

Enthusiasm for Life!

Jesus Showed Us the High Art of Living With Passion, Energy and Joy

By Rod Handley

Recently a friend handed me an artist's depiction of Jesus Christ. Unlike most pictures I've seen where Jesus appears sad, angry or solemn, this one shows him roaring with laughter. It was a wonderful, refreshing look at one of Jesus' most contagious character qualities: enthusiasm for life.

Jesus is the greatest example of enthusiasm, joy and gladness, and because of him Christians should be the happiest people. Charles Jefferson said, "What a pity to live in a world like this and not enjoy living! It's amazing that anyone should live in a universe so glorious, and not feel like shouting! If you're mournful and drooping, it's because there's something wrong...You've not yet learned the high art of living. You've not yet come to Jesus."

Enthusiasm represents passion and Jesus certainly burned with fervency. His enthusiasm reflected a roaring fire, burning with love for God. To know him, serve him, and glorify him, this is the highest ambition the soul is capable of—a fire that can't be quenched.

Jesus' enthusiasm spilled over into his teachings. He said, "Unless you change and become like little children, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven." So what was it that attracted Jesus to children? It was their life, their energy and laughter which Jesus applauded.

Jesus also urged us to not spend time worrying (Matthew 6:25-33). He told us to not worry about the present, the necessities of life, tomorrow, or what we ought to do or say in the midst of crisis. He says it's not right to worry because God has it all under control.

An Attitude of Joy

Paul Sailhammer says, "Joy is that deep settled confidence that God is in control of every area of my life." Tim Hansel believes, "Joy is not a feeling; it's a choice. It's not based upon circumstances; it's based upon attitude. It's free, but not cheap. It's the by-product of a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. It's a promise, not a deal. It's available to us when we make ourselves available to him. It's something we can receive by invitation and choice. It requires commitment, courage and endurance."

There's no question the day-to-day grind of life is sometimes difficult. In John 16:33, Jesus reminds us that in this world we'll experience trouble, even tribulation; however, we're not merely to endure it, but to "be of good cheer," for he has overcome the world.

He exhorted his disciples, when persecuted and encountering all sorts of evil to "rejoice and be exceedingly glad." He reminds us in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Jesus was glad to the very end. Even in the upper room when death was only a few hours away, he spoke of the joy that was bubbling up in his heart, and prayed that the same joy would abound in the hearts of all those who love him. He wanted them to have a full, overflowing joy.

There was lots of talk among the Jewish leaders because Jesus never fasted, nor did he teach his disciples to fast. A good Jew fasted twice every week. Jesus wasn't against fasting, in fact he gave guidelines on appropriate fasting in Matthew 6:16-18. One day some people came to Jesus with disgust saying, "Why don't your disciples fast?" Jesus said, "How can

the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast" (Matthew 2:18-20).

Jesus' reference to himself as the bridegroom is intriguing because a wedding celebration is a symbol of joy. If ever a man is happy, it's on his wedding day. Jesus said he and his disciples lived in an atmosphere of wedding joy.

Why do some Christians lack enthusiasm for life? Jefferson shares, "Our nature is saturated, soaked by the chilling drizzle of worldliness...and along with the deterioration of nature comes a diminishing of the vision of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, and because there's a shadowed vision, the glowing purpose is also lacking. The soul does not catch fire. What then do we do? Get back to the only begotten Son and ask him to remove the heart of stone and set our heart ablaze."

There are only two options, I believe, for every believer—happy and hysterically happy! You choose whether you're going to live life with anxiety and worry,

or with gladness and enthusiasm. It's a daily decision to choose joy.

How do you live out gladness in the midst of disappointments, frustrations and crushed hopes and dreams? I believe it all boils down to having a deep, personal relationship with God. As Ephesians 4:23 tells us, we must "be renewed in the spirit of our mind."

Enthusiasm comes from the Greek word *entheos*, meaning "God in you, or full of God." The power comes from God himself who gives you the wisdom, courage, strategy and faith necessary to deal successfully with the difficulties of life.

Overcoming the World

Through faith in Christ we can overcome anything the world throws at us. Tim Hansel says, "Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional. We can't avoid pain, but we can avoid joy. God has given us such immense freedom that he'll allow us to be as miserable as we want to be."

John MacArthur points out, "There's no event or circumstance that can occur in the life of any Christian that should diminish their

joy." I urge you to adopt an attitude of enthusiasm and gladness. Emory Ward once remarked, "Enthusiasm, like measles, mumps and the common cold, is highly contagious."

Today, renew your commitment to pursue gladness no matter what obstacles or challenges come your way. Why not decide right now to be a joyfully contagious person, just like Christ!

This article is one in a series, exploring the character traits of Jesus and applying them to our lives as Christian leaders and managers.

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