

How to be happy/joyful in life

Headline: Eternal joy with God in heaven is what He wishes for us all. During our lifetime, unexpected experiences of joy can be indicators of the pleasure God derives from our pursuit of holiness. The fertile ground for a harvest of joyful experiences can come from service to others as well as cultivating meaningful relationships both in and outside the family.

Objective: Are the pleasant experiences of happiness and joy accurate indicators of the status of your faith journey? We must first contrast these two concepts. Joy is a disposition that is deeply rooted in us through God's provision of grace. Whereas happiness can sometimes be bought, examples of joy are unexpected friendships and undeserved acts of kindness. When we glorify God through actions such as service to others and the nurturing of meaningful relationships, we can open ourselves to the surprising appearance of joy in our lives.

Song Suggestion: 520 Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You verses 1 and 3

Bible and Catechism Readings:

Matthew 13: 20-21, 23

The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundredfold.

Catechism 1832

Joy is one of the twelve fruits of the Spirit that are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory.

Saint: St Thomas More embodied a holiness of piety and wisdom that opened him to the joyful surprises of grace which he experienced while serving the Church. His high regard for meaningful relationships was evidenced by the depth of his friendships as well as the fatherly love for his daughters, who he insisted would receive the equivalent of a male's education.

Vignette: Marcus had expected the Saturday food pantry to be another obligation, the sort of good deed that would leave him tired but satisfied that he had done his part. Then an older widower shared some interesting stories about how his garden and some stubborn squirrels had led to friendship with neighbors across the fence. By the end of the morning, Marcus was not thinking about the time he had given up. He was thinking about the joy-filled warmth that had quietly taken root in him. In serving, he had been served by another man's trust; in listening, he had received the gift of friendship. This resulted in a phone call to his estranged brother. The joy surprised him again, not loud or dramatic, but steady, like sunlight moving across a room. Marcus began to understand that God often hides His gifts inside the needs of others, and that meaningful relationships are not interruptions to holiness but one of the places where holiness begins to bear fruit.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

1. In the vignette, Marcus begins by seeing service as an obligation. What changed in him during his encounter with the widower, and how might that change reflect the movement from rocky ground to rich soil in Matthew 13?
2. Marcus discovers that in serving another person, he also receives the gift of trust and friendship. When have you experienced unexpected joy through helping someone else?
3. Why do you think meaningful relationships can be fertile ground for holiness? How do friendships or family relationships help us grow closer to God?
4. Marcus is moved to call his estranged brother after his experience at the food pantry. Is there a relationship in your life that God may be inviting you to nurture, repair, or strengthen?
5. How can experiences of joy help us recognize that we may have pleased God through acts of love, mercy, patience, or generosity?
6. What obstacles keep us from serving others or building deeper relationships, and how might prayer, grace, and the Holy Spirit help us overcome them?
7. This week, what concrete act of service or relationship-building could help you become richer soil for God's word and more open to the fruit of joy?

Resources: This topic was inspired by the insights of C.S. Lewis in the following books:

1. Surprised By Joy
2. Mere Christianity

Action Plan:

1. What are your personal takeaways of how a better understanding of joy will enhance your relationship with God?
2. Can you think of other ways besides sincere service and nurturance of relationships that might provide fertile ground for the joy which indicates God's pleasure?

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