*DEVOTIONS*

December 13 - 18

*Fruit of the Spirit: Joy*

**Monday, December 13 1 Thessalonians 1:1-6**

*“You received the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit”*

The Thessalonian Christians’ reception of the Good News of Jesus Christ resulted in a blend of suffering and joy. Had the Gospel just been a source of blessing and gain, their response might well have been attributed to selfish motives. But when they voluntarily took on the opposition of those who denied Christ, they showed their willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of Christ. For Paul and for them, obedience to God was always costly and frequently resulted in suffering. But again and again they witnessed to the joy that the Holy Spirit gives in the midst of suffering.

Perhaps one of the most completely concealed truths of our modern world is that suffering and joy go together. Life without problems and suffering is a fantasy. If we live as followers of Jesus in the midst of a fallen world, a world at war with God and itself, we will suffer. But suffering will not break us or lessen our confidence in God. On the contrary, suffering for what we know to be true in Jesus Christ will only draw us closer to God.

*Give me joy, Holy Spirit, when the world opposes the faith I have in Jesus. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 14 Psalm 66:1-7**

*“Shout joyful praises to God”*

This is a psalm of joyful thanksgiving for God’s loving care. It declares that God is in the midst of his people like a watchman on the watch-tower, not only observing all that is taking place within the city of God, but keeping a keen eye on the enemies surrounding the city.

Of this protecting care an instance never to be forgotten was the scene at the Red Sea, when the sea was turned into dry land and God’s people, who had been in mortal terror of the Egyptian army, had their fears turned into rejoicing. Another was the safe passage of the people across the Jordan River, when they entered the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua.

Against the backdrop of this biblical affirmation of God’s deeds on behalf of Israel, we lift our own joyful praise for all that God is doing for us today. When we gather to worship with the people of God, we sing his praises. When we pray to him in the quiet place of our personal devotion, we thank him for his many blessings.

*With joy I praise you, Lord, for the blessing of your protection. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 15 Psalm 100:1-5**

*“Shout for joy to the Lord”*

If we would daily enter into the spirit of this psalm, every day would be a joyful Thanksgiving Day. The psalmist invites all the earth to come into the presence of God with joy. In many of the Psalms the minor chords overpower the major ones, and weeping prevails over rejoicing. But this psalm is full of unclouded sunlight. The reason for this gladness is suggested in the words: “We are his.” We are his because he created us, his because he provides for us, his because he loves us; and his also by the glad commitment of our hearts to his service.

To the psalmist’s eye the peoples of the world pour into the Temple through the wide-open gates. “Listen!” he cries. “Listen to the burst of thanksgiving which rolls forth from the worshippers of God!” The great attraction is the goodness of God and the everlasting nature of his love. This psalm reveals the importance of evangelism. We cannot be satisfied until all people share our knowledge of the love of God, for there is nothing which will better promote the true happiness and joy of humanity.

*May my joy of daily being in your presence overflow into the lives of others. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONS*

December 13 - 18

*Fruit of the Spirit: Joy*

**Thursday, December 16 Isaiah 12:1-6**

*“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation”*

The passage concludes this section of Isaiah (chapters 7 through 12) in which the prophet has challenged Israel’s King Ahaz to trust in God. When Ahaz rejected God’s protection, Isaiah announced that what Ahaz had trusted in place of God – the nation of Assyria – would turn on Israel and destroy her.

But, demonstrating how genuinely faithful God is to his people, the prophet then declared that God would give light in place of Israel’s self-induced darkness – light in the form of a descendant of David who would be Immanuel, “God with us.” Furthermore, once Israel faced the fact that it was God who controlled her destiny and not Assyria, God would demonstrate that truth by destroying arrogant Assyria and bringing about a messianic kingdom of peace not only with his own people but also with representatives of all the Gentile nations. “In that day” all God’s children will sing the hymn of Isaiah 12, joyfully proclaiming that God’s salvation is for us as we draw life-giving water from his well.

*You give me joy, Lord God, for you have saved me from my sin. Amen.*

**Friday, December 17 Nehemiah 8:5-12**

*“They celebrated with great joy, for they now understood the word of the Lord”*

When Ezra unrolled the scroll to read the word of God, all the people stood in reverence. Their twofold “amen” expresses agreement with the blessing of the Lord and their acceptance of the law. Thirteen Levites then moved through the crowd, interpreting and applying the law of God, and for the first time the people truly understood it. Reflecting their guilt for having failed to observe the law they now understood, the people began to mourn and cry. Ezra urged them not to express their dismay at having failed to follow God’s commands, but instead to celebrate what they had learned about God by eating choice foods and drinking sweet drinks.

There was to be no bitterness on this day! They were even to send portions of food and drink to those who had not had the opportunity, or the means, to celebrate their newfound understanding. For, while there was righteous sorrow due to having disobeyed God, there was a greater reality to be celebrated: the joy of understanding what God desired of them so that, from this time forth, they could live in obedience to God.

*You reveal your Word to me, Lord, that I may joyfully understand and live in it. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 18 John 15:9-12**

*“My joy in you, that your joy may be complete”*

The union between Jesus and his disciples is not an external arrangement, but an internal, personal relationship. The Son loves these disciples as the Father loves the Son, and they are to love one another as the Son loves them. This love for one another is not a vague, sentimental feeling that comes and goes, but a resilient reality that is always revealed in obedience. The Son is perfectly obedient to the Father, and the disciples can only live in the love of Jesus if they keep his commandments. Love and obedience are two sides of the same reality.

This does not mean these disciples are called to a grim, cheerless existence. On the contrary, if they live in the love of Jesus by obeying his commands, they will remain in his joy. Jesus’ joy will be in them constantly, not sporadically. G. K. Chesterton called this joy “the gigantic secret of the Christian.” And when Malcolm Muggeridge, man of the world, first encountered Mother Teresa in Calcutta, he could not explain the “luminous quality” he saw in this little, plain woman. Eventually it was joy which drew him to Christ.

*I thank you, Jesus, for the gift of your joy growing out of my relationship with you. Amen.*