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Holiness Writers

JOY FOR DARK DAYS

By

Richard S. Taylor

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

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FRONT COVER TEXT:

RICHARD S. TAYLOR

**JOY
FOR
DARK DAYS**

COMFORT and INSPIRATION
FOR THE DARK VALLEYS
IN THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

BACK COVER TEXT:

**JOY
FOR
DARK DAYS**

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There seems little reason for gaiety and laughter today. Nations are cowering in faith and standards and ideals are disintegrating. Youth is adrift without morals or moorings. It is against this kind of background that the author insists that Christians can find "Joy for Dark Days."

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PREFACE

Joy for Dark Days is an intriguing title for a book. The very paradox of it adds to its appeal. Everyone thinks of joy in relation to bright days. But to offer a formula for joy in the midst of heaviness and sorrow seems fantastic.

Dr. Richard S. Taylor is not suggesting a gimmick such as a hypodermic needle or tranquilizing pills or a sanguine philosophy such as thinking positively. He seeks rather to lead his readers to drink from fountains that spring from within because they have an experience of God's grace that is vital and scriptural. The joy he describes is related to righteousness and peace. It is the portion of those in whose hearts the love of God has been shed abroad by the Holy Spirit. This joy is not simple emotional exhilaration; it is to provide strength for the exacting labor and it is to share in witnessing for Him who said, "My joy . . . [shall] remain in you."

Here is a book whose author possesses natural gifts and a mind disciplined in learning. It is readable in style and profitable in content. Spiritual blessing is available in this volume at small cost in time or money. My own soul was refreshed by the reading of it.

— G. B. WILLIAMSON —

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CHAPTER ONE

Answer to Despair

"How can anyone ever smile again?"

Thus wrote a hard-bitten woman journalist during World War II. Staggered by the horrible suffering and brutal slaughter which she witnessed, she felt that only a heartless, irresponsible, and totally selfish monster could be gay in such a world.

Mocked by the Times

There is even less reason for gaiety and laughter today. We are witnessing on an unprecedented scale the testing of Christian civilization as we know it. Nations are cowering in fear. Standards and ideals are disintegrating. Youth is adrift without morals or moorings; age is cynical, disillusioned, and frightened. The United Nations is painfully disunited in fluid, swaying camps, without stability and with few guideposts. East is against West, the colored races against the white, the "have-not's" against the property classes, the laborers against the employers, the Communists against the capitalists, the Moslems and Hindus and Buddhists against the Christians — All with an accelerated tempo of hate and fear and distrust. The mocking little fall-out shelters springing up in back yards are grim and constant reminders of the threat that hangs over all like a black shadow — the obliteration of our cities by megaton bombs.

But more terrifying still is the putrid incubus of crime and cold-blooded cruelty creeping across the nation. The increasing disregard for law is an ominous sign of the times. Unbridled sensuality is glorified. Promiscuity is labeled as normal. The most sacred and intimate values of life are soiled and exploited for gain. Cheating at school, pilfering on the job, and swindling in business are not only practiced but defended.

Life is held increasingly cheap. The country seems to be swarming with the vermin of trigger-happy thugs who will kill for a few cents. Crimes of violence — rape, assault, murder, kidnapping — have not only multiplied but are being committed with sadistic, unemotional callousness by teenagers. Twelve-year-olds are killing parents and playmates with no reason but a lust to hurt someone, and doing it without a qualm and with no apparent regret. Sheer animalism is stalking the land. J. Edgar Hoover reports that the crime wave is increasing five times as fast as the population. Vast underworld syndicates are slowly getting a strangle hold on our cities, and law-enforcement agencies seem powerless to stop them.

Joy in the midst of such chaos? Even the desire for joyousness seems an irresponsible, selfish impertinence. The appropriate mood is gloom, not gaiety. The hour calls for sackcloth and ashes, not festivity. It demands tears and anguish, deep earnestness, the set face of a crusader, rolled-up sleeves. This is no time to be seeking joy!

Hidden Hunger

Yet without joy of some kind, in some measure, man quickly becomes mentally and emotionally ill. His soul requires joy as his body requires food. He craves a lift and a lilt in the midst of life's boredom. Of course his basic ultimate desire (though he may not know it) is for an inner sense of well-being, an inner hope and happiness based on some solid good that he has found, some sure security. He wants a grasp of that which cannot be taken from him, and to which he can cling when surrounded by this welter of senseless chaos. Without that solid hold of reality, the steady inner gladness (which is joy) is impossible. Joy and meaningfulness and hope are interlaced and interlocked: one cannot be had without the other, at least not on any deep, satisfying level.

When man does not have such joy because he has not found the basis for it, he grasps desperately for substitutes, anything at all to relieve tensions, no matter how momentarily. Having not the inner sense of well-being to see him through the outer frustrations, he instinctively looks for ways of escape.

Laughter is one way; so comedy does a land-office business these days. Of all the merely human means available, laughter is probably the best way of escape, if it arises spontaneously from a clean and wholesome sense of humor. As a safety value, a "merry heart doeth good like a medicine." But the heart is too often not in modern laughter. When the laughter dies, its echo mocks the inward emptiness. One can't be laughing all the time.

There are other substitutes and other means of escape. Liquor gives its synthetic joy, followed by its real hang-over and utterly joyless aftermath. So does sensual pleasure. Brief thrills and trumped-up excitement can be managed in dozens of ways and bought in dozens of forms. None of these give more than transient, surface joys; without the real thing they are as straws to a drowning man.

And so while thoughtful men see the incongruity of so much fun and frolic, and sense the awful impropriety of merely living for a good time when the world is so broken and bleeding, the throng ever more feverishly seeks. The blacker the world scene and the more despairing the inner emptiness, the more frantically is the tempo stepped up in the mad quest. It is a hidden hunger of the soul. It is as if men said, "What we have is about to be snatched from us — let us hurry to taste a little more of the thrills of life." Or, in ancient words, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Reporters tells us that Singapore gave vent to a mad fling during the final, fateful days that the Japanese were closing in on the city. With the enemy at the gates, the whole populace seemed to make a desperate rush for a good time. Night clubs, cabarets, theaters, hotels were full; the streets were crowded with gay people; liquor flowed freely.

It didn't make sense. And it doesn't today. But men are too selfish to see the absurdity of fun and frolic. The craving for inner happiness is so deep and overpowering that those who skillfully invent new thrills become wealthy overnight. The crowd acts like a man who knows he is doomed, and that if he is ever going to enjoy life he must do it now. And so the slogan is, "Live it up!" — by which is meant: Squander life while it lasts.

It is obvious that the insatiable lust for joy cannot be banished. The need for joy is too much a part of human nature. But neither can we silence the question, Is joy somehow indecent? Is it, in our messed-up world, a selfish and shameful impropriety?

A Way Through

The Christian is the only one who has a thoroughly adequate basis for joy in this hectic age. He is the only one who can merge gladness with sobriety. He alone can have joy without indifference; he alone can have profound concern without despair.

Two friends were flying toward their home in Seattle in a small two-seater plane. They found themselves in dense clouds. Hoping to discover a break, they flew on. The pilot was afraid to descend lest they should still be over the mountains. Two hours more of desperate circling exhausted their fuel, and the pilot knew he must slip down through that murky, unknown waste. They prayed. Then suddenly, as if the clouds were parted by angel hands, there opened a hole which gave them visibility to the ground. Instantly the pilot nosed his plane down that shaft of light, and eased to a safe emergency landing. Their joy knew no bounds because they had found a way through. When they told loved ones and friends, all rejoiced with them because they had found a way through.

The Christian has found a way through. He is neither blind nor indifferent to the world's plight. He is not a giddy juvenile, nor is he a happy-go-lucky optimist by temperament. His is a thoroughly sober and responsible joy. For he knows that God has made a way through, not only for himself, but for the world.

Realist that he is, he has taken a solid look at the enveloping evil; he sees the stark ugliness and hopelessness of the human situation; but having looked at the world with clear eyes, he looks away to Calvary, and sees on that hilltop the darkness dispelled. He knows that God has spoken, and that some way God's word will be the last word. He knows that God has not abandoned man to the devil. He is even now manipulating events toward a grand, victorious climax, when every knee shall bow, "of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth," and every tongue shall confess "that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2: 10-11).

He who has not been to Calvary has no answer to despair. His hollow gaiety mocks him. He has no grounds for joy in any deep, full, and satisfying measure. His very search seems selfish when viewed against the backdrop of the world's misery. But the man who has been to Calvary knows the elation of solutions. His is the exultation of the guide who finds an open pass through the mountains. His is the transporting joy of the scientist who has discovered a cure for the plague. The more soberly and unselfishly concerned a man is over world conditions, the more buoyant and artesian will be his joy when he finds this divine way through. He can offer hope to every perplexed and lost son of Adam. Men may not heed, and their refusal will make him sad. But even this cannot rob him of the joy that he at least has hope to offer.

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CHAPTER TWO Is Your Joy Complete?

That memorable night in the upper room when our Lord quietly comforted and instructed His disciples, five times He assured them of joy. One of His statements was this: "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). What did He mean by joy that was full? I believe that He meant joy that was complete. Only complete joy can utterly satisfy, for it alone has no essential element lacking.

Natural Joy Not Enough

It cannot be denied that non-Christians taste at times some measure of joy. Many people are comparatively happy in a kittenish sort of way. They have — for a time — an abundance of frisky animal spirits, like a calf gamboling in the morning sun. They enjoy eating and playing and working. There is also a kind of joy in great music and great art. There is an ecstatic, yet pensive, painful sort of joy in the ravishing glories of a golden sunset. And certainly a noble joy is felt by two loving hearts standing at the marriage altar, and even a deeper rapture is known by young parents as they bend together over the crib where lies their first-born.

Yet even these joys can so quickly fade, for they are incomplete. At the center of the heart, even in these moments of high ecstasy, there is some strange stab of uncertainty and fear. There is a yet unfilled cavity, so deep one scarcely knows how to find it. Who has not known the sting of discovering that realization does not quite equal anticipation? Life for so many is like the tourist who is lured by the travel agent's pictures only to find that the photography has overplayed the colors and the reality is a vaguely disappointing and disturbing anticlimax. And the higher the culture is, and the more finely tuned and sensitized is the soul to the deep, vibrating chords within, the sharper and more painful will be the awareness of this incompleteness.

The Essentials of Joy

Why is our natural, earthly joy not complete? Because for joy to be complete it must blend within itself certain indispensable elements. And natural joy alone lacks these elements.

For one thing, joy can never be complete without peace. There must be inner tranquillity — not sterility and stagnation, but an alert, wide-awake, deep calm. There must be an inner unity and harmony. There must be freedom from those inner spiritual conflicts which rend and tear the soul.

Then, if joy is to be complete it must be merged with love. One might say that joy is the glow of love. No one can be truly happy who does not love and is not loved. It must be a love that is self-giving as well as self-satisfying. To be transparently glorious and free from any smudge of mere animalism this love must be to persons as persons. It must be to God supremely, and then to one's

fellows. Love with its flame of joy cannot be in self alone, but in God and in men. It thrives in communication, and dies in isolation. Selfish joy is short-circuited. When joy begins to feed on self — on one's own good times, achievements, possessions, one's own schemes and plans and interests — it becomes a shriveled, sordid, ugly thing. It cannot be complete.

Yet another facet of complete joy is assurance. Joy does not mingle well with paralyzing fear. There must be certainty and confidence. No man can have perfect joy who is not sure of the well-being of his own soul. He must not be groping in confusion and darkness. He must be sure of God and of heaven. He must be absolutely persuaded that for the child of God the ultimate outcome of both life and death is good. Joy withers when there is a choking, stifling sense of insecurity.

Again, if joy is to be complete it must spring out of what we might call a sense of cosmic relevance. The soul of man, while not infinite, is immensely vast. It is only tantalized by the rattling of worthless pebbles and earthly baubles. This is demonstrated by the fact that moderns in the world's richest country, drenched with abundance, and spending billions on stimulants and thrills, can still be dubbed "joyless Americans." Man searches for challenges and tasks sufficiently magnificent to fill the great hollowness of his soul. But he will find sufficient reach and stretch only as he becomes elevated by the Creator into redemptive copartnership. All men need to be related to something worthwhile, some great cause; they need to belong. But the soul fairly bursts with the joy of meaning and relevance when it finds God, and allows God to lift it up into His own infinite, universal plan, where it experiences optimum fulfillment in a place of eternal and universal significance. No man can honestly say, "I am serving God," and yet be totally bereft of joy.

Finally, joy to be complete must have a spiritual source. That is to say, there must be within the heart a power to transcend the ebb and flow of earthly fortune. Joy must flow from the inside out, not from the outside in. The world is constantly begging, "Give me a light." But the right kind of joy does not need to be going from thrill to thrill to be lit; its source of ignition is perpetually within.

If joy depends on the presence of the crowd, what becomes of joy when the crowd is gone and one is alone? If joy depends on music that stirs the blood and gets in the feet, what becomes of joy when the music is silenced and one is quiet? If joy has its source in work that is liked, where is joy when illness or old age requires that work be laid down? If joy's only spring is the friskiness of healthy animal spirits, of youth and abounding vitality, where does joy go when health has flown? If joy depends on domestic serenity and prosperity, where is joy when adversity snaps at our heels? Or yet more solemn — when death leaves an empty chair? If joy lives by perpetual sunshine, then how does it fare in the shadow? If joy is found only by running away from life's duties and escaping life's unpleasant realities, then where is joy when the old duties and unpleasant realities are replaced by new ones? If joy can be had only in an unbroken picnic, what hope is there for the man who discovers that even the Christian life is not an unbroken picnic? If joy depends on the hypodermic needle of new adventure and exotic excitement, with its fun and gaiety, then how can joy be found when the needle of novelty is finally blunted and bent, and every new attempt only adds to the boredom of life's surfeit?

Joy, to be complete, must have a deeper source and basis than any of these happenings on which the hope of multitudes so pathetically hinges for happiness.

The Secret Formula

But complete joy — no less — is exactly what Jesus promised. His presence kindles the glow of a warm inner gladness. His spiritual joy sanctifies and perfects our natural joys. For it has all that it needs to be perfect and complete.

His joy has peace: "My peace I give unto you." His joy has love: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love." And there is assurance: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Through the power of prayer there is cosmic relevance: "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Finally it transcends earthly fortune: "Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

Nor did any man! Jesus did see them again, as He promised; and the Holy Spirit did come upon them, as He promised. From that moment their joy was indestructible. Men took from them their goods but could not take from them their joy — because their goods were no longer its source. Men took from them their liberties, but could not banish their joy — because their joy was not in their liberties.

Listen to the symphony of gladness singing through The Acts: "Gladly received his word" — "Did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" — "walking, and leaping, and praising God" — "Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" "Saw his face as it had been the face of an angel" — "and there was great joy in that city" — "and he went on his way rejoicing" — "And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost" — "And at midnight [their feet fast in the stocks, in the inner prison] Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God."

The early Christians were not "sad sacks." The world stands amazed and puzzled in the presence of such radiance, radiance not just in happy circumstances but in adversity and calamity. The world is like the magicians of Pharaoh, who could ape Moses so far, then stood baffled and abashed, and confessed, "This is the finger of God." There is no argument against the Christian's joy, for it has no human explanation. It is the strong bow that wings the arrow of the Christian's words into the sinner's heart.

The world has its fun and frivolity, but not fadeless joy. The secret formula of peace, love, assurance, significance, and transcendence has not been found. But the Christian is in on the secret. He has found it in Jesus.

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CHAPTER THREE

Joy Is Your Right!

May the Christian expect to have joy all the time? We have often said, "No," in order to help the young Christians who tend to feed on excitement and overemphasize emotion. But our position has not been scriptural and it is high time it was corrected.

An Unrationed Supply

Joy, according to Rom. 14:17, is one of the three essentials of the kingdom of God: "Righteousness, peace, and joy." Should we always be righteous? Should we always have peace? If so, then why not joy?

But the balance of that sentence about the Kingdom must not be forgotten: "In the Holy Ghost." The Holy Spirit is the Guarantor of righteousness and peace, and also joy. This lifts joy into the realm of supernatural grace, and emancipates it from total dependence upon mere animal spirits or purely natural factors.

And this reminds us that joy, according to Gal. 5:22, is a "fruit of the Spirit." The order is, "love, joy, peace . . ." Again we ask: When is it acceptable to be without "love"? Or "peace"? Then why make a special exception of "joy," and imply that the Spirit always produces His fruit of love and peace, but joy only part of the time?

We must conclude that the exception of joy as the normal privilege of the Christian is not scriptural. To the Philippians, Paul writes, "Rejoice in the Lord always." To the Thessalonians he says, "Rejoice evermore." And notice his references to joy in just one chapter of his Epistle to the Romans (chapter 5): "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory [rejoice] in tribulations also. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." Joy in hope, joy in trouble, joy in God! We are able to glory in tribulations simply because we joy in God (that's realization) and rejoice in hope (that's anticipation). And he who has God possesses an adequate basis for happiness forever. "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11).

In view of the sharp and unmistakable clarity of God's Word, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that joylessness is a symptom of spiritual sickness. That is jolting, to be sure. But does not joylessness imply unbelief and ingratitude? The man without joy must be without faith and he must be without gratitude. But such spiritual poverty is not just unfortunate; it is wrong.

Nehemiah expressed a basic principle, as psychologically sound as Biblically true, when he said to the Israelites, ". . . the joy of the Lord is your strength." Not the joy of the natural man, but the joy

of the Lord. It is Satan who conspires to alienate us from the Lord and rob us of His joy, thus making us weak. And he has no more fruitful method than the persuasion that the Christian who wants to be joyful all the time is deluded and in danger of fanaticism. No, the Christian who wants perpetual joy is normal, and squarely within his rights as a child of God.

There are perils, to be sure, in this affirmation of joy, but let us not cast away our heritage in order to avoid the perils. Keep joy in its proper place and the perils will take care of themselves. In the kingdom of God "peace and joy" come after righteousness, and never apart from it. In the fruit of the Spirit "joy and peace" come after love, and never apart from it. Let us beware then of ever seeking joy in detachment from either righteousness or love. The man who obeys, who walks in all the light God gives him, who avoids all known sin with a mighty hatred and holy fear, and who loves God with all of his heart and his neighbor as himself — and who proves it by believing God and seeking his neighbor — can claim his share of joy with perfect safety. But such a man won't have to try too hard to claim it; it will be hanging around him so close that one good "Praise the Lord!" will start his soul vibrating to the beat of angel wings.

Unquenched by Tears

When it is contended that joy is the Christian's right at all times, someone is sure to exclaim, "But didn't Peter say that 'for a season, if need be' we might be 'in heaviness through manifold temptations'?" Yes, and he meant every word of it. What is more, Paul said he had "great heaviness and continual sorrow" in his heart over his fellow Israelites. Here we have (1) heaviness because of trials and (2) heaviness because of the need of others. To these we may add (3) depression due to physical weariness or illness and (4) depression due to problems and perplexities related to our work.

Then how can anyone be so rash as to claim perpetual joy? And is not the assertion that joy is always the Christian's right decisively disproved?

No, simply because scriptural joy may be infused by the Holy Spirit even into a heavy heart. This is totally supernatural. It is a divine bonus from our loving Heavenly Father, who is the God of all comfort. It is that sweet inner voice that says, "I am with you, right now, in the midst of your tears and sorrow." Then, though the grief may be no less genuine, a holy elation seems superimposed over it, which leaves the soul trembling with wonder and awe.

Rebellion and unbelief can block the ministry of the Spirit in such an hour. But when joy is thus totally quenched it is not because the divine resources failed, but because the child of God did not lean hard on Jesus in love and trust.

The Buoyant Apostle

Are we promising too much? Let us take a quick look at the Scriptures to see if the compatibility of joy and heaviness is supportable there, and then see if it is workable in real life.

When Paul said he had "continual sorrow" in his heart, did he mean that all joy was crushed? Could he not have a constant burden for the salvation of his people, yet still "rejoice in hope" (Rom.

5:2), "joy in God" (5:11), "thank God through Jesus Christ" for deliverance from carnal wretchedness (7:25), testify with a shout that over all the perils and sufferings of the way he was "more than conqueror through him that loved us" (8:37), be sure that he would come to Rome "in the fulness of the blessing," and solicit their prayers that he might come to them "with joy by the word of God" (15:29, 32)? Did he not possess the Kingdom about which he wrote, with its joy as well as with its peace and righteousness? And over against the "continual" of Rom. 9:2 is the "always" of Phil. 1:4: "Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy." Constant burden, constant joy — both true, but in different relationships: burden for the lost, joy for the saved.

Paul was not a Pollyanna optimist, but a sober realist. He knew suffering as few men have known it. He could say, "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place" (I Cor. 4:11). On him rested "the care of all the churches." Yet the dominant tone of his life, as revealed consistently in The Acts and in his Epistles, was not sorrow but joy. At times his joy might be depressed, but never quenched. It rose in midnight song from the Philippian jail. When God denied him healing but promised more grace he exulted, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (II Cor. 12:9). And even when he knew by the Holy Spirit that "bonds and afflictions" awaited him, he was able to testify: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

No man better exemplified Christian joyfulness in spite of circumstances than did Paul, or better demonstrate that joyfulness was the norm, not just the occasional luxury. And no one can read his Epistles and doubt that he included joyfulness as an integral element of his "gospel of the grace of God." How typical was his prayer for the Colossians, not that they might be strengthened "unto all patience and longsuffering" with stolidness, but "with joyfulness" (Col. 1: 9-11)!

And if we turn from Paul to Peter we shall discover the same glorious privilege and high standard. We miss the point if we read his "heaviness through manifold temptations" and stop there. That is not the last word. Let us continue the sentence and we shall soon come to the words: "Whom [Jesus Christ] having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (I Pet. 1:8). When? After the "heaviness" is passed? No, now.

The Divine Dimension

But does this work today? Let the Chinese Christian answer who was chided by his brother, "Look at you! You are a Christian, but you are just as poor as ever!" — and who replied, "Before I became a Christian I was miserable on the outside and inside both. Now I am miserable on the outside but happy on the inside." Or let Uncle John Vassar reply, who in the fearful suffering of the disease which took his life was heard to whisper, "Dear Lord, how much better this than sin!"

Some years ago my wife and I were called to go at once to the home of one of our church members. We found a grief-stricken family. Just a few minutes before, the wife, while starting breakfast, had heard a dull thud upstairs. Running up, she found her husband on the floor, dead. Her first request when we arrived was for prayer. We knelt by the bed, on which the family had tenderly

placed the body, and with much halting and stumbling, I fear, sought to lead them into the presence of the God of all comfort. When I finished the wife began to pray. Of course the tears flowed. But as she looked heavenward she exclaimed, "O Jesus, I thank Thee for the joy Thou dost put within my heart this moment." Unnatural? Altogether so! — it was supernatural. But ours is a supernatural religion; we should therefore expect to have supernatural grace for natural sorrows.

There may at times be temporary blackouts. Not always does the Holy Spirit buoy the human spirit so quickly and dramatically. But if not grieved and quenched, He will reach through in His own way. Different was the experience of Chrystell Wordsworth, whose husband, Earl, died with his head in her lap, after a ten-minute struggle with his heart. So suddenly did eighteen wonderful years of companionship together come to an end. She enfolded the three older children in her arms and they sobbed together. But let her tell of the next few days in her own words:

"I had a feeling like someone had taken a large knife and sliced me in half. Lopsided and inadequate I stood, a half a being. The next few days I wandered through as in a great fog, doing the things that were necessary.

"Early in the morning the day of the funeral as I read my Bible and prayed, I asked God for strength to carry on through this day. I was wrapped in grief and dread of this day in which we were to lay away the mortal body of the one I loved so dearly.

"Later that morning came into my mind the words, 'Until then my heart will go on singing.' I cried, 'O God, how can it sing?' Came the answer —

[Here the writer quotes, with permission from Hamblen Music Co., a copyrighted verse and chorus from the Stuart Hamblen song in which the above phrase is found. Therefore, this verse and chorus are omitted. — DVM]

"This song rang through my mind over and over all morning. Finally the immediate family were ready and in the funeral car, waiting to be driven to the church. I told Dad that a song had been going through my mind all morning and he said, 'Sing it for us.' As I began to give forth what God had given me, the strength for the day was poured into my heart and soul. Then the children and Mom and Dad joined in and we sang that first verse and chorus again as the family car made its slow way those few blocks to the church." * [See Endnote]

Can these brief glimpses into the Word and into life help us sketch the main points' about joy and sorrow? It is apparent by this time, surely, that when we talk about constant joy as the norm we do not mean ecstasy. We mean a treasure far deeper and more precious than that: rather a sweet calm sense of well-being because of God's presence. It is clear too that even this may be for the moment obscured, for the Christian is very much a human being, whose emotions may be drained, and who may be stunned by grief and shock into what seems to be complete deadness of feeling. This is the human dimension. But to suppose that he must be left in that dimension as a helpless victim is to reduce Christian joy to a purely psychosomatic phenomenon, subject to the vagaries of physical health and emotions. It is at this precise point that the Holy Spirit is pleased to reveal Jesus, and

impart a strength to the spirit which transcends the natural, and which discloses the divine dimension of Christian joy. In the words of Iris Cathell:

There comes a time
When every goal
And every vision
And every star
And every reason
To go on will fail.

There comes a time
When every ideal
And every promise
And every thought
And every friend
Are gone, and naught is real.

There comes a time
When you're alone,
And every door
And every step
And every way
Are closed or stay unknown.

Then is the time
When God comes,
And every glory
And every love
And every day
Reveal Him and His way.

The Christian's Part

But while such an infusion of joy is entirely supernatural, there are ways the Christian can prepare his soul in advance for such an experience. The proper use of these simple ways will make it easier for the Spirit to "get through"; it is just as true that their neglect will make it difficult — even at times frustrate the Spirit altogether. If we have not built ourselves up on our most holy faith (Jude 20-21), we will find that in the first overpowering dizziness of some staggering blow Satan will add confusion and doubt to our heaviness, thereby totally quenching our joy and turning great potential victory into ignominious defeat. When heaviness is thus turned into a rout, and in our despair we "cast away our confidence" and abandon faith, there will follow spiritual darkness. In that case (to go back to Peter) "the trial of our faith" will not "be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

How to have joy today and tomorrow — even though tomorrow's clouds are dense and black — is the subject of the next chapter. But this much should be said now: First there must be a background of intimate friendship with our Lord, in which there is absolute submission to his perfect will. Then when the illness or tragedy strikes we will not be betrayed by the sudden eruption of a dormant bitterness or rebellion. The spontaneous impulse of the soul will be to cling, not to claw.

Second, there must have been cultivated the spirit and habit of praise. This is clearly our responsibility. The Christian who is penurious with his thanksgiving will fall an easy victim to depression. Dr. L. T. Corlett has reminded us that those who suffer nervous or mental illnesses are less apt to experience acute depression and more apt to recover quickly and completely if before their illness they acquired the habit of praising God. The deliberate cultivation of the faith that abounds in optimistic praise and thanksgiving will make those mental illnesses which begin with negative withdrawal almost impossible. A negative attitude toward life cannot coexist with a positive affirmation of life in Christ.

The sum of the matter is simply that we must stop discounting joy in the Christian life as the norm, and begin telling rather how to appropriate joy in spite of physical illness and emotional depression. And let us begin by teaching young believers how to practice the art of praise. Then they will be strong enough to bear the trial, carry the burden, and turn the heaviness to good account. And they will have sufficient buoyancy to weather the violent storms of illness or sorrow which may buffet them.

It should never be forgotten that the repeated promises of joy voiced by Jesus in the Upper Room were not spoken on the Mount of Transfiguration, but in the shadow of the Cross.

JOY FOR DARK DAYS

By

Richard S. Taylor

CHAPTER FOUR

How to Have Joy Today "and" Tomorrow

The promise of our Lord in the Upper Room was not only that our joy might be full (complete), but lasting. His words were, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you." Too many who have possessed the joy of the Lord have lost it. They have had to voice David's prayer: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (Ps. 51: 12).

When Joy Fades Out

It may have been lost through open sin, as was David's. Or it may have been lost through sheer inexperience in the ways of God and the wiles of Satan. Unbelief, of course, will quench our joy; but how is the young Christian to know how to recognize the subtle insinuations of doubt, and avoid them? How can he gain skill in using the "shield of faith"?

The key is very simple. Jesus clearly associated not only complete but lasting joy with "these words." Many have lost their joy because they failed to heed with full understanding this amazing Upper Room discourse. Let us go back from verse 11 and see just exactly what He has been saying.

Joy Through Fruit Bearing

First, Jesus has been speaking to them words about fruit bearing. The fruit-bearing branch is always joyful; the fruitless branch is withered and miserable. And it will soon be severed, for we read: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." It is fruit or else!

The "fruit" is sometimes interpreted as religious labor and soul winning, but this is probably not correct. If thus understood, the Master is made to say that the branch must develop other branches. No, branches in Christ are multiplied, not by either planting or sprouting, but by grafting. This is not a discussion about increasing the number of branches. It is rather godly character, which is the end and aim of life in the Son. If the Holy Spirit is the life in the Vine, then this life will produce His fruit: "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

The relevance of this to lasting joy is at once clear. It can be maintained only in conjunction with other forms of fruit. There can be no joy without love. There can be no lasting joy without long-suffering. If temperance is rejected, joy will vanish. If we are unfaithful (without "faith"), we will also be unhappy. Joy therefore must not be sought on its own. Rather we must cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in its entirety. Then joy will be found nestling in the cluster.

But lasting joy through fruit bearing is dependent also on submission to the cleansing of the Husbandman. Jesus not only said that the fruitless branch would be pruned but the fruitful branch would be pruned. Here are His words: ". . . and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth, that it

may bring forth more fruit." This doesn't say some branches, but every. The purging is not optional with the branch. It is definitely the Husbandman's prerogative and procedure. Here then we have another divine ultimatum. Just as it is bear fruit "or else," so is it be purged "or else."

Could it be that multitudes have lost their joy by balking at the purging?

Again, fruit is not the product of striving but abiding. The branch "cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." But the branch that is purged and abides will inevitably bear fruit. It is life, not labor, which makes us fruitful. Strain and self-effort will introduce a mechanical and artificial humanism into our religion, and our joy will be choked by the tension of our multiplied efforts. "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" Paul asks (Gal. 3:3). Having been made alive in Christ Jesus, are we now to be made fruitful by our own works? There is but one work for which we are responsible: abiding. There is rest, not stress, for the Christian who sees clearly that he is not the Husbandman — who digs and prunes and plants and labors. He is not the Vine, who imparts life and nourishment and power. He is the branch, who does nothing but abide.

But lest anyone be deluded into thinking that abiding is a purely passive and even selfish inactivity, we must remember that Jesus shows its practical nature by saying: "Continue ye in my love." The branch that abides is the branch that continues in His love. And as to the down-to-earth, day-by-day secret of this continuing He leaves us in no doubt whatsoever. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." What is Christ's supreme commandment? "That ye love one another, as I have loved you. . . . These things I command you, that ye love one another." Love, then, is the guardian of joy. Again we are brought back to the scriptural order: "Love, joy, peace . . ." Joy is the fellow of love, and at the same time the follower of love. Self-centered people can never be truly joyful. Some Christians have lost their joy because they have allowed life to contract instead of expand. When life contracts around self as the center, it becomes increasingly gloomy and cheerless.

Joy in the Spirit

Jesus is not only speaking to them words about fruit bearing, but about the Holy Spirit. This begins in 14:15: "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever."

He assures them, "I will not leave you comfortless" — or orphans. I will not leave you on your own, He is promising. The Amplified Version attempts to extract the intense pathos of the word by adding the adjectives: "desolate, bereaved, forlorn, helpless." Such would be the disciples without the Holy Spirit. But in this dispensation there are no true disciples without Him, and there need be none without His fullness.

The joyous, triumphant march of The Acts was made possible by the indwelling fullness of the Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. He is the Paraclete — the Strengtheners and Helper. He is the Revealer of Jesus, the Son, and the will of the Father. As Dr. Wiley has said, "He is not the representative of an absentee Savior, but our Lord's ever-present other self." Through Him as

Sanctifier, Teacher, and Guide men are purified from sin; they are emancipated from bondage to self into the progressive fulfillment of all their ransomed powers; they are molded, fashioned, animated, impelled, sustained; they do not drift aimlessly or grope blindly, but live meaningfully and purposefully; they are illuminated in mind and warmed in heart; their infirmities are helped, even at times turned into assets; they are buoyant and radiant. Only the Spirit-filled can say: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Only the Spirit-filled can speak to themselves in "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody" in their hearts to the Lord. They do not need to be constantly entertained, for they have the gladness of God within. And the Spirit-filled are the branches which have been purged, which are abiding, which are drawing heavily on the life of the Vine, and who bear much fruit — fruit unmingled with the works of the flesh.

It is to be feared that many new converts have lost their initial joy because they were not instructed in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Or, if instructed, they failed to avail themselves of that ministry. Unless the believer goes on to the baptism with the Spirit, then through the Word and prayer learns to walk in the Spirit, and partake daily of the transforming and overcoming power of the Spirit, his joy will not last.

Joy Through Looking

Finally, Jesus has been speaking to them words about heaven. "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. . . ." Faith in God demands faith in Jesus; faith in Jesus imparts hope of heaven. He is our Surety for immortality.

Of course we already know that the grave is not our "final resting place," but we sometimes fail to see that neither is heaven. The phrase is objectionable because it smacks of the end, rather than the beginning, which heaven is. Heaven is our destiny, not our epilogue. It is our home. It is not a "better land than this"; it is our native land — if we have been born into the new race. We can never be completely at home in this world when once we have been to Calvary, and have learned to walk in the way of the cross. We are forever disenchanted with earth. And the joy of the Lord, which is our strength, is kept vibrant as long as we live with the pull of heaven tugging at our hearts. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick" — but the hope of the Christian increases in excitement as He knows that the passing days bring him not farther away from, but closer to, his home.

Coleridge is reported as saying: "This world is like a highway on which are two groups of people, some glad and some sad, because some are going home and others into exile." In like vein is the account of the young woman who said to an elderly friend of her father: "Why is it that you are so happy, while my father is fretful and peevish?" Quietly the old saint replied: "Maybe it is because he is leaving his treasure; I am going to mine.

I think maybe we have a clue here to the joylessness of many professing Christians. They have revived their citizenship in this world, and have decided to settle down. And since this world's specialty is things, they have gone all out to accumulate things, as many as possible. And things have been tyrannizing and domineering them, until their souls are empty and breathless. They have forgotten their goal. They are not migrating but nesting.

Maybe others, while apparently not captivated by Vanity Fair, are troubled and tossed by life's afflictions. But if afflictions destroy our joy, maybe it is because our joy is too much tied to earthly circumstances. So the word "apparently" is necessary. He who pities himself because of his poverty or ill health or misfortune may be a materialist after all. He may not yet be weaned from earthly values. He too, as well as the busy earthling surrounded by his hoard of things, is looking down instead of up. He is not reaching forth unto those things which are before, but out toward those things which surround him.

Peter, we remember, fully acknowledges the "heaviness through manifold temptations." But he also shows how to transcend the heaviness in the two words: "yet believing." And Paul concurs: "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." What is believing, if not looking in the right direction? If we look at the waves we will begin to sink as did Peter. If we look at our afflictions we will be submerged by them. But listen again to Paul: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." Faith believes this, therefore looks accordingly. Faith chooses to rejoice, regardless of temporary feelings or appearances, because faith knows that always there is more to rejoice about than to be glum about. Faith looks backward at Calvary and forward to the crown. This constant backward-forward vision is explained by the constant upward vision, wherein we keep looking "unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

The Christian who thus keeps abiding, bearing, and looking, in obedience to "these words" and in the power of the Holy Spirit, will never lack for joy — joy unsubmergible, undiscourageable, and indestructible.

JOY FOR DARK DAYS

By

Richard S. Taylor

CHAPTER FIVE

Joy — a Key Link in Our Chain of Evangelism

Every Christian ought to be joyous, for only then will he be an attractive, full-color advertisement for his wonderful Lord.

Joy is the "punch line" in Christian salesmanship. It provides the eye appeal in the Christian's display counter of goods. Unless joy is prominent, no one is apt to buy.

The joyless Christian is spiritually sterile, not infectious. No matter how he exposes people, they will not "catch" religion from him. The world is immune to joyless Christianity.

Helen, a young Jewish woman in an eastern city, carried a hungry heart for years. Nevertheless she turned a deaf ear to the professional vendors of religion who occasionally knocked on her door because, when she searched their faces, she found no true happiness written there. But one day some Spirit-filled Christians came. When she looked intently into their faces she instantly sensed something different. Inviting them in, she listened, and was soon a happy Christian herself.

Though their words were important, it was not their words that won Helen; it was their joy. Her religion had words too; she and her people could talk at great length and with much energy. But she wanted reality. She wanted God in such a way that in her heart would be a central core of joy and peace. She found joy in Jesus simply because she discovered some Christians who displayed what she was longing for.

In pre-Communist days, Chang Po-Ling was perhaps China's greatest educator. For years he was a Confucian atheist. Gradually he became so oppressed by the awful prevalence of evil and suffering, and by the seemingly insurmountable problems of China, that he was thoroughly despondent and pessimistic. Finally he opened his heart to one of the Christian professors at his great university, C. H. Robertson. "I notice," he confessed, "that you Christians seem to have some hidden source of joy and peace and power. What is the secret?" The outcome of that and subsequent conferences was a glorious and radical conversion to Christ. From that moment he was a radiant, fearless witness and an uncompromising Christian leader.

But Chang Po-Ling was not won by the theological arguments of the Christians. He was not won by their splendid morality — he could match that himself. He was not won by their dedication to their work, for he was just as dedicated to China's youth as they were. But he had discovered that they had theology and morality and dedication — plus. That plus was joy. And it was the plus of joy that won this great Chinese soul. He sensed that a religion which could give its disciples the calm radiance of true inner joy even in the midst of chaos must be divine. If Jesus Christ could do that for them, he wanted Jesus to do it for him. And He did.

Once again we need to be reminded that "the joy of the Lord is your strength." For personal victory, yes, but for soul winning too. Let us therefore refuse to allow Satan to rob us of our joy and thereby blunt the "cutting edge of our witness. God can use our learning and eloquence, to be sure; He can use our labors and sacrifices; He can use our money and our talents: but it may be that sometimes He can use our simple joyousness to tip the scale in favor of victory when all else fails. Let us not deprive our Lord of one of His essential tools for the building of His kingdom. Let us not foredoom our evangelism by pouring into it everything but joy. Let us rather search and find the secret of joy so deep and steadfast that it cannot help but glow in our faces and shine through our lives. Then men will say, "Where is this fountain of life which you have found?"

Endnote

* The late Dr. B. V. Seals.