

# Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: May 12, 2013

## Learning to Abide in Joy

by Dan Trygg

“...whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ...”  
Philippians 3:7-8

“...remember the former days, when ...you endured a great conflict of sufferings, <sup>33</sup> partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. <sup>34</sup> For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. <sup>35</sup> Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. <sup>36</sup> For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”  
Hebrews 10:32-36

“I have this against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup> Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first.”  
Revelation 2:4-5

“For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, <sup>19</sup> ...who set their minds on earthly things...”  
Philippians 3:18-19

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God...”  
Jude 1:20-21

**Remember the joy and excitement of when you first gave your life to Christ?** Do you remember when you really clearly understood what God had done for you in Christ, and you eagerly embraced salvation? Or, do you remember other high points in your spiritual pilgrimage? Can you recall times of extreme joy, or wonderful answers to prayer that were awesome and delightful? **Has that excitement faded? Have you lost that zeal?** Have your motivation and excitement for God faded away in the everyday drama and routine of life? Have you wandered away, or lost that drive you once had? Are you persisting in a daily quiet time, ...or has that been eroded away by the busyness of packed schedules, or by the distractions of life? How long has it been since you had a real heart-to-heart with God? Does it feel like God, who you professed would be the *focus* of your life, has been relegated to the *margins* of your thoughts? Do you feel lost? Do you feel discouraged? **Do you feel like you are at a distance from God?**

**It is important to acknowledge what is going on with you.** Just get honest, and talk to God about it. It's not like He has never heard this before. In fact, *He already knows* of the flatness and lukewarm temperature of your present experience. He knows that apart from being continually reenergized by Him, you will eventually end up in a placid, lifeless state (Jn. 15:4-6). He knows, too, that we all have experienced it, at one time or another, ...or we will. *Our spiritual life must be nurtured and cultivated*, or it begins to feel hollow and empty – because it *is*! **Of course, the enemy is right on us, accusing us, and pointing out our pathetic state. He tries to make us feel guilty, and to make us feel like we cannot draw near to God.** He tries to convince us that this Jesus stuff is not true, ...or at least not *for us*. We aren't “nicey-nice” or “holy-holy” enough to walk the Christian walk. We aren't cut out to be a religious person, and we feel like giving up. **Well, I am here to tell you, “Enough of that!” Tell that old Serpent, “Devil, you are a liar!” Get off the pity pot and get back on track!** Anyone who has studied (or lived) the Christian life for very long is well aware that these “dry times” or “down times” or “wanderings” are almost universally experienced by believers of every age. God has forewarned us, and given us examples to help us recognize the symptoms. He has given us instructions regarding what to do when we are stuck in the thick of thin things like this. **In spite of what the enemy is trying to tell us, God wants nothing more than for us to return and renew our relationship with Him, and be reenergized.**

**The first thing to recognize, as I said above, is that this is a common malady that many other Christians have experienced, ...and conquered!** This experience does *not* mean you are a failure, or a loser. It just means you are not healthy, at the moment. The first step to getting better is to recognize, acknowledge and define the problem. **You are not the problem.** It is not about you as a person being defective, ...not any more than catching a cold or the flu makes you somehow defective physically. **What you are dealing with is a spiritual illness. It needs to be diagnosed and treated.** If we can normalize this experience, ...if we can recognize that this is a common spiritual condition..., we can strip the enemy of a lot of his power to intimidate and discourage.

**Secondly, we are to remember better times, times when we were spiritually excited and joyful.** Notice that this is clearly stated in the passages from Hebrews and Revelations listed above. Paul testified in Philippians that when he first came to Christ *nothing* was more important than knowing Jesus. He willingly gave up *all* else, and considered everything else he had going for him to be as rubbish in comparison with knowing Christ, being found in Him and covered by His righteousness. **There was no greater joy than finding forgiveness and freedom in Christ!**

The Hebrew Christians had also known that kind of joy. They had willingly embraced persecution, ridicule, suffering, and even the seizure of their property. It was like *nothing* to them, because they were filled with the joy of the Lord! They knew they had an eternal reward and inheritance laid up in heaven for them. The temporary discomfort and inconvenience was like *nothing* in comparison to the rich inheritance they knew was theirs. If, perchance, we cannot think of any such positive times, know that such joyful, transporting experiences are part of our inheritance in Christ. **God wants us to experience joy inexpressible and full of glory** (1 Pet. 1:8). *If you have not ever had such times, take this opportunity to begin to pursue the joy that is meant to be yours in Christ.*

**Third, change your thinking.** In the Revelations passage, this is translated as “repent”. The Greek word for “repent” is literally, “change your perception”. This gets at the heart of the issue. **If joy is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, ...and if we are not experiencing joy..., then we must not be getting our life from the Holy Spirit.** It naturally flows from Him, so if we are not experiencing it, we must somehow be disconnected. In Revelations, **Jesus tells the Ephesians that they left or abandoned their first love. They turned away from the source of love and joy.** Instead, they became theological slicers and dicers, analyzing the theology of others. How subtle! In their zeal for correct doctrine, they *turned away* from the freedom of the love and joy of walking in the Spirit, and *turned off* the flow of life! They became judgmental and intellectual, but shut out the love of Jesus that previously had filled their hearts and spilled over in good deeds of service to others. They became lifeless Pharisees, experts in the Law, but without grace or compassion. **By contrast, in Philippians Paul refers to Christians who lost their joy because they had set their mind on earthly things.** How easy is it to get distracted by, and then focused on, things of this world? Soon, we have forgotten Christ. We disregard God, and neglect our relationship with Him. We get consumed by the worries of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the pleasures of this life and the desires for other things (Lk. 8:14). **We leave God in the dust, and try to find fulfillment in things that are empty and passing away. They cannot give life, and before long we are feeling empty. It is not because our walk with Jesus did not work; it is because we did not work out the walk with Jesus.** We abandoned the fountain of life to drink from a Styrofoam cup. Soon, our cup is dry, and we begin to feel that way, too. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:17-19, we try to live by the same methodology as those who do not know God. We try to medicate our pain by seeking pleasure. It doesn't work, so we find ourselves endlessly searching for something to fill us. **The enemy is quick to say, “Where is your Jesus, now? He didn't do much for you, did He?” The truth is that we have been living like practical atheists. We haven't been drawing near to Jesus, or looking to Him for life.** We have returned to living lives that are alienated away from the life-flow of God's Spirit, vainly trying to find life from experiences, relationships and things that can only momentarily distract us. **We need to repent, and return to God as our Source.**

**Fourth, learn to manage and cultivate your emotional/spiritual life.** We are complex beings, ...an interconnected, interrelated, interdependent combination of parts affected by the physical world, our thinking and emotional experiences, *and* our spiritual connectedness. **We need to recognize our needs, and learn to manage our lives** in these areas. Our physical health can affect our emotional and spiritual experience. Our emotions can also affect the other two aspects of our experience, and our spiritual vitality can also affect our physical/emotional/mental well-being. **Many times we lose our joy, or experience lethargy, because we don't effectively care for ourselves** in these areas. An acrostic, HALT, is a good place to start to troubleshoot why we may be feeling somewhat empty or flat. If we are **Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired**, we are likely to feel drained or on low energy. This affects our emotions and our spiritual outlook, as well. Hunger and tiredness are often plainly physical needs. We need to eat properly, and get enough sleep, if we are going to feel energized. Regular exercise will also raise our energy level and lift our spirits. Unresolved anger can be both an emotional stress and a spiritual problem. If we cannot address the source of frustration or anger, and come to release or forgive the offender, we will continue to live in torment and disease. Loneliness is also a natural human need that can only be addressed through meaningful interactions with others. Many of us “suffer in silence”, medicating ourselves with distractions, when our real need is for a friend. Often, however, we do not reach out to others in ways that will effectively establish healthy, helpful relationships. **Just as there are levels of skill to learn and develop in areas of physical and emotional health, there are also practical investments we can make to keep our spiritual lives healthy and growing.** Our spiritual lives are *not* meant to *replace* these other needs. Spiritual health will have a *positive effect* on all these other aspects of life, but *it is not designed to cover or totally overpower serious defects* in these other areas, at least not long term. God will use our spiritual life to refocus and lift us, but He still expects us to address these other areas. That said, ***we need to learn to build ourselves up in our walk with God, and we need to utilize these skills to keep ourselves walking in joy.***

**Fifth, we need to press on after God and His will.** So many Christians start out well, but *drop out* before they receive the promise. God *is* the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, but we *abandon the search* and *settle for something far less* than what He wants to do in our lives. **We have need of endurance to discover and walk in joy.**