

Joy Comes in the Morning

I love the early morning hours. The very early morning hours, when the late night owls have just gone to sleep and when most of the other morning people are not quite awake yet. ^{At} This time of the morning it is still dark outside, except on those rare occasions where it is a clear morning and the moon is brightly shining, but falling towards the horizon and the stars are shining their last few beams of light before the sun bursts onto the scene, lighting up the sky, signaling the start of a brand new day. It is a peaceful time. You can feel nature anticipating the day to come, waiting for the darkness that has been covering the Earth to be lifted and the light to shine again. There is a joy that comes with this new beginning, with the light shining again, pushing back the darkness. It is a joyous time. It is true, joy comes in the morning. And the morning always comes, but sometimes it feels like the night will never end. I'm beginning to feel that way now with the seasons changing and the sun setting so early, and in a few weeks when we observe daylight savings time and move into winter we will have even

longer nights filled with more darkness. We see and experience this every year in nature, but I wonder, how many of us have experienced this in life?

Life is hard. There is no if ands or buts about it. Life is hard, and life, like nature moves in seasons. As Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 says:

There is a time for everything,

and a season for every activity under the heavens:

² a time to be born and a time to die,

a time to plant and a time to uproot,

³ a time to kill and a time to heal,

a time to tear down and a time to build,

⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh,

a time to mourn and a time to dance,

⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,

a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,

⁶ a time to search and a time to give up,

- a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- 7 a time to tear and a time to mend,
- a time to be silent and a time to speak,
- 8 a time to love and a time to hate,
- a time for war and a time for peace.

All of these examples that are given in the verses above are opposites, but they go together,. Kill, heal, weep, laugh, ect. They, like the natural seasons complement each other, like Summer and Winter or Spring and Fall. Or, night and day, evening and morning, joy and suffering. Like peanut butter and jelly or twist ice cream with rainbow sprinkles, where you can't have one without the other; you can't have night without day or light without ^{or joy without suffering} darkness. And frankly, that really stinks!

Night, and the darkness that comes with night is scary. When it is dark it's hard to get your bearings, know where you are and see up ahead, or sometimes if it is really dark it is hard to see what is right in front of

your face. Darkness can get lonely, darkness can get cold, darkness can leave you feeling empty inside. Physical darkness can leave us feeling this way, but so can emotional or spiritual darkness. When we go through hard times it can feel as if a shadow is hanging over us. When we struggle with situations whether they be related to family, jobs, finances, whatever it may be that is a burden weighing on your heart we sometimes will enter a state of darkness. We may be surrounded by incredible people who are there helping us at every turn and can see God is working around us, we know there is light shining but we can't feel it, we can't sense it. We are stuck in the dark of night and don't feel like the light of morning will ever come. Has anyone ever been in such a place? I have, and am right now, it is not a pleasant place to be. I have been in the pit that is often referenced in the Old Testament. That place where even though you are not, you feel lost and alone, wanting to get out, wanting to shake the negative feelings, knowing you are in need of something, but unsure exactly what that something is, and even if you know, are unable to express it. Spending part of the

time crying out to God to deliver you from your situation and your anguish while on other days having barely enough energy to get out of bed, let alone cry out to a God that you sometimes wonder is even listening. When we are in these places, not just night, but deep, dark caves types of nights, how do we make it through? I believe, the only way to do this, and the only way I have been able to make it through is by finding and holding onto joy. Not happiness, but joy.

Webster defines joy as a feeling of great pleasure and happiness. With synonyms that include, glee, euphoria, exultation, bliss, rapture, and ecstasy. That to me ~~is~~^{is} a simplistic definition, one without a lot of meat.

I much prefer the definition of joy I heard given by Francis Anfusio on K-Love: he defines joy as: a deep sense of inner elation and satisfaction that comes from seeing your life from God's perspective and responding properly to the challenges and sufferings of life. Joy is a conviction not a feeling.

This definition came about in part from his reading of 2 Corinthians 12:10 which says, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

This is not the only verse from Paul which talks about rejoicing in our suffering; In Romans 5:3-5 Paul writes not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Here again we see opposites; when I am weak, I am strong, rejoicing in suffering. What do we do with that? It's hard stuff. I don't know about all of you, but I don't delight in my weaknesses, I often try to work on them, but I don't delight in them. I more often than not try to cover up my weaknesses, I don't feel that when I am weak I am strong. When I'm weak I'm just weak. The same thing goes for suffering. When I am suffering whether it be physically, emotionally, or spiritually, the last

thing I want to do is rejoice. I want to eat ice cream, chocolate, and carbs, sit by myself, and do nothing.

Did anyone catch what I just said, what pronoun was used? In every statement just made, the pronoun "I" was used. I said I don't delight in my weakness, I don't feel strong, I can't rejoice, or don't want to rejoice in my sufferings. All of those statements are true, but they are missing the point. I, you, we, can't do those things, but God living in us, transforming our hearts, He can do those things.

He can give us insight into our weaknesses, and show us that when we finally get to a place where we can surrender those weaknesses to Him, he can use them to grow us and shape us into the person He wants us to be, and He may even use our weaknesses to help another person.

We feel stronger when we release our weaknesses to mighty God, and seek His strength to help us conquer those weaknesses.

The same thing goes for rejoicing in suffering. As I stated before, life is hard. In my humanness I am unable to rejoice in the midst of my

sufferings, but again, God living inside of me can fill my heart with such joy that regardless of the situation, or of how dark the night becomes, God gives me the strength to rejoice in my suffering. I love how Francis Anfuso put it. Joy is a conviction not a feeling. Happiness is a feeling. Happiness is contingent on your circumstances, happiness comes and goes as quickly as the wind. Joy however, something that comes from God is rooted deep in our soul, it is a conviction, something that is not easily shaken, something that sets us apart, leaving people who don't have that deep seeded joy, scratching their head going, what is it that they have that allows them to act in that way? And how do I get it?

As we hold onto this joy, it helps us persevere through the dark, cold, lonely nights. However, the nights are less lonely now that we are holding onto God's hand as He leads us, finding Joy in Him and His promises even when the rest of our world seems to be crumbling around us. This perseverance, like the verse says then produces character, which ultimately produces hope. Hope that things will get

better, but that even if they don't, we can still have hope because we know that one day we will be in Heaven with our Lord.

Charles Spurgeon, a great minister, author, and theologian wrote, Even the joys of hope need to be mixed with the pains of experience... Think about it, I don't know about you, but I have learned the most about myself and the most about God during the dark times. It is during those times, the times when I come to the end of myself, and am not able to go on any longer that I finally acknowledge my weaknesses and inability to handle the situations on my own, and surrender to God, relying completely on him for all of my needs. It is during the dark times, that although I may not feel like God is near, if I take a second to be still I can see God's hand in every situation, even the little insignificant things. It is during the hard seasons in my life, and during this current hard season that I experience God in new and exciting ways, and gain even a better appreciation for how much He loves me and truly cares about every aspect of my life.

Psalms 90:10, 12-17

10 Our days may come to seventy years,

or eighty, if our strength endures;

yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,

for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

12 Teach us to number our days,

that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

13 Relent, LORD! How long will it be?

Have compassion on your servants.

14 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,

that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,

for as many years as we have seen trouble.

16 May your deeds be shown to your servants,

your splendor to their children.

17 May the favor[a] of the Lord our God rest on us;

establish the work of our hands for us—

yes, establish the work of our hands.

As I read the verses above, it came to me how fleeting our days on this earth are, and that makes living in joy all the more important. We do not want to lose a day to despair...when it is a day that should be used for the work God has called us to do while here. This is easier said than done. I have lost many days to despair that should have been used to show Christ's love to others and to work towards the calling God has placed on my life. It is easy to fall into despair that is why, during the difficult days it is important to understand and rest in God's unfailing love. That is what brings the joy. We could never be in despair if we could grasp just an ounce of understanding of God's great love for us, we would always be joyful knowing He has us in the palm of His hand ...no matter what is going on.

In regards to despair and joy, Charles Spurgeon said: *Weeping may endure for a night*; but nights are not forever. Even in the dreary winter the day star lights his lamp. It seems fit that in our nights the dews of grief should fall...*But joy cometh in the morning*. When the Sun of Righteousness comes, we wipe our eyes, and joy chases out intruding sorrow. Who would not be joyful that knows Jesus? The first beams of the morning brings us comfort when Jesus is the day dawn, and all believers know it to be so. Mourning only lasts to morning: when the night is gone the gloom shall vanish.

He made this comment as a commentary on Psalm 30 verse 5: the second half of this verse says: weeping may remain for a night, but joy comes in the morning. We all mourn, we all hurt, we all struggle, we all weep, it's a part of life. We weep during the night, when it is dark, when we are in despair and we feel like morning will never come. Joy does come in the morning, but I don't believe the morning always comes with the dawning of a new day. Sometimes we have to sit in the

dark of night for a long time, but just because we are sitting in the dark of night does not mean that we have to sit in the darkness. If we seek God, surrender everything to Him, and find that conviction of joy which comes with resting in His presence, we can be surrounded by light, God's light, of love, joy, and peace experiencing ^{the light of} morning in the midst of the darkest night. Waiting patiently for and trusting that eventually, a new day will dawn.

