

# FOCUS ON FAITH

## TAKING A FRESH LOOK AT – JOY!



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I've met a lot of people who think that Christians don't have much fun. You know the kind of comments, Church is a serious place where you don't laugh a lot and we're forever going on about the things you shouldn't do – like the 10 Commandment – don't do this; don't do that.

Well I have to admit that I do know some Christians (and Churches) who are somewhat like that but I don't believe Christians need to be killjoys and I certainly don't think that's how Jesus was.

After all Jesus, speaking about His mission on earth said in John's Gospel 10: 10, ***"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*** The Message version of the Bible says, ***"...more and better life than they ever dreamed of."*** Isn't that what we'd really like our lives to be – fulfilling?

One of my favourite Christmas carols is, *"Joy to the world, the Lord has come"*, but I wonder how much joy there was once the presents were opened and the turkey consumed. Over the Christmas and New Year period there might have been merriment and over indulgence; there was festivity and a degree of happiness but how much of the celebrations we enjoyed was real joy?

And if we're really honest, what brings us joy? Maybe there's a sense of joy when our favourite sporting team wins; when we achieve that exam result or clinch the business deal or work promotion but it tends to dissipate quickly when the team loses the following week or we fail to achieve our next objective.

Dr. David Myers in his book *"Pursuit of Happiness"* points out that in the last 17 years there have been 80,000 research projects on depression and anxiety but only 400 on joy. Yet joy was a key element of Jesus' birth, life and even his death.

- At his birth the Angel announced to the shepherds, ***"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."*** Joyful news for ***all*** people – nobody's excluded.

**The Bible says, "The joy of the LORD is your strength." But only if we choose it to be!**

- During His earthly ministry Jesus told His disciples, ***"I have told you (these things) so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."*** It was his life's work to bring joy to people.

- And the writer to the Hebrews tells us that in respect of his death it was ***"for the joy set before him"*** that Jesus endured the cross.

Most of us confuse joy with happiness but happiness only lasts as long as the circumstances are favourable whereas real joy is an inner sense of well-being that isn't dependant on what's happening around us or to us.

We can even be joyful in situations that don't warrant it. James, the brother of Jesus, wrote in his Epistle, ***"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds."***

You've got to be kidding! Joy when you're in trouble? But James goes on to say that these tests of our faith develop both perseverance and maturity.

Of course our lives are tinged with sorrow, regret, sadness, disappointment as well as anxiety and fear. We all face problems and difficulties and there is a right place for sorrow and sadness especially when we lose a loved one but real joy will enable us to be positive people in a negative world. Like other aspects of our lives though, joy is a choice – The Bible says, ***"The joy of the LORD is your strength."*** But only if we choose it to be!

I believe God wants us to enjoy our lives, trusting Him that even when difficulties arise they can be used to help us develop – that they are building blocks not stumbling blocks.

Maybe it's time for you to take a fresh look at the kind of joy Jesus wants to give us. The Christian Churches in the Bridgnorth area would welcome the opportunity to help you – you can find out more at a church near you this Sunday.

If you'd like to find out more about the real, radical Christian faith, log on to ***www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk*** which has details of local Christian Churches and contact details.