

Embracing Joy

As we prepare this morning for prayer, I encourage you to quiet your surroundings; still yourself of external and internal distractions.

Write down those things you need done today, this week, and what you may have missed last week. (Pause)

Intentionally prepare your surroundings, your mind, and your heart to speak to your Heavenly Father. God is patient and is happy to wait for us to still ourselves to be in His presence.

(Pause)

Today we are going to Embrace Joy.

A Little background on the narrator today, I am Deborah Brown. I am the mother of four. My eldest is 10 and my youngest is 3. My husband is Burton; he serves as a police officer for the City of Springfield. He has rotating shifts and needs his own color coded Google Calendar to keep track of days and times for work and trainings. I am fortunate to be a domestic engineer, or stay at home worker, that earns no vacation time or has any sick leave, but the other benefits are great! Adjectives that describe our family are busy, chaotic, and hopefully kind and helpful, but busy and chaos-infused is really us (self-inflicted and otherwise).

Whenever the Brownies load up in the van to leave, we say a prayer that is the same *every time*. It has prayers of safety and favor. Having a heart that seeks and fears Him. That we would be godly friends and have godly friends. We thank God for His blessings and at the end, there is a call and answer portion where they state characteristics we pray for them to possess. And yes, it's a long prayer. It's full of great biblical "nuggets" that we have added, and added ... and added. But the first sentence of this prayer comes from Psalm 118:24.

"This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it."

(Pause)

Every morning, we say, "Thank you God for this glorious day, it is the day you have made and we will rejoice and be glad in it." We start our morning by stating we will be glad and have gratitude. I will be honest . . . it is not joyous getting four kids into the van. Joy is not how I feel trying to get all four kiddos to wake up, brush their teeth, especially for the two "full" minutes, let alone floss and mouthwash. Exacerbation is the

emotion of getting four pairs of socks and shoes on feet and out the door. In full disclosure, my three-year-old loaded the bus without shoes on the day I wrote this, but three out of four is still a passing grade. So the emotion I feel when starting this prayer, first thing in the morning, is exhaustion. The only thing running simultaneously is the exhaust/fumes from the van and me.

But when we start this prayer, we turn it all over to God. We reset that tension, that rush, and stop and thank Him for the day that he has made for us. We express our gratitude despite the obstacles and hindrances we have encountered. We know that God has made this day; moreover, everything and everyone in it. This joy is a choice, an intentional decision, to be glad. Furthermore, Psalms doesn't let us get away with being just glad, but rejoice. Rejoice or exult, delight, celebrate, or my favorite, jump for joy. It is a conscientious, deliberate decision to a) acknowledge He made this day and everything and everyone in it b) celebrate and exult this acknowledgement and c) choose to be glad and joyful. "We will be glad in it." We will, not wait for it to come, not if, not by others or circumstances, but We and Will. Furthermore, will will be glad *in* it; not on this day we will be glad . . . but in this day, throughout this day. Prepositions matter people. This is a big task or undertaking, but with repetition and God's grace. . . the Brownies have *decided* to celebrate and be glad in this day, everyday.

(Pause)

Just as we stopped everything to clear our minds, hearts, and surroundings to speak to our Heavenly Father, we need to do the same to decide to choose and embrace joy. Embrace means to take or receive gladly or eagerly. Can you decide to eagerly choose joy? (Pause)

To state that you will have joy by appreciating what God has done, is doing, and will do. Embrace joy with gratitude? (Pause)

Can you take delight in God's creation as he takes delight in His creation? (Pause)

I pray that we all pray to embrace joy, willingly, full heartedly, and without hesitation. Take these next few moments to pray to embrace joy.

(Long Pause)

In these final moments together, let's meditate on Psalm 118. It's one of my favorites.

Psalm 118

1

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

2

Let all Israel repeat:

"His faithful love endures forever."

3

Let Aaron's descendants, the priests, repeat:

"His faithful love endures forever."

4

Let all who fear the Lord repeat:

"His faithful love endures forever."

5

In my distress I prayed to the Lord,
and the Lord answered me and set me free.

6

The Lord is for me, so I will have no fear.

What can mere people do to me?

7

Yes, the Lord is for me; he will help me.

I will look in triumph at those who hate me.

8

It is better to take refuge in the Lord

than to trust in people.

9

It is better to take refuge in the Lord

than to trust in princes.

10

Though hostile nations surrounded me,

I destroyed them all with the authority of the Lord.

11

Yes, they surrounded and attacked me,

but I destroyed them all with the authority of the Lord.

12

They swarmed around me like bees;

they blazed against me like a crackling fire.

But I destroyed them all with the authority of the Lord.

13

My enemies did their best to kill me,

but the Lord rescued me.

14

The Lord is my strength and my song;

he has given me victory.

15

Songs of joy and victory are sung in the camp of the godly.

The strong right arm of the Lord has done glorious things!

16

The strong right arm of the Lord is raised in triumph.

The strong right arm of the Lord has done glorious things!

17

I will not die; instead, I will live
to tell what the Lord has done.

18

The Lord has punished me severely,
but he did not let me die.

19

Open for me the gates where the righteous enter,
and I will go in and thank the Lord.

20

These gates lead to the presence of the Lord,
and the godly enter there.

21

I thank you for answering my prayer
and giving me victory!

22

The stone that the builders rejected
has now become the cornerstone.

23

This is the Lord's doing,
and it is wonderful to see.

24

This is the day the Lord has made.
We will rejoice and be glad in it.

25

Please, Lord, please save us.
Please, Lord, please give us success.

26

Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of the Lord.

27

The Lord is God, shining upon us.

Take the sacrifice and bind it with cords on the altar.

28

You are my God, and I will praise you!

You are my God, and I will exalt you!

29

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

(Pause)

Embracing joy may not change your circumstances. Choosing to be joyful may not change those around you. But by claiming and celebrating the joy God has shown you, is showing you, and will show you, you are changing your heart. Take this day to contemplate, pray, and celebrate the joy God has, is, and will bring because he loves you.