

The Gift of Joyfulness

Picture this: you're invited to a company BBQ on your own time, but everyone is expecting you to be there whether you like it or not. "Mandatory fun" isn't! When something that should be an exciting time of joy and celebration turns into a drudgery, you might be forced to slap on a smile and grit your teeth through it.

Is that how we view our service to Christ? Do we "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4) — if we have to?! Contrary to popular belief, Christians are actually fun people! We're not called to lives of stoicism and grumpiness, but we experience a daily celebratory freedom from the slavery of our sins! So, as we continue to consider God's good gifts, let's appreciate how he wants us to live a joy-filled life as his servants on earth!

Celebrate Life's Good Things

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'" (Luke 15:4-6)

The Big Idea: It pleases and glorifies God when we gratefully enjoy his blessings together.

As with so many of the good gifts we've considered already, joyful celebration is a timeless activity we practice now, while we wait to do it for all eternity! Just imagine a scene like the one John saw in Revelation 19, where multitudes shouted praise to God as they waited for the great wedding feast of the Lamb. Also, picture the angel's celebrations when lost souls return to the Lord (Luke 15:3-10). It's safe to say that we've never been to a party like the ones in heaven!

After all, God gives us laughter and meals shared with good company! We can *"eat and drink and find enjoyment ... from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment"* (Eccl. 2:24-25). But as with everything in life, we party sincerely, thoughtfully, and with plenty of self-control. Of course, we must *"fear God and keep his commandments"* (Eccl. 12:13), but also, *"be joyful and ... do good ... eat and drink and take pleasure ... this is God's gift to man"* (Eccl. 3:12-13).

The Big Question: How are you expressing your joy and enthusiasm to those around you?

Open Your Heart to Sing Praises

"And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." (Mark 14:26)

The Big Idea: Singing expresses what's inside us — what we believe, feel, and decide.

God's grace brings out grateful praise (Col. 3:16) as we sing with our *"spirit"* and our *"mind"* (1 Cor. 14:15).

Singing is a heavenly art we get to practice on earth (Rev. 5:9; 14:3; 15:3). It can make joyful worship a habit (Phil. 4:4). So God says, *"Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise"* (James 5:13). But our songs

also express our sorrow and help us find hope in the night, like Paul and Silas singing in prison (Acts 16:25), or Jesus before heading to Gethsemane (Mark 14:26).

Melody and harmony can lift or comfort us, but in Scripture, the purposes of singing come from the words. We learn them "by heart," and their messages become portable, guiding wisdom. When we sing — if we mean it — we take a stand for truths we believe in, like, "It is well with my soul." We make and renew commitments, like "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord." We can even discover deeply held longings as we sing of our hope, our need for mercy, and our desire for God's presence. But our songs also challenge, teach, and support one another.

It's great to hear one person teaching, but you know what's better? Singing "*together ... with one voice*" (Rom. 15:6). It's a uniting bond. And when we sing together, we need to hear each other and heed the teaching (Eph. 5:19).

The Big Question: How have psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs impacted your life?

Appreciate Your Unique Abilities

"For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them ..." (Romans 12:4-6).

The Big Idea: God manifests his wisdom and glory in the diversity he has filled his good world with.

We see it in every aspect of his creation, from the millions of strange and wonderful animal species to the breathtaking spectacles of the cosmos. But maybe no part of God's creation displays his creative range more than the abilities he has given humanity. His image bearers reflect his creativity, order, rationality, and love. From the Mona Lisa to the Empire State Building, from mapping the human genome to walking on the moon, our achievements come from our unique abilities.

And what a gracious God who gives us each something unique (1 Cor. 12:12-26)! Some people can brighten a day with a sentence, while others can explain the most complicated subject and make it understandable. Some people are passionate about feeding people, some love fixing cars, while others want to explore the world and climb every mountain. Our diverse abilities and interests allow humanity to rule over God's world as he created us to do. With our rich tapestry of gifts all woven together, we serve each other and reflect the way God has blessed each of us to his glory (1 Peter 4:10-11).

The Big Question: How often do you stop and appreciate the good that God fills the world with through the incredible range of gifts he gives us?

Conclusion

What a blessing to be called God's children! And when we gratefully acknowledge what God has done, it's easy to sing to him and serve him with sincerity and joy.