

The Incarnation Brings Joy // Christmas Devotional on 1 John

In John 1, John starts with the glorious heights of the majesty of God incarnate- Jesus coming to us. “the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us”. God Himself has come and been made manifest to us. As John tells us of the fullness of what they saw, and how it grants us fellowship with the Father in Jesus, He says in v. 4 that His writing these things that our joy may be complete.

In Christmas, we have God coming and making available to us a fullness of joy. Jesus would say this very thing repeatedly in His earthly ministry (Jn 15:11, Jn 17:13). He has come to bring a joy that cannot be attained in our doing. In Jesus, He offers an abiding joy, and an abundant life. Biblically this joy, is an assurance, delight, satisfaction that is rooted in who we are in our union with Christ and is not dependent on circumstances. It’s why Paul can tell us to rejoice 13 times in Philippians as he writes from prison.

So simply put, joy is available and joy is promised in Christ. It is not dependent on circumstances. Then why do we struggle with being joyous day to day? If Christmas brings with it this promise and we celebrate what Jesus says, we even sing “joy to the world” why do we struggle so much day to day to live in this joy?

In 1 John he helps to lay out some areas that cause us to struggle in living in the fullness of joy that God offers in Christ. Consider these four things John lays out, and ask God which one resonates most with you.

1. **Read John 1:5-10, 2:3-6 We circumvent the joy available in Christ, by continuing in sin.**

When we continue to walk in darkness, that is hiding areas of our lives that we know are not living in obedience to Christ, we are living in ways that we were not created to live and are now living out of step with who we now are in Christ. It is much like misusing something for an unintended purpose, it will not work well, and eventually break down. I tried using a plastic cased tape measure as a hammer, and it worked but not very well. After using it several times, it started to crack the case and work less and less efficiently as a hammer. This is because this is not what the tape measure is, and its intended use.

The same is true when we continue to live in sin. As we continue to go against the way we were made by our Creator, and instead of living in step with Him, we live in defiance- pushing back the opposite way. When we do this, there will continue to be consequences and struggles. Many believers struggle greatly in having a sense of the joy of the Lord, yet they continue to ignore the things that God has clearly called us to. We neglect corporate worship, we rarely spend time in God’s word, we order our lives around temporary things with little energy or time towards things that have eternal purposes and then wonder why we are not living out of the abundant joy Jesus offers.

John makes a very serious claim here. In 2:4-5, ***“Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.***

Notice in 2:5, God’s word does promise us whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. * Ask God to show you areas of your life that you are not abiding in Him, and how you can make the necessary steps to obey him in those areas.

As you consider your joy in the Lord, is there any area of your life you are not trusting in God, not keeping his commandments? Are you seeking comfort, joy, happiness in ways that God says you will not find them?

*Note: This is **not** a matter of, if you sin less God will love and bless you more. God loves you completely and totally in Christ as much as He will ever love you. This love is perfect and complete and lacking in nothing. The matter here has to do with walking in step with who you are in Christ, and the joy that comes from doing so, not a matter of God's love for us.

2. Read 2:9-11 We circumvent the joy of the Lord, by living in unforgiveness.

When we are unified with Christ, by grace through faith, we are a new creation. The Holy Spirit comes in and lives with us and in us, leading and guiding. The Holy Spirit gives us a great love for God and for people. When we live in darkness by hating our brother, we are walking out of step with who we are in Christ, and it robs our joy. This can take many different forms in our life. For example, we can hold grudges for past wrongs that people have done to us and then feel vindicated not seeking reconciliation.

There is a fatal flaw in this type of thinking. We are operating under the premise that we seek reconciliation only when (we believe) the other person deserves it. Is this how Christ has dealt with us? Is this how we have reconciliation with God in Christ, because we deserved it? (If you want to answer, 'yes', please see Titus 3, Eph. 2:1-10, 1 Jn. 1:8-9).

Who in your life are you currently struggling to be reconciled with? Who are you having trouble with feeling as if you have been wronged or are holding a grudge against? Have you fallen into the trap of believing you are better than they are or they don't deserve your forgiveness?

How do we proceed in seeking reconciliation when we don't feel like it? What are you not believing about your standing before God if you feel justified in not offering forgiveness?

What steps can you take to seek reconciliation? Ask God to show you the next steps to take in those relationships, and be obedient in following him. If we are living in unforgiveness we are out of step with who we are in Christ, and the power of the gospel in our own lives. This will continue to rob our joy.

3. Read 2:15-17 Seeking joy in love of the world

By seeking our joy on the things that John calls the "desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life" we functionally replace love of the world with the love of the Father. I say functionally because we say we believe (and do to an extent) that joy comes from God and our relationship with Him, yet we function in a way that says we get that joy from other things. This gets revealed especially around the holidays. We can place our hope in things, parties, schedules, food, etc. We operate much in the same way the world does, and fall into the trap of defining joy as coming from the temporal things that the world holds up as most important.

When we functionally operate this way, we are making good things ultimate things in our lives, which is idolatry. All idolatry is disordered loves, placing something good (parties, food, gifts) in front of God will leave you ultimately unfulfilled. Temporal things cannot fill your eternal need of God.

Stop and take inventory on how much time you spend seeking joy from temporal things vs. the time you spend knowing God and making Him known. Where do you give most your time and energy?

What is one step you can take this year to be more giving of your time and your finances to eternal things that make God the center of all versus temporal things.

4. Read 4:15-19 Living in Fear

You can read the first three reasons we miss the joy the Lord and feel beat up, and like a failure in one or all of these areas. It can bring an unhealthy guilt and shame that is not of God. Here in chapter 4 John talks about God's perfect love driving out fear. He says that fear (and the negative emotions that go along with it) are born out of believing that God is out to get us, not understanding God's great love for us.

This misunderstands the very heart and glory of the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus came to earth, leaving His throne, all that He was due and deserving and entered this world to deal with those very sins. In doing so, God proves His incredible love, grace and mercy for His people. Jesus has come to deal with your sin, to restore you to God, that we may now live out of our new identity in Him. THIS IS ALL GOD'S DOING, IT IS BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED.

What areas of your life are you still living in guilt, shame, and ultimately fear? Confess those things to God, and thank Him for His forgiveness and then rest in His grace. We continually miss out on the joy of the Lord, because we believe lies about how God deals with us in Christ. God's love is not dependent on your works or your performance but on the one who saves- JESUS!

The incarnation, God with us, who is for us, who has redeemed us answers all these areas of our lives. We often want to make our walk be about earning before God, but grace precludes all earning. God has done in all. Guilt, shame and fear of punishment cannot change your heart, only relishing in the goodness and loving kindness of our Savior who saves us by grace through the power and work of the Holy Spirit will do that.