



## CHOOSE JOY!

ADVENT is preparation in anticipation of the arrival of Jesus. This week we're looking at joy. We're looking not just at the arrival of Jesus but what it means for us. It's easy in this season to get caught up in all the things we've got to do and forget to focus on the significance of the season. The God we couldn't be good enough for, came to be with us and loved us. There's a lot of phraseology we say without even thinking about it that are well-intentioned but we don't understand the implications of such as "how ya doin'?" Do we really mean it? It's more of a social reaction than inviting them into really telling us how they're doing. The same thing with someone going through pain or difficulty and we say "just get over it" when really the best thing we can do is just sit with someone. Or, when someone says "just relax" when you're feeling tense. We're asking someone to do something they may not be capable of doing at that moment. In Christian circles, we say "choose joy". If we're honest, if it were that easy, we'd all choose joy all the time! What's even more confusing in our desire for joy, is the difference between the joy Jesus brings versus joy as the world defines it as happiness and excitement. Joy is hard because it's circumstantial and subject to things outside of our control, but it doesn't have to be that way because that's not the way the Bible tells us joy is.

1. What have you tried to produce your own joy? How much energy did it require?

## JOY IS PRODUCED IN YOU BY A GIFT GIVEN TO YOU

Joy is something the Lord does in us. As we anticipate the arrival of joy in advent, it isn't just His arrival we celebrate but also what He brings to us and for us. It's impossible to experience true joy outside of Jesus. We may associate joy with events such as our wedding, the birth of a child, and so on, but we confuse true joy because we look at those experiences and say we've experienced "sheer joy" but what we're really saying is that we experienced highly intense feelings and emotions as the world defines joy. Those are things that are fleeting and in response to stimulus outside us that we react to. If that was what biblical joy was, we'd never be able to experience it without an event to go with it. But Jesus tells us that after He left, the Holy Spirit would come to lead us into all truth. That includes experiencing things like hope, love, and joy. When it comes to joy, we can't choose to experience something we can't produce on our own. How frustrating and exhausting it is to try to experience something we can't produce on our own.

2. What are some ways you've experienced the difference between circumstance-based joy and the Joy of the Lord?

## JOY ISN'T A FEELING OR STATE OF BEING YOU HAVE TO CREATE, BUT RATHER RELIANCE ON THE HOLY SPIRIT TO PRODUCE

[Galatians 5:22-26] Outside of the Holy Spirit, we can't experience true joy, because joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. What's so frustrating in our humanity outside of Christ is wanting these things that can only be produced supernaturally by the Holy Spirit and given to us. Prior to these verses, Paul tells us there is a natural inclination in all of us to produce things like hatred and strife. While we want to see humanity as good by nature, this isn't true. All we have to do is look at history. If we were by nature good, compassionate, and kind people, our history books would look a lot different. People are prone to jealousy and envy. We're by nature NOT good, but as we walk in the Spirit, the Lord starts to produce good things in us that we were unable to produce on our own. When we try to produce joy on our own, we are left with frustration and exhaustion. It's like you're using the wrong tool to achieve the result.

3. What are some ways that the Holy Spirit has worked to produce good things in you that were beyond your ability to produce on your own and in your natural human inclinations?

## THANKFULNESS CULTIVATES THE CONDITIONS FOR THE SPIRIT TO PRODUCE JOY IN OUR LIVES

[Ephesians 5:18-21] We might not be able to produce joy, but we have a responsibility to cultivate the environment for it to happen. We are to give thanks always for everything. The Bible doesn't say just give thanks sometimes for what really impresses you. Looking at where we are and what we have, we need to have contentment, but in our current culture, that can be hard. For example, we just experienced Thanksgiving. As soon as we share what we're thankful for, share a little turkey, and watch some football...BOOM, it's Black Friday and we're not happy with what we have. We're suddenly not content and this impedes joy in our lives because we're always looking forward to where we think we need to go and what we think we've got to get instead of sitting with where we are and what we have. We have to be intentional to look for the things we should be thankful for. We need to be thankful that Jesus is not going to leave you where you are but is doing a work in you. Be thankful for all the ways your spouse puts up with you. Be thankful for what a gift it is to have children. Be thankful for your job even if your boss is challenging. Don't look at what it's not and look at how you should be grateful for what it is.

4. What are some things you're thankful for?

## THE CONDITIONS DON'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT FOR US TO EXPERIENCE JOY

[Hebrews 12:2] Some of us don't perceive this season to be joyful, but perhaps marked by loss or loneliness. But joy isn't contingent on our environment, so we can experience joy in the midst of where we're at. Jesus isn't a hypocritical God because he never promises us or expects something from us that He didn't experience. Jesus even endured the cross because He saw on the other side there was future joy that would come from it. We have a savior that went before us so we can experience His joy this season regardless of what things we're experiencing.

5. What does it look and feel like to have joy through Christ in the midst of what the world perceives as joyless hardship?

## TO CULTIVATE JOY, BE THANKFUL

Christian joy can exist in the midst of pain, suffering, loneliness and misfortune. Joy isn't in our situation getting better. Our joy isn't attached to a situational standard that we have to experience. Our joy is grounded in Jesus Christ. He is the anchor of our joy without regard to what may be happening to us. We can take account for everything that we have to be thankful for, and most importantly this Advent season, we can be thankful that Jesus loved us enough to come to us.

6. What are some things you can particularly count as all joy in this season of Advent?