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Joy. Everyone wants it. Everyone promises it. But can anyone deliver it? It might surprise you to know that joy is a big topic in the Bible. Simply put: God wants his children to be joy-filled. Just like a father wants his baby to laugh with glee, God longs for us to experience a deep-seated, deeply rooted joy.

The joy offered by God is different than the one promised at the car dealership or shopping mall. God is not interested in putting a temporary smile on your face. He wants to deposit a resilient hope in your heart. He has no interest in giving you a shallow happiness that melts in the heat of adversity. But he does offer you a joy: a deep-seated, heart-felt, honest-to-goodness, ballistic strong sense of joy that can weather the most difficult of storms.

Peter referred to this joy in the opening words of his epistle.

"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9).

Who was Peter addressing when he spoke of unspeakable joy? He was speaking "To God's chosen people who are away from their homes and are scattered all around the countries of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1). Peter was speaking to persecuted Christians—people who had been driven from their cities, separated from their families. Their rights had been taken. Their property had been taken. Their possessions had been taken. Their futures had been taken, but their joy had not been taken. Why? Go back to Peter's Epistle again— this time in another translation: "You have never

seen Jesus and you don't see him now. But still you love him and have faith in him" (1 Pet. 1:8). The source of their joy? Jesus! And since no one could take their Jesus, no one could take their joy.

What about you? What has been taken from you? Your health? Your house? Have you buried a dream? Have you buried a marriage? Buried a friend? As you look at these burial plots of life, is your joy buried there, too?

If so, you may have substituted *courageous* joy for *contingent* joy. Contingent joy is always dependent upon a circumstance. Contingent joy says *I'll be happy when...or...I'll be happy if*. I'll be happy when I have a new house or a new spouse. I'll be happy when I'm healed or when I'm home. Contingent joy depends upon the right circumstance. Since we cannot control every circumstance, we set ourselves up for disappointment.

Envision the person who buys into the lie of contingent joy. As a young person they assume, *if I get a car, I'll be happy*. They get the car, but the car wears out. They look for joy elsewhere. *If I get married, I'll be happy*. So they get married, then disappointed. The spouse cannot deliver. This goes on through a series of attempts. *If I get the new job... if I can retire... If we just had a baby*. In each case, joy comes, then diminishes. By the time this person reaches old age, he has ridden a roller coaster of hope and disappointment. He becomes sour and fearful. Contingent joy turns us into wounded people.

Courageous joy, however, turns us into strong people. Courageous joy sets the hope of the heart on Jesus and Jesus alone. Since no one can take your Christ, no one can take your joy. Death, failure, betrayal, sickness, disappointment. They cannot take your

joy, because they cannot take your Jesus. And Jesus promised, "No one will take away your joy" (Jn. 16:22). Is that to say your life will be storm-free? Is that to say no sorrows will come your way? No. "In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33). Is that to say you will never cross the drylands of sorrow? No. But that is to say your sorrow will not last forever; "Your grief will turn to joy" (Jn. 16:20).

A friend of mine lived on a houseboat that was docked on the Miami River. The level of the river would rise and fall with the tide. The boat rocked back and forth with the river traffic. But though the level changed and the boat rocked, it never drifted. Why? Because it was anchored to a concrete sea wall.

Courageously joyful people have done the same. They have anchored their hearts to the shoreline of God. Will the boat rock? Yes. Will moods come and go? No doubt. But will they be left adrift on the Atlantic of despair? No, for they have found a joy which remains courageous through the storm. And this courageous joy is quick to become a contagious joy.

Believe that joy is possible! Don't give in to despair. What Jesus said to his followers, he says to you. "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11).

Ask God, "Lord, what is separating me from joy?"

Ask him to replace your contingent joy with courageous joy. Ask him to help you anchor to the firm rock on his shoreline. Ask him to show you the joy that cannot be taken, and He will stir a revival of contagious joy in your heart.