

The Joy of Christ

Before we start the discussion on “**Joy**” take a moment to complete the following two questions without relating them to your faith.

1. What has been the happiest moment of your life? _____

2. What has been the most joyful experience of your life? _____



Though we tend to use the two words “happiness” and “**joyful**” interchangeably there is a significant difference. Happiness is an outward expression. Whereas **joy** connects with meaning and purpose. A person pursues happiness but chooses **joy**. **Joy** is more a state of being than an emotion; a result of choice. From a religious perspective, **joy** is part of the experience of being a Christian. {<https://www.compassion.com/>}

In the Old Testament, **joy** is closely related to victory over one’s enemies. In the New Testament, **joy** is still used for victory but with the focus more on salvation and the presence of Christ. St. Paul expressed frequently the **joy** he had regarding the salvation of those he was writing to and prayed that they might be full of **joy**. One example is his statement, “*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.*” {Phil 4:4} In case his audience didn’t get it the first time, he said it twice ... **REJOICE!** To finish off his encouragement he wrote, “*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” {Phil 4:7} True **joy** is known when you are in a relationship with Jesus.

We see this idea in the parable of the Lost Sheep where Jesus said, “*I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*” {Luke 15:7} Let’s look at Blaise Pascal as an example and how the heavens and Pascal rejoiced when he found his way home. Although Pascal was a brilliant scientist, mathematician and philosopher, he struggled with questions of the soul, like so many of us do.

Ultimately, Pascal’s intellect couldn’t provide the answer ... but God did through scripture. On November 23, 1654, Pascal, then 31, was reading the 17th chapter of John’s gospel when he had a life-changing encounter with God. He quoted from John 17:25, “*O righteous Father, the world has not known You, but I have known You.*” followed by, “**Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.**” He later sewed this piece of parchment into his coat where it was found after his death eight years later. {<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/thank-you-blaise-pascal>} Can’t you just imagine the **joy** in heaven?

In one of Jesus’ parables, Jesus said, “*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. ... Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ... I have said these things to you so that my **joy** may be in you, and that your **joy** may be complete.*” {John 15:1-11} What parent wouldn’t like to say, like the apostle John did, “*I have no greater **joy** than this, to hear that my children [family] are walking in the truth.*” {3 John 4}

One way that might help us stay focused on what is most important ... our relationship with Christ, might be the acronym **JOY**.

J Jesus first.

O Others second.

Y Yourself last.

As you go into this Christmas season, and for that matter every day, let **joy** be your focus while appreciating the happy moments along the way.



Reflective Questions:

1. Is “joy” a regular part of your life? _____
If yes, in what ways? _____
If not, what could you do to experience God’s joy more fully? _____

2. If one of your goals is to “*have no greater joy than this, to hear that my [family] are walking in the truth.*” What might you do this Christmas season to help make this happen? _____

3. Of the many gifts you’ve received at Christmas, which ones have meant to the most to you?
Why? _____

How might you incorporate gifts like these to those you love throughout the year? _____

