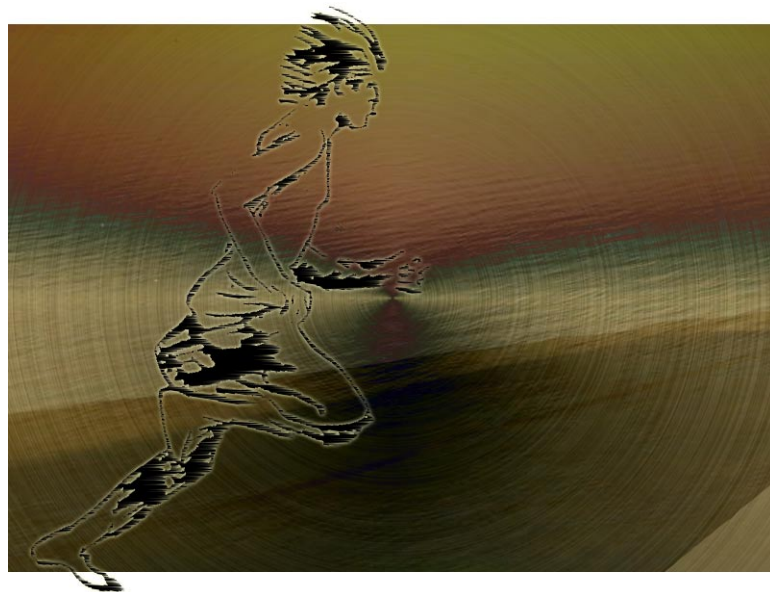


There are moments even now—apparently normal, everyday moments—when he is surprised by it. He does not expect it, has not gone looking for it. But his heart beat stutters, his breath stalls, and an unnamed happiness overtakes him. ■ He can only name it by its feeling. ■ Joy.



Sharing the Joy

The Race

THE YOUNG MAN IS DAILY EMBATTLED by the small tyrannies of his world. His life is like a racetrack—loud, frantic, moving at blinding speed. Every morning he rises and begins the race anew. Every day begins with him standing on the edge of the asphalt track, leaping to catch a passing racer (the odds are against you, but once you find purchase, you don't dare let go). And the rest of the day is spent desperately clinging to the speeding vehicle, trying not to fall off—or to be pushed off by others along on the same ride—as it whips and weaves through the perilous traffic.

Like a shopworn marionette dangling by threads controlled by others, he is suspended throughout the workday by the insistent technologies of his trade. Everything vital to his work—information, connections, reminders, conversations, alarms—comes through the plastic and metal gadgets that live in his pockets. The threads are fine, but tenacious. There is no breaking the connections by which strangers and friends make contact with him. Worse, every connection is invariably interrupted by the next.

At the end of the day he releases his grip, flies off and crashes to a skidding halt in the racetrack's greasy pits. Exhausted, nursing his bruises, he drags himself home to ready himself for the next day's race.

Knowing Him

Full Measure

Jesus does not live in his daylight world. At least that is how it feels to the young man. How could He? How could Jesus coexist with the traveling madhouse that is his workday? What part could He have with it?

But then it overtakes him. Unexpectedly. Powerfully.

In a moment, even as he clings precipitously to the speeding vehicle, in a soft intermission of grace he is overwhelmed by joy.



"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full."

John 15:11

It is a measure of kindness. Indeed, it is the *full measure* of kindness. It is the person of the Lord Jesus being manifest in this grimy, gritty, fallen world.

His Lord Jesus—Savior, brother, friend—has pierced through the raging cacophony of the work day to refresh His battle-weary child. He has accomplished it as only He can—by sharing His joy.

More Than Suffering

All too often the image of my Savior that comes readily to mind is that of the suffering servant, the spotless Lamb sacrificed on the altar of my many sins. He is the one engaged in unrelenting battle with His tormentors—those for whom His life and teachings were so terribly inconvenient. He is the one seeking time alone, away from the insistent crowd. He is the one hanging from the cross.

But Jesus brought more than suffering with him. His time on earth was, as well, His opportunity to express the unbounded joy of heaven to a grim and needy people.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked

for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full."

John 16:20-24

I will never share in the full, unfiltered, undiluted rapture of heaven until the day I finally cross its shores to kneel before the Throne. No man with feet still standing on the soil of earth can. But until that bright and shining day I can know the joy that Jesus brings to my life here and now.

Authentic Joy

The world in which I live has blessed itself with a counterfeit emotion it calls "joy." But the joy it has created for itself is often riddled with sarcasm, cynicism, revenge, arrogance or, at best, silliness.

*Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

Isaac Watts

Once again, man has settled for an inferior product. In his ignorance, he has taken his own low humor as the supreme example of ultimate joy. Thinking only he knows best, he has decided that small experiences such as laughter, feeling good, and happiness are synonymous with real joy.

But there is only one authentic joy, and it is God-created. It is an experience of His devising, and every related man-created experience or emotion pales in comparison.



Still, have I been settling for this pallid substitute? Have I been seeking only a higher form of earth-bound happiness, rather than true joy? Have I become so blinded by the counterfeit that I no longer can recognize the authentic?

The believer's joy is a sometimes powerfully quiet, sometimes riotously ecstatic exultation based on the presence of God in a life. That "presence" is the person of Jesus Christ, experienced through the ministry of

the Holy Spirit, that blessed companion who is the engine of our joy. God's joy come down, manifested in Jesus and translated by the Spirit, transcends any earthly pretender as it weaves itself through every temporal experience, every moment, every part of a life.

There are times when I am unable to *feel* this authentic joy, but, as always, the shortcoming is mine—not His. Jesus is not responsible for the desensitizing callus I have allowed to build up on my spirit.

It can happen anywhere, at any time. I need not cloister myself in a cell, or scale the heights of Everest to experience this gift from God to the believer. At work, at play, at rest, in worship—anywhere I am, there too may dwell the joy I have in Jesus.

I am the better for it if I nurture this gift, but I need not. Jesus, working through the Spirit is free to surprise me—to overwhelm me—at any time of His choosing.

And in that moment—that bright, crystalline moment—I am with God. There is no orderly, systematic logic to explain my thoughts; if handed a pen, I could not write them down. But there, no matter where I may be, I am lifted into His presence.

It is a soaring, un-worded joy that overtakes my being. It is a tiny sampling of the unbounded joy I will one day experience in Jesus' actual presence, as I join the chorus of all the redeemed around the throne. It is a small piece of that same joy encased in the crown I someday will be given—a crown containing a joy I cannot wear, but must—blessed rapture, *must*—cast back at His feet. For the joy is not mine to keep, but only to share for a moment with all of His creation.

And with Him.

You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,
that my heart may sing to you
and not be silent.
O Lord my God,
I will give you thanks forever.

Psalms 30:11-12 NIV

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