

Complete Joy

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Okay, so ...



My wife, Jamie, had cancer surgery Thursday. Cancer! Many of you personally know the bolt of fear that shoots through you when you hear that word connected to someone you love. So, thank you for all your prayers, because this seven-month cancer ordeal has been the darkest, most difficult and frightening thing my family and I have ever walked through.

As I was pondering and praying about what to share, “Joy” seemed like the last thing I’d want to talk about. And then it seemed clear that that’s why I *should* talk about it. Yuck!

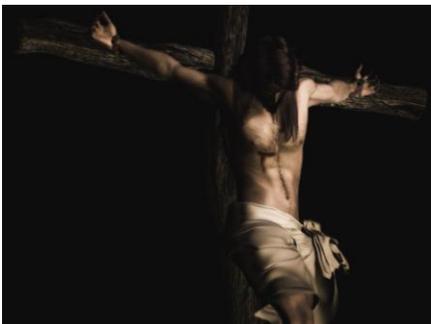
Don’t you just hate it when God does things like that?! *My wife had cancer surgery Thursday! Joy?! Seriously?!* And I sensed the Lord say, “Yeah, share seriously about joy ... *and* openly *and* honestly.”

Joy is not based on how good or easy or cancer-free life is. Joy isn’t like happiness. Happiness is fickle and fleeting and it comes from externals. Joy is this deep ... *something* ... that passes all understanding. Happiness just happens, but joy is something you have to choose. That’s preached a lot in sermons, isn’t it; you’ve heard it before: “Joy is something *you must choose*. You *choose* joy.”

Okay. I’m game ... but how in the world *do* I *choose* joy?!

I know I’m *supposed* to choose joy when life is miserable, but if I don’t know how to choose it, if I can’t *figure out* how to choose it, if I have no idea where to even look for it, then, instead of feeling joy (*like a “good Christian” should*) I still feel miserable and now *guilty* on top of it!

When life stinks, when life is truly miserable, when we’re heartbroken and confused and feeling all alone, and God seems so far away and unconcerned, just how *do* we *choose* joy?



In John 15:9-11, Jesus says ...

Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept 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. – *John 15:9b-11 NIV*

Look at that word “complete”. What’s it mean?

What's it mean to have *His* joy in *me*, in *you*? What *is* Jesus' joy? How does it make my joy *Complete*? I think this is the key.

Was there ever a person more joyful than Jesus? No. He is the only One who ever truly had *complete*, comprehensive, all-encompassing joy. And yet, He lived the *unhappiest* life of any person who ever walked the face of this earth!

Think about it: What did Jesus have to be *happy* about?

- He knew he was going to die a horrific death.
- He was betrayed by some of his best friends.
- He was taunted and mocked and bullied by the very people who should have embraced him.



Do you think he *enjoyed* chasing his own people out of the temple, when he turned over the tables of the money-changers? Can you imagine how He must have felt? He's in the house of worship that He designed as a place for people to draw close to Him ... and He's chasing them out with a whip! I imagine after he stormed through that place, he went off by himself, and wept. Scripture isn't shy about Jesus' frustration and Jesus weeping.

But all that unhappiness, as bad as it is, can't compare to the big one. The most devastating unhappiness that assaulted Jesus, day after day, moment by moment, more than anything else, was seeing the pain and despair and suffering in the people he loved most deeply.

And here's the kicker: he loved *everyone* "most deeply". He could see into the depths of their brokenness, and feel the anguish of their sin, to a degree that even *they* weren't aware of.

Every one of us is broken. We try to hide our hurts, look like things are better than they really are. And we can fool others. We can even fool ourselves. But you can't fool Jesus. He saw everything! Every fear, every worry, every shame, everything that everyone tries to hide.

And because he was perfect love, He perfectly felt everyone's pain. *And* he was the most joyful person to ever walk the face of the earth. Really?! *HOW?!*



If you were here last month, you heard me tell a story about my 4-year-old son, Cash (after Johnny Cash – my wife won't acknowledge that ... but *I* do!).

We'd been working with Cash on staying in bed ... at night, and after some rough nights he did it! Stayed in bed *all* night. Next morning he jumps on my bed, wakes me up, looks right into my eyes, and says, "Daddy how'd I do?"

I said, “You did great! I love you no matter what, and I’m so proud. I’m so pleased.” And his face just lit up. It lit up with a joy that only comes from pleasing your father ... and it only comes to the degree that you know, in your heart, that He loves you even if-and-when you *don’t* please Him.

Joy is found in pleasing your Father. And the Father is pleased with faithfulness (*“cause everything else is poisonous*). And Faith is most fully expressed when life is unhappy

Let’s simplify it a bit:

- Joy is found in pleasing God
- God is pleased with faith
- Faith is expressed when life is unhappy

Jesus *never* missed an opportunity to please His Father with faithfulness in the midst of unhappiness. And Jesus had more unhappy situations than anyone!



Therefore, I propose that Jesus led the *most unhappy* life and was the *most joyful* person to ever walk this earth!

And if not for His unhappy situations and feelings, each offering a unique and independent opportunity to fully express his faith, His joy couldn’t have been complete!

Let’s read that passage again, and listen to what He’s saying ...

Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept 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. – *John 15:9b-11 NIV*

It’s all here! Our “joy” will be “complete” to the degree that we “remain [faithful]” (keeping His commands when we’d rather run or rebel), and “remain in [His] love”.

To “remain” means when life gets tough, we don’t revolt and we don’t run from His presence. But we keep his commands and remain in His love, and jump on His bed, and look into His eyes.

God’s love and God’s presence are synonymous. Look at Psalm 16:11:

You make known to me the path of life; **[and it’s not an easy path]** In your presence there is fullness of joy ...” – *Psalm 16:11a ESV*

Jesus had an unimaginable number of unique, unhappy opportunities to look into His father’s eyes and know that He pleased Him.

And he *never missed a single one!* And that made His joy as complete as joy could ever hope to get! And Jesus wants to help us experience that same joy with Him.

Deep joy comes when your path isn't easy, because that's when your faithfulness has the deepest, most profound significance and impact.

And the sense of God's presence and love is never stronger than when you know you're pleasing him in the midst of your pain.



My wife had cancer surgery Thursday. This seven-month ordeal has been the darkest, most difficult, and frightening thing my family and I have ever walked through.

And it's *because* of the cancer that my family and I can experience a level of joy that we couldn't have experienced *without* the cancer.

Through it all, we have not rebelled or run from His presence. We've tried to remain faithful. And we know we've pleased him. And we've *definitely* remained in His love.

Joy comes, in the midst of misery, when you remain faithful, and you look into God's eyes, and you know He's saying, "You did great! I love you no matter what, and I'm so proud. I'm so pleased."

The pain you're currently facing won't last forever. God *is* working. God *is* healing. And God will bring you through it. But in the meantime, how do you "*choose*" joy?

Truth is, ya don't! You *choose* to please the Father. You *choose* to remain in His presence. And you *choose* to remain in his love. You *choose* that, and joy just comes ... completely.