

December 10, 2016 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Psalm 146:5-10 Tis the Season of Joy by Andy McDonald

I can almost guarantee you'll get one. If not this year than I'm sure at least for some previous Christmas one has arrived in the mail at your house.

A Christmas card, but not just any Christmas card, but one with this one word emblazed across it. JOY!
From hand crafted, to cutesy, to making use of the traditional symbols of the season, to even the oxymoronic

Christmas is in so many ways the season of JOY!

This is rooted in the very first Christmas when the angel showed up on the hillside outside of Bethlehem, and announced "I bring you GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY!"

When we think of Christmas joy we think of the faces of children on Christmas morning.

How would you define JOY?

Here are just a few scriptures where we find the word.

Nehemiah 8:1 The Joy of the Lord is your strength

Psalm 19:8 The precepts of the Lord are right giving joy to the heart
David cries out in Psalm 51:8 for God to "Restore to me the joy of your salvation

Psalm 126:3 reminds us "The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy.

Jesus illustrated finding God's kingdom being like the joy of finding treasure hidden in a field.

Jesus after sharing with his disciples the metaphor of his being the true vine and we are the branches, and reminding them, "Apart from me you can do nothing." "I have loved you even as the Father has

loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey me, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father and remain in his love. I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow.”

Paul says that part of the fruit of the Spirit is Joy! Gal 5:12

Jesus was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the JOY he knew would be his afterward. Hebrews 12:2

James advises us to consider trials joy.

Peter is clear that trusting Jesus is a joy unspeakable, inexpressible, and full of glory.

What is this thing called JOY?

If we use it as a noun, then the dictionary defines it as a feeling of great pleasure and happiness”

Synonyms would be words like: delight, great pleasure, joyfulness, jubilation, triumph, exultation, rejoicing, happiness, gladness, glee, exhilaration, exuberance, elation, euphoria, bliss, ecstasy, rapture.

It seems clear, from just these synonyms of JOY, that to enter joy demands vulnerability, to show up and let ourselves be seen.

This summer the evening our daughter-in-law was about to go to the hospital to give birth to our second grandchild, we went out to dinner. Our two year old grandson who was about to become the big brother was full of energy and waiting for the food to arrive was torturous, so I took him outside for a walk. Once when he stopped I began to whistle, and it was like my whistling had flipped a switch in him to joyful abandon and he began to “dance!”

There was no holding back. In that two year old’s mind he was enough. He was sure to be himself. He was letting go. There was no sense of shyness, or reserve. No worry that he might look silly or stupid or whatever. There was just delight in the dance.

Sometimes in our scarcity culture that teaches us that we aren't safe, we can't be certain, we can't be sure enough feeling joy can sometimes also feel like a set up.

Brene' Brown writes: "We wake up in the morning and think, Work is going well. *Everyone in the family is healthy. No major crisis are happening. The house is still standing. I'm working out and feeling good. Oh no! This is bad. This is really bad. Disaster must be lurking right around the corner.*

"We get promoted and our first thought is *Too good to be true. What's the catch?* We find out we're pregnant, and we think, *our daughter is healthy and happy, so something really bad is going to happen with this baby. I just know it.* We're taking our first family vacation, but rather than being excited, we're making plans for the plane to go down or the ship to sink." (Daring Greatly p 118.)

For many of us when good things are happening, we feel vulnerable, because what will happen after this good thing passes. Or how will this be ruined in some way. We imagine everything from terrorist attacks to natural disasters to some deadly disease outbreak or a school shooting.

By holding our joy in check and imagining the worst we imagine that rehearsing and planning for disappointment means we can avoid vulnerability. None of us want to be caught off-guard and be blindsided or hurt so it's easier we believe, to practice being devastated. That's why even in moments of joy of standing over our child thinking how much we love them, in that very moment we may also imagine something terrible happening to them, rehearsing the possible hurt or loss we imagine can lessen the possible coming pain.

So as strange as it sounds we may resist giving into joy because we see it as setting ourselves up for disappointment or disaster. We ask ourselves dumb numbing questions like, "Who am I to be joyful?"

In Jesus' teaching recorded in John 15 we will hear the same secret to embracing joy as is found in our scripture from Psalm 146.

Joy is found through reliance on God.

That is really a pretty bold assumption.

Psalm 146:5 &6 says "Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever."

Creatures are happy when they rely on, put their trust in, have confidence in their creator, especially when that same creator God keeps faith forever.

As creatures we have been duped by the devil to spend way too much mental and social energy focused on our being faithful, our keeping faith, our having faith and that's a problem. Focus on our being perfect and getting our act all together, and looking to our accomplishments, putting our hope on our side of the equation will rob us of joy.

God is our help,
 God is where our hope is.
 God is the one who is forever faithful.

In a world where we so easily get hung up and have joy rung from us like water from a wash cloth, because we aren't enough, you and I can be confident, absolutely confident that God is enough.

The psalmist tells us what this God of ours does:
 The Lord executes justice for the oppressed
 The Lord gives food to the hungry
 The Lord sets the prisoners free
 The Lord opens the eyes of the blind
 The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down
 The Lord loves the righteous

The Lord watches over the strangers
The Lord upholds the orphan and the widow.

We sometimes wish the Lord would do more.
There are those who die in oppression without justice
There are some hungry who suffer starvation
Some like John the Baptist die in prison
Most blind stay blind
Some strangers aren't cared for but kicked out
And while God upholds orphans and widows they remain orphans and widows.

We don't understand this. Even Jesus on the cross cries out questioning "Why have you forsaken me?"

It is critical that we come to embrace the moments of joy in the ordinary moments of life. That we build joy resilience by being grateful for what we have. Be joyful and grateful and thrilled with what we have. And let joy be embraced that it becomes part of who we are so when bad things do happen we are stronger.

As believers even in tragedy we hold that the Lord will reign forever vs. 10 of Psalm 146. All the scarcity is enough in him. All the trials and tough days are hopeful in him. Our eternal joy is certain he will reign forever.

In a similar vein Jesus teaches us about finding joy through reliance on God

Jesus said "I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

When I was a kid my dad would cut two Christmas trees! These weren't blue spruce, or douglas fir, or even Scotch pines. We'd just go out on our property and cut a couple of pitiful pine trees. Virginia

pine or some scrub pine. One by itself would look sort of like one of those Charlie Brown Christmas trees. But dad would cut the limbs off of one tree and then drill holes in the other trunk and add branches to fill out the tree! No its not a perfect illustration but by the end of Christmas you could tell the “fake” branches from the others as they dried out and began to turn brown at a faster rate. The truly attached limbs stayed green longer.

The Joy of this season becomes ours as we embrace the reality that apart from Jesus we can do NOTHING, not a little, or not as much as we’d should, we can do nothing.

Joy is found in reliance on God.

Jesus said, “as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

Too often I’ve hears sermons, or read articles that have insinuated that when Jesus said “obeying my commands” he meant becoming a perfect law keeper. We are clear that’s not reality. Paul says there is no good thing in us. We are fallen and we can’t get up. But when Jesus restores us. When his life comes in to our life. The mark of the Christ follower is that we obey the command he called “My command. We love each other the way Jesus loves us.

Unconditionally—not based on similarity to us, not based on behavior, life choices, ethnicity, agreement, political affiliation, or sexual orientation. We love unconditionally.

We love Sacrificially—we love in ways that cost us something.

We love inconveniently not just when it feels good or looks good or doesn't interrupt our agendas.

We love generously—no holding back we will be patient and kind, and keep no record of wrongs and always protect, always trust, always hope always persevere.

And we will do this because we will put no confidence in us but all our confidence in God. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing. But in loving others Christ's Joy will fill us up and our joy will overflow because we rely on God. 'Tis the season of JOY!



What was your favorite Christmas card you ever received?

When you just hear the word “Joy” what comes to mind?

Why do we sometimes have moments of joy stolen by imagining bad things happening?

Where do you struggle to enjoy and embrace the joy?

What kinds of things steal your joy?

Psalm 146:5-10 encourage us to hope in the Lord. How does that make joy possible?

Joy in the Lord can be ours even in tragedy, how does that work?

Jesus joy becomes our joy and it is exercised in loving each other. How will you express love to someone this week?



Join the conversation at @FloridaHC #fhcTAKEAWAY
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