



Joy – 2023 Advent Devotional

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All together... deep breath... inhale... now exhale. Feel better? Maybe you are by yourself, with your family, or with your friends. Turn on some relaxing holiday music and sit near your Advent candles.

Light your **PINK** advent candle, the candle of JOY.

As you sit and breath, reflect on why you're taking time away from your busy schedule to refocus your mind.

How would you define **JOY**? What robs you of **JOY**? What does it look like to be **JOYFUL**?

PRAY

Lord,

Thank you for the opportunity to spend time with You. Help us block out the distractions we have created around the holiday season, and allow us to focus our minds and hearts on the truths of your Word. In this time, grant us hearts of gratitude for the many blessings that you have given us. Refresh our spirits as we read of your promises and gifts. Empower us through your Spirit as we celebrate your arrival and await your return. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Read God's Word

The Birth of Jesus

2 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ² (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. ⁴ And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁵ He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. ⁷ She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

The Shepherds and Angels

⁸ That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹ Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

Something to Consider.

JOY and happiness are two words that are many times considered synonymous. They have many similarities that drive us to believe they are the same. However, when we look deeper into the meaning of both words, we find that they are rather different.

Happiness is an emotion and outward expression of pleasure. It is something that is dependent on circumstances and is fleeting when those circumstances worsen. Happiness is focused on self and functions on the surface. Simple things can influence happiness such as favorite foods, fun experiences, material objects, time with family, and even Christmas gifts!

JOY is a lasting state of one's heart and mind influenced by a deep contentment. **JOY** can cause us to feel happiness. **However, JOY can be present when happiness is absent. JOY is not** dependent on circumstances but is a product of something much bigger than oneself. JOY is rooted in selflessness.

"Joy must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and Pleasure. Joy has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever... exchange it for all the pleasures in the world. But then Joy is never in our power and Pleasure(happiness) often is."

- C.S. Lewis

There is one example on Earth where I believe **JOY** and happiness are most distinguishable from each other: a mother during childbirth. When a woman has a baby, she physically goes through one of the hardest experiences she will ever encounter. However, when the baby arrives, a mother experiences pure **JOY**. The mother is handed her new baby, and for a moment, the pain, the exhaustion, and the worry all disappear. The physical circumstances that, in most cases, would rob her of her happiness are silenced by the **JOY** that comes from birthing her child. That **JOY** then overflows as an outward expression of happiness.

Through God's **LOVE**, He sent his son Jesus to Earth, born as a perfect baby that grew to be a perfect man. Jesus then died for our sins and gave us **HOPE**. Because of His **LOVE**, we receive **HOPE**, which produces in us indescribable **JOY** and **PEACE**.

Often, when we dilute our understanding of **JOY** and define it as we would happiness, it causes us to lose our **JOY**. We see the state of the world, the state of our finances, the state of our country, or even the state of our family, and we let these outside circumstances hijack our emotions. This then breeds resentment and bitterness, which do not coincide with **JOY**.

Not many people know the difficulty of maintaining **JOY** quite like empty nesters during the holidays. For 18+ years, they have been developing Christmas traditions with their kids and family that they cherish. Then suddenly their kids are grown, getting married, and developing their own family traditions. For the first time, it can feel like there is a competition for their kid's time. This is where they find the fork in the road, and they can choose one of two options.

Option 1: They can strive for happiness and make demands on the rest of the family to hold tightly to what used to be, and in doing so, they start World War 3. Sometimes, this option does successfully get everyone together, but the byproduct doesn't produce happiness, it produces bitterness.

Or

Option 2: They can lean on **JOY**. Accept life and its new boundaries; embrace the emotions of what used to be; but celebrate the **JOY** that Jesus came and died not only for them but also for their children. Then worship in thanksgiving and embrace the ever evolving growth of their family.

We look at this example to then ask this question: **What is robbing you of your JOY?**

Paul writes this to the Romans,

¹ Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. ² Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

³ We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. ⁴ And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. ⁵ And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

As believers in Jesus, we all stand in a place of undeserved privilege regardless of our surrounding circumstances. This truth should provide us with **JOY**. As for those things robbing you of **JOY**, how can you view them as, "trials that help you build endurance"? Then when you are finished with your self-analysis, **rejoice** in what God has done!

PRAY

Lord,

Thank you for your many promises. Thank you for the **JOY** that we can find in you regardless of our circumstances. Thank you for the **HOPE** that provides us **JOY** and **PEACE**. We ask that during this time of waiting and anticipation for your return, grant us strength and perseverance that is only possible through your Holy Spirit. Fill us with this gift of **JOY** and grant us opportunities to share it with those who have not yet heard about it.

Amen.

⁹ "Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,

your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,
¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

Matthew 6:9-13