



Discovering Joy in Work

The seventh in a series of nine leadership devotionals based on the fruit of the Spirit

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Scripture Passages

“You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy: in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11)

“I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:11)

Theme: Discovering Joy in Work

Stepping out into the world from the foundation of *agape* love, the Christian leader has the incredible opportunity (and responsibility) to reveal the multi-faceted character of God each day. It's instructive to note that Paul's message about the freedom in Christ that breaks the bondage of the Law (see Galatians 4-5:15) reaches its climax with the shocking comparison between what the wicked (flesh) man *does* out his sinful nature (Galatians 5:19-21) and the virtues Holy Spirit can produce in that same man who has decided *to be* a new creature and allow the produce by willingly being guided by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). Paul wastes no time illustrating how the perfect nature of God's *agape* love living in the believer produces that new being, that one seamless, perfectly integrated representation of His own image. Paul begins to shape the image for us with the three attributes of God that bring to mind the personalities of the Triune God – Love, Joy, and Peace. In this triad it's not difficult to see the reflections of the Father, Whose *agape* love was so great that He gave His most precious possession (see John 3:16), the Son, Whose arrival was heralded by the joyous chorus of angels and Whose Heavenly and earthly relationships were marked by *joy* (see Luke 10:20-24, 15:7, John 15:10-11, 17:11-13, and Hebrews 12:2, 22) and God's Holy Spirit, Who first appears in the quietness of the pre-dawn of Creation, “hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:2 NIV) like a mother bird caring for and protecting her young (see Deuteronomy 32:11 and Isaiah 31:5) and Who will continue bringing life and *peace* to all who actively, intentionally, pursue Him (See Romans 8:6) until there will be no more night (see Revelation 22:5).

And following this order, we come to better understand that love makes joy and peace possible and also see that it is impossible for true agape love to be restrained and not be expressed as joy and peace anymore than joy or peace could exist without agape love, just as the Triune God is three unique Entities yet still perfectly One. So we begin our reflection on Joy from the vantage point of our love relationship with God.

Psalms 16 is a song of confidence in and of joy in God. In it, David expresses concern over his immediate personal safety (verse 1) and his hope for his future well-being (verses 8-11). He asks for protection from immediate danger and rejoices in the assurance of a favored future from the position of his relationship with God. It is helpful to recall that the basis of this relationship was God's covenant with David that his throne would be established forever.¹ Because of this covenant, David could proclaim that "the boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly inheritance" (verse 6). But David also reminds God that he chooses to "keep the Lord always before me" (verse 8) unlike other men who choose other gods and follow them (verse 4). As God's favored one, David wants to keep God close and to follow Him. This speaks to the obedience that love engenders; David loves God and therefore wants to follow (obey) Him. Because of this choice, David remains in right relationship, so close to God that his heart receives the Lord's own counsel, even at night! (verse 7). The result is that David's physical being (his body) and his eternal spiritual being (his heart and soul) are glad and rest secure (v.9).² Finally, David expresses that joy is found in God's presence both now and forever (verse 11). In Hebrew the word used here for joy, *simhah*, "refers to the reality, the experience and manifestation of joy and gladness."³ David's joy was not a pie-in-the-sky, Pollyannaish sense of well-being. Rather, it was a real and palpable dimension of his reliance on God lived out in their love-relationship. David understood that not even death could steal this *simhah* joy; it would even follow him into eternity (verse 11). His joy was "the experience of having one's niche in life assured and affirmed, 'sealed' by an act of God. It is joy conferred from the outside and they truly can't take that away from me (and you)."⁴ As certainly David's "niche" was affirmed by God's covenant with him, Jesus affirms each of ours by His blood in the new covenant (see Luke 22:20).

In John chapter 15, Jesus clearly connects love, obedience, and joy for his apostles and underscores their importance to His Father. Using the metaphor of the vine and the branches, Jesus illustrates the essence of the new covenant love-relationship – abiding. In the Greek, to abide (*meno*) speaks of the "relation in which one person or thing stands with another...i.e. to be and remain united with him, one with him in heart, mind, and will."⁴ It is only through this intimate union of the follower's being with His that spiritual fruit can be produced. And it is by this union, this complete abiding, that His Father is glorified (John 15:8). The new covenant of love, therefore, is now lived out in willing obedience; the Son to the Father, and the believer to Jesus (verse 10). And this wholehearted submission of self results in Jesus' own perfect, complete joy fully present in His followers (verse 11) because "The graced person is a tabernacle of the Triune God; God is tented in us. God is

¹ Gregory Trull, "An Exegesis of Psalm 16:10." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (July-September 2004)304-321 22 Dec. 2006 First Search, ATLA Religion.

² Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete WordStudy Dictionary, Old Testament*. (Chattanooga: AMG 2003) 1161.

³ Paul Zahl, "Protestant Joy: An Actual Possibility?" *The Living Pulpit* (October-December 1996) 40 22 Dec. 2006 First Search, ATLA Religion.

⁴ Spiros Zodhiates, ed, *The Complete WordStudy Dictionary New Testament*. (Chattanooga: AMG 1993) 960.

closer to us than we are to ourselves.”⁵ Where the Davidic covenant could offer God’s joy imparted, Jesus’ new covenant actually brings His joy inside us.

The Greek word for Joy (*chara*) portrays a great, calm delight that comes forth from deep within, a delight whose origin is the unseen Spirit of God thriving within our hearts. Joy is *not* an emotion nor is it a feature of our emotional programs for happiness or a component of our broken, human condition. It is, in fact, the antithesis of our fickle hearts and jealously maintains its own independence from situations, circumstances, and external influences, including pain and suffering - and work!

For many, the concepts of work and joy may appear to be mutually exclusive. If you count up all the time spent at the workplace, commuting to and from work and add in the time spent thinking about, preparing for, or conducting work and work-related activities outside of the physical plant, work consumes a great deal of our lives – about 30% by some estimates.⁶ Yet how many of us can truthfully say our work brings us joy? More importantly, how many of us can say we *find joy within ourselves as we work*? The difference is significant. If we expect work to bring joy to us, we will be disappointed, which may explain why so many executives keep striving for more of whatever it is they pursue; power, money, prestige, conquests of various types, etc. (you may fill in the blank based on your own observations). They are looking for something *outside* of themselves as the source of joy and never find it and for good reasons. Motivational theorists like Maslow, Herzberg, and Aldefer have all come to the same conclusion about work; man is most profoundly motivated by the *intrinsic* desire for personal development. Certainly the fundamental needs for food, security, and relationships are important and must be met before a person will pursue higher level needs, but once the lower level needs are met, there still exists a deep longing to achieve a potential that cannot be satisfied by extrinsic factors alone.

According to the research that resulted in Kriger and Seng’s list of desired core spiritual values at work, joy is an aspect of work life that many people desire. But why don’t more of us experience joy at work? The answer is two-fold. First, the false self promotes self hate, “the dominant malaise crippling Christian people and stifling their growth in the Holy Spirit.”⁷ Our false self tells us that we’re not good enough, smart enough, or disciplined enough to acquire the virtues that would make us what *we* think we ought to be, crippling us spiritually and emotionally and tormenting us with, “intense feelings of guilt, shame, remorse, and self-punishment,” and making it virtually impossible for us to accept the fact that sin and grace can, and do, “coexist simultaneously.” The debilitating outcome is “an unrealistically negative self-image. *There’s a conspicuous absence of peace and joy*” (emphasis added).⁸ Having robbed us of joy already in our hearts by the redeeming work of Christ, the false self then tries to deceive us into thinking that our joy depends on external matters such as wearing the latest fashion, getting the next promotion, buying that new car, or even on our children’s success. Happiness becomes a cheap substitute for joy and, like love, is often sought “in all the wrong places.” But,

⁵ Walter Burghardt, S.J., “Trinity: Toy for Theologians or Joy for Believers?” The Living Pulpit (October-December 1996) 9 22 Dec. 2006 First Search, ATLA Religion

⁶ Dennis Bakke, Joy at Work: A Revolutionary Approach to Fun on the Job. (Seattle: PVG 2005).

⁷ Brennan Manning, A Glimpse of Jesus: The Stranger to Self-Hatred. (San Francisco: HarperCollins 2003) 85.

⁸ Manning 8.

“True joy, as it turns out, comes only to those who have devoted their lives to something greater than happiness.”⁹

Secondly, our work places are designed and populated by a host of false selves, looking for joy *outside* of themselves where it simply cannot be found. The workplace becomes a marketplace where the false self barter in values in order to manipulate structures, systems, and other people to produce outcomes that satisfy their intrinsic desire for personal development in pursuit of their highest human potential. The fundamental problem with that is, of course, that our highest human potential falls woefully short of God’s potential in our lives as lived out through the authentic self growing and thriving in the new covenant love-relationship.

Scripture has shown that no leader can give this type of joy to others, just as no human could give joy to them; it can only be found within one’s heart. But leaders can, and should, help others find joy by creating a workplace that is conducive to helping them see the greater purpose for their work as they utilize their talents in pursuit of their highest *God-given* potential, unhindered by conditions that commonly distill joy out of work. Studies about the effect of joy at work continue to reveal some significant, positive correlations between “positive emotions,” enhanced meaning derived from work, and increased productivity.¹⁰ According to leading researcher/professors Wright and Cropanzano, “The available data consistently point to a common, highly practical conclusion...when happiness is measured as PWB (psychological well-being) it is consistently and positively related to various measures of job performance.” Specifically, “...the positive emotion, joy, creates the urge to play, to think outside the box and be creative...Properly implemented in the workplace...such positive employee emotions as joy and interest foster...perceptions of enhanced meaning from their work.”¹¹

But Dennis Bakke, co-founder and longtime CEO of AES writes, “Joy (at work) will be difficult to experience. It requires that we understand that the major purpose of work is to use the resources of the created world to serve our needs and the needs of others. Work is likely to be experienced as a difficult and meaningless endeavor if we stray from God’s original purpose.”¹² And this is precisely what occurs when the false self steps into a leadership role, making its own demands and placing its own purpose on work. Some of the more obvious joy-killing effects include selfishness in decision making, including hoarding decision-making authority, unauthentic motives, shallow purpose, blaming others instead of practicing personal accountability, class systems, and condescending attitudes.¹³ When these conditions prevail, the culture will most certainly kill morale and eradicate the loyalty necessary to retain workers in the present, cause burnout or “early retirement” while still employed, and keep them from developing the skills they’ll need to support the organization’s future needs. And, most importantly, these conditions degrade others by denying them the opportunity to develop and use the gifts God has given them.

⁹ John Ortberg, The Life You’ve Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1997) 73.

¹⁰ T.A. Wright, “The Role of ‘Happiness’ in Organizational Research” 2005, Danner, Snowden, and Friesen, “Positive Emotions in Early Life and Longevity from the Nun Study” 2001, “When a Happy Worker is a ‘Productive’ Worker: A Review and Further Refinement of the Happy-Productive Worker Thesis” 2001, Wright and Straw, “Affect and Favorable Work Outcomes: Two Longitudinal Tests of the Happy-Productive Worker Thesis, 1999.

¹¹ Thomas Wright and Russell Cropanzano, “The Role of Psychological Well-Being in Job Performance: A Fresh Look at an Age-Old Quest.” Organizational Dynamics 33:4 (2004) 343 02 Jan. 2007 First Search, ATLA Religion.

¹² Bakke 260.

¹³ Raymond Bakke, William Hendricks and Brad Smith, Joy at Work: Bible Study Companion. (Seattle: PVG 2005) 201-202.

Jesus said that now is our time of pain but when we see Him again, our hearts will rejoice and no one will take our joy from us (John 16:22). In the meantime, the leader who abides in Christ's *agape* love will see to it that her followers have an environment in which they are encouraged to thrive and find joy within themselves, as they work.

Leadership/OD Concept

Improving morale, decreasing turnover

Wisdom of the Ages

“Far be it, Lord, far be it from the heart of Thy servant who here confesseth unto Thee, far be it, that, be the joy what it may, I should therefore think myself happy. For there is a joy which is not given to the ungodly, but to those who love Thee for Thine own sake, whose joy Thou Thyself art. And this is the happy life, to rejoice to Thee, of Thee, for Thee; this is it, and there is no other. For they who think there is another, pursue some other and not the true joy. Yet is not their will turned away from some semblance of joy.” ~Confessions of St. Augustine, Chapter XXII

Example of the Devotional

Being an elementary school principal was Henry's dream job. He loved the authority he had over the children but seemed to revel in his position over the teachers. Henry prided himself on his years of teaching experience and believed that his style and methods were better than anyone else's, even those teachers who had taught as long, or longer, than he. In spite of the fact that Standardized test scores were consistently higher than national norms and the school always maintained a waiting list for prospective students Henry insisted that "his" teachers conformed to his teaching style. When teachers would attend seminars or conferences, Henry would grill them about what they had learned and would have to approve any new techniques they hoped to implement.

Henry was also always busy. Never available for conversations in the hallways between classes, Henry's preferred form of communication was the written note. Negative feedback, which took the form of criticism and blame, was left in the teachers' mailboxes or dropped on their desks before school in the morning. Most teachers felt as though Henry kept track of their every move and shortcomings and dreaded the uncertainty they faced each spring when their contracts were due for renewal.

Eventually, established teachers began to leave because "Henry sucked the joy out of teaching." Punished for their desire to be creative and spontaneous, the teachers simply couldn't keep "going through the motions" any longer. And with them went the familiarity and stability parents who had several children in the school over many years had come to value, causing a slight, but noticeable, decrease in enrollment.

When the school's administrator retired, the teachers voiced their concerns that Henry would be allowed to fill the position. Many of them refused to sign their contracts for the next year until they knew Henry's status. When Henry was finally told that he would not be promoted, he blamed the teachers and resigned his position.

Application of the Devotional

In this case, Henry's lack of *agape* love for the teachers resulted in his inability to allow joy to flourish at work. If he had possessed this love, he would have *wanted* them to enjoy their work, to express themselves through their work, and to grow and develop as teachers and as human beings. And this love would have caused him to invest himself in their development instead of quashing it. His love for the students would have further compelled him to create an environment where the teachers could be creative knowing that their attitude toward teaching would directly influence the students' ability to learn.

Unfortunately, Henry exhibited love only for himself. If Henry was a Christian, it's sobering to think "How often have people misunderstood God because they attributed to Him the grim, judgmental, defensive, soul-wearing spirit"¹⁴ Henry brought to work every day.

Practical Exercises

It should be easy enough to detect joy in your organization. In fact, if you have to go look for it, it's probably not there! But take some time to look around then ask yourself if this is a place where people are encouraged to *be* better, healthier and happier or do they come here to *do* certain tasks, pick up a paycheck, and go home?

Two spiritual disciplines lend themselves well to the release of joy in the believer's life (remembering that joy is already in us, it doesn't need to be cultivated, only released!). And, yes, it might sound contradictory that *joy* should be a matter of discipline, but if you're not in the habit of being joyful, a little practice is probably in order. First, studying God's Word helps to retrain our minds on the things of God, Who is the source of our joy. Study, as opposed to meditation, is an analytical exercise through which we seek to conform our thoughts to the thing being studied.¹⁵ As we study not only God's word, but our own actions, and the world of nature, we will soon become aware of His joy in and around us. Secondly, the discipline of celebration is essential for sharing our joy with others. Ortberg instructs, "True celebration is the inverse of hedonism...the demand for more and more pleasure for personal gratification...(and) always follows the law of diminishing returns so that what produced joy in us yesterday no longer does today...(but) when we celebrate we exercise our ability to see and feel the goodness in the simplest gifts of God. We are able to take delight today in something we wouldn't have even noticed yesterday."¹⁶ So start celebrating – today! For quick hints on how to get started, read Ortberg's chapter on Celebration or work through the chapter in Foster and Yanni's workbook. You'll get the idea.

¹⁴ Ortberg 64.

¹⁵ Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. (San Francisco: HarperCollins 1998) 64.

¹⁶ Ortberg 72.

Suggested Further Reading

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