOUR SOURCE**

In economics, there is a principle called the law of diminishing returns. This principle states that all things considered, when you employ an additional factor of production, it, in effect, causes a small decrease in output. This law isn't just about production; it's also true about joy.

Many things can give the sense of happiness in a moment. It is human nature to return to the source of that feeling to experience it time and again. But at some point, the law of diminishing returns kicks in. By that point, we've trained ourselves in the habit. The real test then comes in the source's ability to sustain the emotion over time.

Moses was raised in Pharaoh's house. He had it all: money, food, leisure. But somewhere along the way, he caught a vision. A vision that

included truth, justice, and love. A vision that the LORD and His ways were better than anything else. Once he saw it and tasted it, he realized he had found something better, something that offered increased returns of joy. So, he left Pharaoh's house and became a shepherd—the exact opposite of wealthy Egyptians in that day.

Later in the Bible, the author of Hebrews wrote a letter, seeking to encourage people who thought of walking away from Jesus by telling them stories of men like Abraham and Moses. He says, "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, *choosing rather* to be mistreated with the people of God than to *enjoy* the fleeting pleasures of sin." (Hebrews 11:24-25)



The Bible teaches us that joy isn't merely something to passively experience, but rather something to *actively choose*. Moses was a man who often led out in joy. But not always. Thus, he was only a shadowy type of the One who was to come; One who would daily *choose* joy and also *bring* it to our sad world.

When Jesus was born, an angel—who had been in the presence of the Son of God for ages—declared, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of *great joy* that will be for all people.” (Luke 2:10)

This angel had experienced the joy of God since creation. He knew firsthand that the source of this “great joy” was an eternal fountain that never diminished in ability or quality. This was the joy he heralded. This was the joy that had come—to *us*.

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated by the people of God than enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.”

HEBREWS 11:24-25 ESV



WEDNESDAY: THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF HEAVEN

"What did God do before creation?" I remember the first time I read that question in Michael Reeves' book, *Delighting in the Trinity*.⁴ That one question transformed the way I understood God, life, the church, and joy. With the basic understanding of a Trinitarian God, the most foundational thing we can say about God is that before creation He was a Father loving His Son, making known His love by His Spirit to His Son. When this kind of love is present, peace and joy are the inevitable results. This is *why* C. S. Lewis said in *Letters to Malcolm* that "Joy is the serious business of Heaven."⁵

When Jesus came out of the baptism waters, the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). In other words, the Father was saying, "I have so much joy and delight in my Son! I love him!" This love manifests through the

⁴ Reeves, M. (2022). *Delighting in the trinity an introduction to the Christian faith*. Intervarsity Press.

⁵ Lewis, C. S. (1998). *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*. (n.p.) Fount.

Spirit (that declaration was made as the Spirit rested upon Jesus).

This is important to understand because Jesus was more than a merely joyful person. He was connected to the source of eternal joy: the love of the Father through the Spirit. He actually brought joy to others. When sin entered the world in the garden, this access to the love of the Father was compromised because of sin. Jesus—the joy bringer—reopened those doors through His life, death, and resurrection.

There's an old saying that says "comparison is the thief of joy." This is true *if* your joy is found first and foremost in people or things. When you are connected to the eternal source of joy through faith in Jesus, comparison is only a mere *temptation*, because the joy Christ gives cannot be diminished or taken away. Neither governments, nor stock markets, nor inflation, nor

wars, nor sickness, and not even death can ruin the kind of joy that Christ brings to His people.

Reeves says in another book, *Rejoicing in Christ*, regarding Jesus:

He is the treasure of the Father, shared with us. Sometimes we find ourselves tiring of Jesus, stupidly imagining that we have seen all there is to see and used up all the pleasure there is to be had in him. We get spiritually bored. But Jesus has satisfied the mind and heart of the infinite God for eternity. Our boredom is simple blindness. If the Father can be infinitely and eternally satisfied in him, then he must be overwhelmingly all-sufficient for us.⁶

Joy *is* the serious business of Heaven. And Jesus came to bring that glorious business *to us*. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you.

⁶ Reeves, M. (2015). *Rejoicing in Christ*. IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press.

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY

“THESE THINGS
I HAVE SPOKEN
TO YOU, THAT
MY JOY MAY BE IN
YOU, AND THAT
YOUR JOY MAY
BE FULL.”

JOHN 15:11 ESV

THURSDAY: THE JOY GIVER

As the chapel doors flung open, there she stood. She wore a white dress, as pure as the moment. As she began to slowly make her way down the aisle toward me, I became filled with emotion. Tears ran down my face because somehow I knew, even if I couldn't describe it then, that our love for each other was deeply connected to joy.

It's interesting to consider that Jesus, the Joy Giver, was called a man of sorrows (Isaiah 53:3). If Advent is connected to joy, it must also be connected to sorrow. We live in *this* world, one full of heartache and pain. Jesus was not immune to sorrow; He came to impart His joy to us so we might not be overcome by our sorrows (John 16:20-24).

The commitment of Jesus to share His joy with us never ceases to amaze me. It's why He came. The author of Hebrews says that as we encounter sorrows, we should consider Jesus, who, "for the *joy that was set before him* endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2)" (Author's italics). If Jesus has experienced joy for all eternity, then how could joy be *before* Him?

With the beloved Son is a tight link between joy and sharing. The joy set before Him was the bride to whom He brought to Himself. The joy set before Him was the church. Because just as I brought my wife into a life of sacrificial love and joy with me, Jesus, did the same with His bride.

Jesus is not only the joy *bringer*,
Jesus is also the joy *giver*.

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY



"So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."

JOHN 16:22 ESV

FRIDAY: THE GIGANTIC SECRET OF THE CHRISTIAN

Until 1997 in the United Kingdom, the only flag ever flown from Buckingham Palace was the Royal Standard, which is the official flag of the reigning British king or queen. And the only time it was flown was if the king or queen were at home.

Sally Lloyd Jones, in her book, *Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing*,⁷ writes that when Jesus comes to dwell in your heart, He brings His flag with Him, declaring to everyone the King is at home.

And the Royal Standard for the Kingdom of Heaven is Joy!

Here are four ways Jesus' arrival changed the way humans experienced joy:

1. Joy is a gift. Jesus gives His joy to all who trust Him. This means you don't have to try to manufacture

it or conjure it up. Joy is always accessible because it is a gift from the eternal One!

2. Joy is tied to sharing. We are made in the image of God, so when we are connected to Jesus' joy, we can truly begin to be who we were made to be, sharers of this same joy. We are invited to bring others into this same life-giving joy. Thus, the fullness of joy is tied to sharing. (1 John 1:1-4; Hebrews 13:16)

3. Joy transcends suffering and trials. James 1:3 and 1 Peter 1:6 both encourage followers of Christ to consider it a joy when we experience trials because of the Christ-like fruit it is producing in our lives. Jesus' joy turns suffering on its head.

⁷ Jones, S. L. (2012). *Thoughts to make your heart sing*. Sally Lloyd Jones.

4. Joy is a command. “Rejoice in the Lord always,” Paul tells the Philippians (Philippians 4:4). Instead of joy being something you experience passively, the Bible says because of Christ’s coming, joy is a bold act of faith in life. This doesn’t mean you ignore suffering or over-spiritualize difficult circumstances. It does mean joy can still be chosen and experienced in the midst of those things.

G. K. Chesterton said in *Orthodoxy* that “Modern men have utterly lost the joy of life. They have to put up with the miserable substitute of the joys of life. And even these they seem less and less able to enjoy.” He goes on to say that humans are most themselves when “joy is the fundamental thing in them,” which is why he calls joy “the gigantic secret of the Christian.”⁸

Is King Jesus at home in your heart? Is His flag of joy raised over your life?

⁸ Chesterton, G. K. (2019). *Orthodoxy*. Start Publishing LLC.

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit."

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-19 ESV



SATURDAY: FUTURE JOY

One of the greatest memories I have of growing up is Sunday afternoons. Sabbaths. Especially the ones when we went to Grandma and Pop's house to eat. We'd throw down on some country food, turn the game on, retell stories, and wait for Pop to make some homemade ice cream. Peach was my favorite.

After the dishes were cleaned and a couple naps were had, everyone would mosey outside because by then, we kids (plus some neighbor friends) were already two innings into a wiffle ball game. My uncles would give commentary, which would make us want to play even better. I'm sure there were conversations about sad things, but as a kid, all I heard was the laughter of generations of family enjoying the golden hour of the day with ice cream, games, and stories.

The older I get, the more I think about Jesus' next Advent. I get excited, but not in the silly kind of way. In a way that is honest about the pains I've caused or experienced. A way that feels like the mingling of tears and trembling, longing and laughter, waiting and wonder.

When I imagine what eternal joy with God will be like, a passage in the prophet Zechariah's book often comes to mind. He says about the future reign of the Messiah:

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. Zechariah 8:4-5

As perfect as those Sabbath afternoons seemed at the time, they were but a glimpse, a hint, a picture, of the day when Jesus will rip open those eastern skies and descend upon the earth. A day when there will be no hesitation to play in the streets, and where we'll enjoy long tables of the choicest foods and no shortage of stories to tell of the King and His kingdom.

This Christmas, let Jesus' first Advent fuel your longing for His next one.

MEDITATION FOR THE DAY

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"

REVELATION 21:3-4 ESV

NOTES