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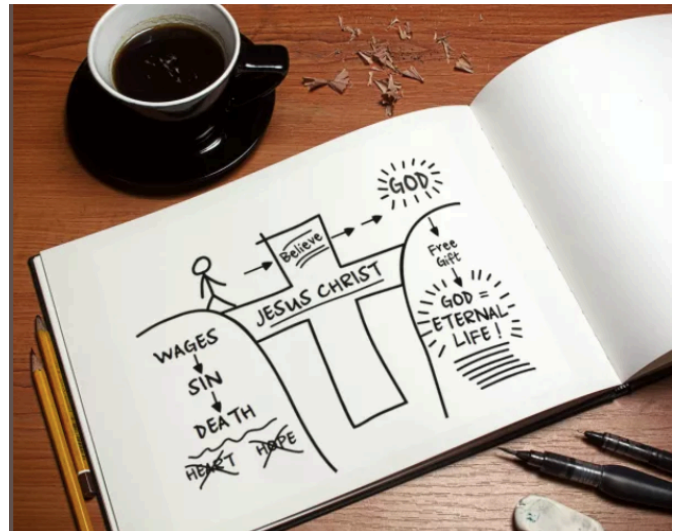
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Rejoice in the Lord, Always

There may have been a time when we've tilted our heads and wondered if God's command to rejoice in Him always is possible (Phil. 4:4). After all, the word "always" denotes that we are to be full of joy during the good, the bad, and the times in between the two. But we mourn, grieve, and ache for numerous reasons. And when we don't personally go through the seasons of weeping, we walk along with someone who is trudging in anguish. Life is real and sometimes, life hurts. But this shouldn't be too surprising. Jesus is aware and thus warns us that there *will* be tribulations in the world (Jn 16:33a). But He gives hope and great assurance in the following sentence, "But take heart; I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33b). Jesus's commands are not unreasonable. He is not seeking to turn His people into masochists. He wants us to have joy and we can. Christians are called to have permanent happiness, or joy, that springs from Jesus's finished work on the Cross for the eternal salvation to His children (1 Pet. 1:8-9).

Rejoice in Hope

Only three chapters into the first book of the bible and humans have already failed. And since Genesis 3, we are inevitably doomed to hell, forever. There is nothing that we can do to save our souls. In fact, we fall into deeper sins as we live our days, routinely accumulating more thoughts, actions, and words against God. At the end of our time, when God asks why He should allow us to enter into heaven, we have no answer but simply shrink from guilt and shame. But that's not the ending for the Christians. We are instead welcomed into our Father's embrace for eternity to come because of Jesus's death and resurrection. So we believe wholeheartedly that Jesus has died on the Cross, taking all the past and future sins of all humanity, came back to life in three days, and is now sitting next to God in Heaven. And we



rejoice because not even the devil can bring any charge against God's elect (Rom. 8:33). We rejoice because no one or thing in all its power and creation can separate us from the love of God displayed by His Son (Rom. 8:39). We rejoice because death has no power over us. We rejoice because hell is not our destination. And we rejoice because we are saved from something that is more daunting than what this world can hurl at us.



Rejoice in Prayer

In May 2019, my family and I lost someone very dear. It was a cruel and painful fight, for him to bear and for us to watch. This trooper was a father to my mom, a husband to my grandmother, and an adored grandfather to me. After the death of his son, King David came out of fasting and mourning immediately, aware of God's sovereignty over life and death. I desperately wished that I too, could gracefully submit to God's timing and will.

But I couldn't do what David did. It seemed as if the works that I've checked off under the list of "Living as Christ's Disciple" didn't serve as my cushion when I fell; it was a hard fall to the ground. But it was then, when I had scraped knees and elbows, God revealed where I truly stood in my faith. I had a mindset that I was *entitled* to comfort and joy because of my Christian deeds. Just as salvation is purely from God's grace and mercy rather than our own works, so are His gifts (Eph. 2:8-9). And so began the fight for joy, prayerfully. The joy that I prayed for is not the antonym of sadness. Habakkuk prayed for joy that overcomes the fig tree that does not blossom, fields that yield no food, and any other failures and disappointments in life (Hb. 3:17-18). Holding fast to His unfailing words, I prayed for the joy of salvation to rule my heart in the midst of grief.

Half a year later, I'm still praying for joy. But not because God is unfaithful to hear. Persecutions, pains, and trials will be at our doorsteps as unwelcome guests. But the "sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). Christians, even in the midst of hardships, the joy of the salvation still remains. We are His children, rightfully calling the Almighty God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, as "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). And that's why I continue to pray. I pray knowing that my Father will supply infinite amount of strength to rejoice in hope. And I pray that this life-giving truth brings comfort and peace for you. May you endure all seasons of life, vibrantly colored with the joy of the Lord.

-HSW