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C. S. Lewis entitled his spiritual autobiography *Surprised by Joy*. Lewis thought of joy as the most singular experience imaginable, unlike anything else. He used words like *delight*, *bliss*, *rapture*, and *ecstasy* to describe the experience of joy. None of these, however, quite expresses what joy really means.

In the previous discussion of love, the argument was presented that love is not so much what we feel but what we do as Christians. Joy, on the other hand, is the feeling that complements that love. Lewis found our deep religious experiences to be the most meaningful of human experience and the one thing that kept drawing him on toward faith in Christ.

Joy as Longing

Lewis discovered in his conversion that joy has a dark side as well as a light side. Joy involves longing just as it involves fulfillment. This longing amounts to more than a desire for something. Paul refers to *desire* in the Galatians passage on the fruit of the Spirit, and he says that Christians have been freed from the passion of desire, which might also be called lust. Desire can be a trivial lust, such as wanting a car or a stereo. There are all kinds of things we desire to possess, but these things are merely ornaments to life like ornaments on a Christmas tree. Ornaments do not affect the tree at all. They just hang there.

Last year we were late buying a Christmas tree, and what we finally found looked more like the parsley that garnished our Christmas turkey. We hung beautiful decorations on the tree, thinking we would hide the ridiculous tree itself. When friends dropped by, they never noticed the ornaments; they only laughed at our misshaped sprig of a tree.

Longing as Spiritual Thirst

Longing involves more than the lusts that camouflage our lives. Longing involves our very survival. It is like thirst. Thirst can only be satisfied by having a drink. If I am thirsty, I do not want a steak. If I am thirsty, nothing I eat will satisfy my thirst. When I thirst, I must have something to drink. This sort of longing ultimately involves survival. The longer I go without having the longing met, the stronger the longing will grow. If it is never met, I will die.

Homesickness may be related to this kind of desire. Homesickness is the felt need to be in a particular place with particular people; no other house and no other group of people will satisfy that longing. Such longings can affect our health and behavior.

Nothing can satisfy longing except the one thing that is longed for. The strange thing about this longing is that it cannot be sought. It cannot be pursued the way pleasure or fun can be pursued. One may find pleasure. One may find fun. Our society gears itself to providing pleasure and fun. Unfortunately, people usually confuse joy with its imitations. They settle for pleasure and never find joy.

Things can bring pleasure, but they can never bring joy because they do not reach into our spirits. The same sort of circumstance occurs when people laugh at a joke when they are depressed or in a miserable mood. It is possible to laugh at such times, but the joke does not reach deeply enough into the spirit to make a person happy. Laughter is not happiness any more than pleasure is joy.

Longing as Dissatisfaction

Lewis said that joy must have a stab or a pang of inconsolable longing that nothing else can satisfy. Because of this longing, joy creates a dissatisfaction with any other state of mind. Joy will not let people settle for anything less. The longing gives us the knowledge that there is something more, something better to life, even if we have never experienced it. This knowledge is the work of the Holy Spirit. Longing tells us that there is something missing from our lives. We cannot describe what that missing experience is, but we know it is there. Lewis experienced this longing until his conversion. Then he knew what that unknown experience was.

People drive themselves in a quest for this missing ingredient of life.

Some pursue it through the drug culture while others take an alternative route through fame and fortune, reputation and respectability, success and sociability. Yet, nothing can quench this thirsting of the spirit except joy.

The Source of Joy

If joy does not come through grabbing for it, then how does it come? How can a person experience joy? In the Bible, the experience of joy comes through relationships. Things may give pleasure, but only people can give joy. Joy can only come as a gift, and it can only come from a person. People give joy as a gift. Joy cannot be acquired by forcibly taking it. It cannot be squeezed out of life. Lewis was right. Joy surprises us. It comes to us from outside, like a surprise birthday party. Though it is possible to manipulate people and drop hints or sneak around to discover if someone is giving us a party, when we do that we lose the one crucial ingredient of a surprise party—it is no longer a surprise.

Joy is like that. The more we want that feeling of joy and the more we try to get it, the more it eludes us. Joy has to be given to us. In Greek, the word for *joy* and the word for *grace* come from the same root word. Joy is *chara*, and grace is *charis*. *Grace* is a free gift; it is completely unearned or unmerited. *Joy* is also something that comes to us.

Joy as Relationship

Joy comes in the presence or in the thought of the one who is loved. King David understood this. David was the great king of Israel. He was the model of what a king should be, but if we look at his career, we find that from time to time he was overtaken by sin. At one particular point in David's life, he became involved in an affair with a married woman. As usually happens in those situations, one disaster led to another. In order to cover up the affair, David arranged to have the husband neatly put away in the heat of battle. And so, Uriah the Hittite fell in death. David thought his sin was neatly covered up. It was hidden from everyone except God. David found that his relationship with God had crumbled and shattered. He prayed this prayer:

Cast me not away from thy presence,
and take not thy holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation (Ps. 51:11-12).

Despite David's imperfections, the Bible tells us he was a man after God's own heart. Even though he had been distracted by things, sidetracked by seeking pleasure, and wrapped up in physical experiences, there was something for which he longed more than passing pleasure. He longed for the presence of God. He was a man after God's heart. When he compared his empire, his harem, his riches, and his power to being in the presence of God, nothing else mattered. Nothing compared with the presence of God, and he pleaded, "Cast me not away from thy presence." Away from God's presence, David did not have joy anymore. Life without joy is no life at all.

Joy as By-Product

All his early life, C. S. Lewis sought that experience which he called joy. He failed to create it. He failed to make it come to him. Then, when Lewis found his Lord—trusted Christ Jesus as the one who brought him salvation—he was suddenly surprised by joy. He had not planned it. He had not expected it. It just reached out and hugged him and held him. Joy is the experience a person has in being close to God. It is a common experience of conversion.

Charles Finney, the great evangelist of the first half of the nineteenth century gave this account of his conversion:

Without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me, without any recollection that I had heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through my body and soul. I could feel the impression like a wave of electricity going through and through. Indeed, it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love because I could not express it in any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me like immense wings. No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy.¹

Joy may be charged with emotion, like Finney's conversion, or it may be quiet and penetrating like Lewis's conversion, which he described this way.

I know very well when, but hardly how the final step was taken. I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out, I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And when we reached the zoo I did. Yet, I had not exactly spent the journey in thought, nor in great emotion. Emotional is perhaps the last word we can apply to some of the most important events. It was more like when a man after long sleep still lying motionless in bed becomes aware that he is now awake.²

Joy comes in the morning and surprises us. It touches us and supplies that missing ingredient in life that satisfies the longing of our spirits.

Joy does not come in what God does for us. It does not come in the wonders and the miracles God might perform. Demonstrations of His power may create wonder and amazement, but they do not create joy. Demonstrations of His power may create fear or thanksgiving, but they do not create joy. Joy comes by God's presence. Joy is the experience we have in being close to such a wonderful person who cares about us. This experience comes in friendships: the joy of having someone special who cares about us. Joy comes when we have that sort of relationship with God. If God never did anything at all, it would be joyous just to be in His presence.

Joy as the Well-Being of Others

Jesus told several parables about people who were full of joy. Remember the shepherd who had gone in search of one lamb that was lost? He went out into the danger of the hillside where not only lambs, but also shepherds, fall prey to lions and wolves. Not only lambs but also shepherds fall over cliffs in the dark. In spite of the danger, the shepherd went out into the darkness to retrieve that frail creature in such desperate need. When he found it, he went back to town to gather together his friends to rejoice with him. He could not contain his joy. He had to share it with other people to experience the full joy.

Jesus also told of a woman who lost a coin. Her distress did not come from a simple loss of wealth. In those days when a woman was married, she received some coins that were her dowry. They had been in the family for years, passed from mother to daughter. They symbolized a very special relationship with someone and with the family that had nurtured her. The coin represented relationships that were a part of who she was. The coin was such a precious part of her that she stopped at nothing to find it. She turned the house upside down, and

when she found it, she gathered the neighbors together to rejoice with her. She could not contain the joy. It had to be shared.

Finally, Jesus mentioned a father whose son had rejected him, his life-style, his teaching, and had gone off into the world. When the father regained his son, he had to share his joy with someone, and he went out to find the older brother to see if he would rejoice and share the joy. Jesus said, "There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). The Lord knows our frailty and our deep need. The Lord knows how desperate human life is. The Lord entered into this world not just to know it intellectually, through the infinite wisdom of God, but actually to experience what it is like to be rejected by family and friends; He was a person who could be insulted, injured, harmed, and even murdered. God knows our every weakness and frailty, and He knows our need. Therefore, when our well-being comes about, God is filled with joy. It is the same with us.

Oddly enough, joy often follows sadness or tragedy. When those we love and care about are in deep need and suddenly begin to experience well-being, we experience joy with them because we love them. The relationship is the context of joy. However, joy is not constant in life. Jesus did not imply that it was. In fact He warned His disciples that sorrow would overtake them. He said, "So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). When sorrow comes, it is hard to experience joy. When we love someone who is going through pain, the joy diminishes. The joy is gone because we are experiencing the pain with the person. Jesus promises us that the sorrow will pass away because something lies beyond the sorrow.

Joy as the Bridge Beyond Sadness

The joy of Christ lay beyond the suffering of the cross. We are told in Hebrews about Christ "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (12:2). Jesus' joy lay on the other side of sorrow. His joy did not consist in being the King of kings and Lord of lords. His joy did not consist in having the crown and the power and the glory. The joy of the Lord was to be in the presence of His Father again, to be at the hand of His Father. That relationship provided His source of joy. Nothing else could bring it. We can endure sorrow and

sadness better when we know what lies ahead. Jesus Christ has given us the concrete hope of what lies just beyond the sorrow. He has given us promises about the future. Paul said, "I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12). Paul knew that Christ was able to keep that which Paul had committed unto Him. The basis for joy is our relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Loss of Joy

While sorrow may blur the vision of joy, the saddest loss of joy comes by choice. People do not decide they will not have joy, but they do decide to live in a way that banishes joy. Before describing how Christ endured the cross for the joy beyond, Hebrews gives a warning: "Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus" (Heb. 12:1-2).

When the joy has left a relationship, any relationship, a wall has grown up that must be torn down. It may happen because of distraction or apathy, but whenever joy seems to have faded, sin seems to be involved. Sin denies Christians the joy of their relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus told us that He prunes every branch that bears fruit, so it may bear more. Sin must be pruned, otherwise, joy will not bloom.

Because joy comes in nearness to God, anything that inhibits closeness with God must be pruned. Worship often hinders rather than encourages a sense of joy. When we become too familiar with worship, we lose a sense of the presence of Christ. As worship becomes a routine dominated by complacency, the longing for nearness with God can be replaced by a smug satisfaction that some debt has been discharged. Doing "holy things" can become a substitute for longing after God that will eventually kill the longing.

Instead of an attitude of complacency in worship, Christians need to worship in the belief of Christ's promise that He has a special presence in worship, wherever two or three are gathered in His name. Surely, Christ is present when Christians are alone, but He promised a special visitation for Christians who gather in His name for worship. Such gathering presupposes a longing after Christ that He wants to satisfy. Jesus Christ wants to fill His disciples with joy.

King David understood well that sin had come between him and God. Other things had captured his mind—personal glory, the build-

ing of an empire, and an affair with another man's wife. Yet the longing for what he missed most led him to pray, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10, KJV). Joy can be ours again. The Lord is not so far away. Paul told the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. . . . The Lord is at hand" (4:4-5).

In His last moments with His disciples Jesus said that He had spoken to them in order that His joy might be in them. He wants His divine and eternal joy to be in us and for our joy to be full. But it only comes in closeness with Him, and closeness with Jesus is in danger when we sin and turn away to other interests, or simply take Him for granted. Paul challenged the Philippians to "Rejoice in the Lord." Draw so close to Him that joy will be full and overflowing. Renew that powerful relationship. Revive that moment of joy when you first knew Him and realized His deep love for you.

Jesus said we have to be like little children to enter the kingdom of heaven. The very sight of her parents transforms a child who has been in day care or with a sitter all day. That little child, when she sees her parent, has a face transformed and beaming, and her joy cannot be contained. Arms wave, hands clap, and voice squeals as the child rushes into the arms of the one she loves. Yet, as the hours pass, the child becomes fussy, and the joy of the reunion fades.

Joy is a barometer of our relationship with people whom we sometimes take for granted. Sadly, it is also a barometer of our relationship with the Lord who is with us every moment, yet is often taken for granted.

Joy comes as a gift from Christ, and it is experienced in nearness to Him. Joy is not isolated from the other attributes that describe the fruit of the Spirit. Christ declared to His disciples on the night that He was taken how they might share His joy:

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full (John 15:9-11, KJV).

1. Charles G. Finney, *Charles G. Finney: An Autobiography* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, Co., n.d.), 20.

2. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1956), 237.