



JOY

Joy Set Before Him

By: Bri Koch

Can I be honest? I think I've been wrong about joy my entire life.

When I agreed to write about joy a month ago, I thought, *"Perfect, I got this."* Because joy and the Christmas season just go hand-in-hand, right? Christmas cheer. Jolly Old St. Nick. Party after party after party. Gathering, giving, celebrating, baking. And the LIGHTS! Joy is just in the air – how could you not be joyful? Yet tears come to my eyes while writing those words. Perhaps for the first time, the magic of the Christmas season isn't filling my joy cup. My Christmas Classics playlist and holiday preparations aren't enough to keep my mind distracted from the pain under the surface.

Exactly one year ago, just a week after the birth of my son, my grandma passed away after years of battling illness. And now, one week before my son's first birthday, my husband's grandma passed away. Joy stolen, again. The birthday celebration that I imagined would be full of joy, quickly turned to mourning. The holiday season we imagined celebrating with our loved ones, suddenly changed.

If there were ever a time when I expected abundant joy, it would be right now. Instead, I'm surrounded by reminders of my lack of joy. A month ago, in preparation for Christmas, I hung a massive "JOY" sign on my door, and it mocks me every time I come home. Have you ever been there?

The other day, a friend sent me a video of a sermon. Within minutes, the preacher quotes Phillippians 4:4, *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"* I quickly stopped the message to breathe through the sharp sting of guilt and disappointment.

**LORD... I just don't FEEL joyful. This is painful. Where is your joy? Where are you?
I thought Christmas was meant to be joyful.**

Maybe you know exactly what I'm talking about. Or maybe I'm bursting your Christmas joy bubble (I'm so sorry either way). But can I tell you why I'm glad that God allowed the rug to be pulled out from under my fragile Christmas joy? **He fixed my focus.**

It happened when I finally broke and came to him. It was a quiet Friday morning before my family got up for the day and I knew it was time to finally hand over all my disappointment. As I fell into an exhausted heap on my living room floor, He woke me up and whispered, **Look at me. Do you see me? Do you see that I love you?**

Psalms 16:8-9 ESV says, *I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.*

We don't rejoice because every Christmas to-do is perfectly in its place, every ornament hung just so, and every family issue is smoothed over. ***We rejoice because we have set our King before us.*** Our eyes locked on Him. When we fix our focus on our coming Savior, we see the Joy of the World.

I love this moment in Matthew 2:10 that illustrates the wise men's journey over many miles and through the night to their brand new King. It says, *When they saw the star, they were filled with JOY!* Sometimes we need to experience a period of darkness to grasp the captivating miracle and beauty of a Star shining bright in the sky.

Looking back to Philippians 4:4, Paul is not making a suggestion that we should rejoice, he is commanding us to rejoice. He didn't write this from a mountaintop of circumstantial joy. He was suffering greatly in prison and still saw all the more reasons to command himself to rejoice in his God.

As in all things Jesus is our example. Hebrews 12:2 NIV says, "...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. ***For the joy set before Him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.***" This is so hard for me to grasp. How could Jesus experience both the pain and joy of the cross?

While I was struggling with this, my Lifegroup surrounded me in prayer. One friend spoke wisdom and kindness to my broken places. She said,

"Jesus saw the joy set before Him and endured the cross, not because the cross itself was joyful but because obedience and what it produces in our lives brings fulfillment to God's plans. The beauty of joy is to see beyond the darkness. Joy sees the hope we have in Christ."

I believe that joy is the type of gift that keeps on giving. Our joy in the Lord is incredibly more powerful and transformative than we could ever imagine.

As we all journey toward our King and endure the heaviness of this world, let us pray that our eyes would be so fixed on His face and that His transforming presence would produce true joy in our hearts.

Questions:

1. What kind of joy are you experiencing in your life right now? Are you joyful only when things seem bright and merry? Or are you joyful because you see Jesus? Take some time to ask God for an answer.
2. Reflecting on Psalm 16:8-9, what does it mean to you to set the Lord before you each day and fix your eyes on Him?