

## **JOY 101...** **The Source of Lasting Joy**

**2018**

As I begin to write this story, we have no air conditioning at our house. We have been without it for five days now. We're in October and despite the fact that fall has already started, the heat and humidity in North Central Florida is still quite high. But we count our blessings. We have ceiling and portable fans all set at high speed as well as a portable air conditioner that we installed in our bedroom. Our son who lives a 2½ hr. drive, round-trip, from us showed up unexpectedly at our front door on the first evening of our ordeal with the contraption in his car. He had just come back home from a weeklong business trip to California, tired and jet-lagged, but he took the time to drive all the way here to bring us some needed relief from the heat. I must say that we are both very touched by his kindness.

We had a technician diagnosed the problem and after serious consideration, we decided to change our twenty year old system for a new one. For three days my dear husband has been glued to his computer learning all there is to be learned about A/C systems. He's done his 'homework' as he calls it, we prayed God for his wisdom and guidance, and now we're waiting for the installation to take place.

Under our present circumstances, we could feel grumpy, frustrated, unhappy, critical, but as strange as it may seem, we're not. Sweaty maybe, but none of the above!.. Even as I was walking through the streets of my little neighborhood this morning, I had a lightness in my step. A cloudless sky, an early morning balmy breeze and the cheerful song of mockingbirds all helped to make the start of this new day a wonderful one. Actually, I was feeling quite happy and joyful!

JOY...HAPPINESS... We're all longing for these emotions in our lives. It's in our DNA, so to speak! Obviously, how we come to experience these feelings may vary from person to person. Some will look for pleasures, possessions, prominence, prestige, reputation or fulfilled ambitions. Others will find it through love, personal relationships, people or nature. But if we think about it, oftentimes our joy rises and falls depending on our mood and circumstances.

From time to time, most of us will experience the joy that comes – as I like to call it - in small packages. It could be a phone call from a loved one that we haven't heard from in a long time, reading an especially good book, a new birth in the family, a birthday celebration, a promotion at work, a college graduation, and the list could go on and on... Unfortunately most of these pleasurable moments or joy are short-lived.

On that basis, I've been asking myself lately... Is it possible to experience sustainable joy in our lives? Especially when we're constantly being bombarded with bad news from the media; when we're witnessing all the ugly things happening around the world; when situations in our lives only bring us struggles, pains, sufferings and sorrows?.. Is there such a thing as living with a deep and constant joy in our hearts no matter what our circumstances may be?

I hadn't seen Granny in a while and as I walked by the assisted living facility this morning, I decided to pay her a visit. I entered the building and asked a nurse where I could find her. Apparently she wasn't feeling too well this morning and stayed in her room. She gave me the number and I made my way there. I knocked on the door. She didn't answer. She's a little hard of hearing and I thought that she probably hadn't heard me knocking, so I gently opened the door and tiptoed into her room. I found her sitting in her 'Cadillac' by the window, her eyes closed and

breathing heavily. She seemed sound asleep and I decided to come back later. I was about ready to leave when she woke up.

“Oh, is that ya honey?” she asked a little bit in a daze, trying to grab her eyeglasses from the small table by her side. “Have ya been standin’ here for a while? I fell asleep, I guess... But come and sit...make yerself comfortable.”

I sat down at the foot of her bed. “How are you doing this morning, Granny? A nurse told me you weren’t feeling well... I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Oh, honey, it’s one of them days when I cain’t seem to shake myself off, if ya know what I mean... I ain’t no spring chicken ya know!... But enough talkin’ ‘bout me. How have ya been doin’?”

“Very well, Granny, but our air conditioner conked out on us so we’re trying to keep cool some way or another.”

“Great time for ya to come visit an ol’ lady like me at the assisted livin’ facility, ain’t that right honey? With all the ol’ folks here, they cain’t afford to be with no air conditionin’!” she said with her squeaky laugh.

“Yes, well, I wouldn’t say it’s the only reason I’m here today, but I’m very grateful to get out of the heat and humidity for a little while!” I said smiling.

“Cain ya imagine livin’ with no air conditionin’ nowadays? Especially livin’ in Florida! We’re so spoiled...too spoiled maybe... Let me tell ya, honey, when I was just a little bitty thang, my folks used to live in an ol’ cracker house in the country with no runnin’ water or electricity. We didn’t know any better back then, and we were content and happy like pigs in the sunshine!”

“Despite the inconvenience, you were still happy and joyful, weren’t you?”

“Yes sirree! Mind ya, we couldn’t miss what we never had... But we didn’t need all of them thangs folks need today to make them happy. There was lots of love at our house, we had a roof over our head, food on our table, a bed to sleep in and clothes to wear; maybe not brand new ones but they were nice enough. But ya know, honey, the most important thang was that we had faith in the good Lord. We knew he’d always take care of us and provide for us some way or another. That was somethang to rejoice in, don’t ya think?” she asked with a twinkle in her eyes.

“You’re right, Granny!... That reminds me of my own story when many years ago I lived with my husband and our three sons in a house without air conditioning. The summer heat and humidity were tough to handle... And during winter, we had a hard time to warm up the place especially when the temperature would drop in the low forties at night... I don’t remember being joyful and happy during those times, probably because we had known better days...”

“You know, honey, we sure cain’t do like the Israelites did in the wilderness. No sirree... You remember the story?<sup>1</sup> They were so upset ‘bout so many thangs that they were grumpy all the times, murmurin’ against Moses and God, complainin’, not trustin’ Him even though he was providin’ for their needs. Oh, maybe not the way they wanted to but he was still providin’... They were sorry they’d left Egypt and wanted to go back... They had lost their faith in Him and in his promises. They even built a golden calf to bow down to. Remember?.. God was not pleased with them at all and cursed them. So, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years... Cain you imagine that?.. That whole generation died and didn’t get into the Promised Land. Only two of

them did, Joshua and Caleb, because they had followed the Lord and believed in Him and in his promises... Ain't that a sad story!.." she said with sorrow in her voice.

"Yes, I know very well that story... I can be a complainer too sometimes!... You'd understand why if you only knew the struggles our family went through years ago..."

"Ain't that so... Well, honey, I'm in no hurry...except for meetin' the good Lord! But as ya cain see, he's takin' his sweet time! So, why don't ya tell me yer story? Go ahead, I'm all ears... I always love a good story!" she said, smiling and adjusting herself to be more comfortable in her chair.

"Well, it all started in 1991... After we moved to this area from South Florida, we found ourselves in deep financial troubles. It got to the point where we were unable to pay our rent... The Pastor of the church we were attending to back then knowing our situation came to see us one day and made a proposition. In exchange for cleaning the church twice a week, we could live rent-free in a little house adjacent to it. There was no air conditioning but we were so desperate that we accepted his offer and moved in.

"In as much as we were grateful for the house God had given us, the following couple of years proved to be the most challenging times of our lives. The responsibility of taking care of our three sons who were then eleven, fifteen and seventeen, was undeniably our main concern, and we made every effort to shield them from the hardship we were going through. However, we were not naïve to believe that such experience would leave them without emotional scars, but we sincerely hoped that they would find a sense of security in our deep love for them.

"Our life in "the little house on the prairie" as I used to call it, revolved mainly around church. Besides the cleaning of the church that I did, our participation in various activities increased since we lived next door. My husband got elected as board member, I was voted secretary of the Women's Ministry, and the boys got involved in the music department of the children's church. Field trips and youth activities kept our boys busy. I can honestly say that our involvement in the church was a lifesaver since it helped us to focus on matters other than our problems.

"I have to say here that my husband is an entrepreneur at heart. So, our move to this area was to open a water purification business. It seemed very promising but at some point he had to close its door. Using his expertise in real estate, he then started a "For Sale by Owner" business but it was definitely not generating enough income, so he began applying for different positions which were mostly declined because - as he was being told -, he was overqualified for the jobs. Having no other choice, he took any kind of odd jobs he could find: mowing lawns, working in attics and digging trenches for minimum wage. However, the little income he made would not always cover our expenses, so we found ourselves in a tight spot more than once.

"We applied for food stamps to help us out. We got clothes from donated items at the church. Oh, we had to make big changes to our lifestyle. No more hobbies with a price tag on it... No more trips... Frugality and simplicity became our priority in our household.

"Christmas was certainly the most difficult time of the year for us. We didn't have the money to buy gifts for our sons, so we had to come up with creative ideas. One year my husband thought of making miniature buildings replicating something meaningful to them. He would normally stay up late at night after our boys were in bed to work on his projects. He would find pieces of weathered wood he needed either on the side of the road or from people who would be tearing down their old fences. In order to decorate the miniature buildings, he would hunt for garage

sales to find any miniatures that would do the trick. It was an unusual project for him which helped him discover a certain artistic side of him. I can say that his best reward for his work was when our youngest son unwrapped his gift that Christmas morning and commented: *“Wow dad! This is the best gift I ever got!”*

“Following his success in creating miniature buildings, he kept on making more. One of our friends from church, was into making all kinds of objects with wood and started doing Arts and Crafts shows around our area. My husband asked him if he could join him and he agreed. So, he started making more miniature buildings, added some three-dimensional shadow boxes to his collection and on the road he went. What an unexpected way to supplement our income!

“However, after more than a year of relentless worries, I must confess that we experienced frustration, angst and despair. Our battle between faith and fear was quite overwhelming at times. However, through the many little miracles we were witnessing in our lives, we knew that God was with us every step of the way. He might not have been providing for our needs in ways that we would have chosen, but he did it and that was all that mattered.

“Sometime in 1993, my husband saw an ad in the newspapers. A local Real Estate office was looking for a manager. He made a phone call and got an interview. It was definitely a ray of hope on the horizon but we didn’t want to rejoice too soon. Well, our hope turned into reality when he came back home with the job.

“With a steady income coming in, we thought it was time to move out of our “little house on the prairie”. We found the most beautiful and comfortable 3 bedroom/2 bath home within our budget. It was within walking distance to schools and close to the downtown area which was perfect for us. I tell you what... we could have danced in the street to celebrate!”

“Ain’t that a beautiful endin’ to yer story!.. God is always so good, ain’t he?..” she exclaimed, smiling from ear to ear.

“He sure is, Granny! I’ll always remember those days mainly because I don’t want to forget the faithfulness of God in action. He was by our side every step of the way. It was quite a learning experience for us. Not knowing when this nightmare would end, we had to live each day by faith and hope alone... I have to admit that joy was far from our hearts in those days though...” I said with sadness in my heart.

“Oh, honey... We all learn, and the good Lord understands we’re only humans but he sees also our hearts and all the love we have for Him... And he loves us too. That’s why he’s always there to come to our rescue!” she said, looking at me tenderly.

“Yes, I know Granny...”

We suddenly heard a knock on the door. A nurse was carrying a tray with Granny’s meal on it. It was time for me to leave. I stood up, hugged her and left the room promising I’d be back soon.

When I entered my home, I was back to reality... The heat, the humidity and the fans roaring at full speed welcomed me... Oh, I realize that the inconvenience of living without air conditioning for a few days is in no way comparable to the pains, sufferings and sorrows which could result from more serious circumstances in my life. But joy should not be dependent upon my circumstances because true joy is really a fruit of the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> As I constantly make my goal to live with the sweetness of God’s presence, yielding to his will, acknowledging his sovereignty,

thanking Him for all his blessings, praising Him for his faithfulness and knowing that nothing will be able to separate me from his love that is in Christ Jesus<sup>3</sup>, what is there not to be joyful for?

The Word of God is also filled with many verses about joy. They all encourage us to rejoice always, to find our strength in the joy of the Lord, to be filled with joy, to rejoice in hope and more. And they need to be taken seriously and put in practice. But the following comments I read recently made me realize the importance of maturing spiritually if I want to experience a deep and constant joy in my life.

*'We can find out how mature we are, how Spirit-controlled we are, how spiritually virtuous we are by finding the breaking point where joy is lost and bitterness, negativism, critical spirit, sullenness begin to creep and take over our life. The measure of our joy is how we react not to things the way we'd like them to be but to things the way we wouldn't like them to be.'*<sup>4</sup>

I don't know what my future may hold, how I would react if I am faced with overwhelming circumstances in my life that I never experienced before. But I certainly hope that I would be able to say... YES, there is such a thing as living with a deep and constant joy because I feel the Lord's sweet presence in my heart, and I would say like granny said...I know that the good Lord will always take care of me and provide for me some way or another. And that's something to rejoice in!

<sup>1</sup>Exodus <sup>2</sup>Galatians 5:22 <sup>3</sup>Romans 8:38-39 <sup>4</sup>John McArthur, Pastor/teacher, Grace to You Church, CA

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