

*"You will make known to me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy,
in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.
~Psalm 16:11*



Receiving Joy!

by Josh Glaser, Executive Director

We were made for joy. Something inside us knows it. Something inside us *feels* it. We are hungry for joy—pleasure, rapture, ecstasy, bliss . . . Heaven. And this desire—our desire for joy—is not secondary to the human experience. It is foundational. We need joy.

With that said, this article is not a step by step guide on how to feel better fast. You know how to do that, and you know where that leads—certainly not to joy. Nor is this article an admonishment to “cheer up” or to “stop feeling sorry for yourself.” Often, this kind of advice is more rooted in a discomfort with suffering than it is in any real understanding of joy.

Before sitting down to write this newsletter, I noticed that several of my recent articles have had a more “desert” or endurance theme to them—walking through the hard things en route to the good fruit God promises later on. I think this is so important, particularly in a world that increasingly points to our current subjective experience as the authority on how we should live sexually. In contrast, Christ taught His followers plainly that pain is a part of our experience in this life, and suffering is a part of the Christian journey.

In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

How do we reconcile these two seemingly contradictory realities: That we were made for joy and that this world includes suffering? Or for our purposes, how can we live out our need for joy while no longer attempting to sidestep the inevitability of pain in a fallen world by running to our old sexual sins?

GRASPING VS. RECEIVING

When we believe the enemy’s lie that God is holding out on us, that God has good but will not give it to us, we will inevitably begin grasping for whatever around us appears to offer us the “good” we need. This is what sexual lust

is all about. It is a grasping, a taking for ourselves what is not ours—a desperate grasping of the eyes for our own pleasure, no matter what the effect on others.

Dallas Willard puts it this way in his book *Renovation of the Heart*:

This is the basic idea back of all temptation: God is presented as depriving us by his commands of what is good, so we think we must take matters into our own hands and act contrary to what he has said.

Many who struggle with sexual sin have a deep (sometimes subconscious) sense that God isn’t going to meet our needs or doesn’t care about what we’re going through. In turn, when trouble comes as Jesus promised it would, we interpret it as God failing us. Feelings of pain, abandonment, shame, fear, and on and on ensue. To alleviate these, we are tempted to turn to lust, pornography, another woman or man, or some other form of sinful sexual pleasure.

Incidentally, this grasping can be for nearly anything: food, alcohol, justice, position, money, ministry, esteem, power, love, even godliness. And this grasping is just what the enemy is after. It is not the object of our grasping he is so much concerned about, but the action itself. The action of grasping (in any form) is an action of self-will, of taking for self, rather than trusting, resting, and receiving from God.

Consider Adam and Eve in the Garden. The serpent’s temptation to them was centered around the notion that what God was withholding from them was to “be like God” (Genesis 3:5). The terrible irony is that among all the creatures on the earth, none was as like God as man and woman. To humanity and humanity alone, God had given His image and in His likeness (Genesis 1:26, 27). So again, the enemy’s main approach in temptation was to get Eve and Adam to believe the idea that God was holding

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out good from them and that if they were going to get all the good they could, they would have to take matters into their own hands. They would have to grasp.

We see this same idea fleshed out at the beginning of Jesus' ministry when He is tempted by the devil in the wilderness. After Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove, and God spoke to Him out of Heaven: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Mt. 3:17). Forty days later, the enemy assaults Jesus with three temptations:

1. "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (Mt. 4:3).
2. "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down [from the top of the temple]" (Mt. 4:6a).
3. "All [the kingdoms of the world and their glory] I will give to You, if You fall down and worship me" (Mt. 4:8,9).

Again, the serpent's temptations were centered around the notion that Jesus was not who God had made Him to be—that He wasn't the Son of God. The enemy attacks you in the exact same way—challenging your identity in Christ, suggesting that if you were really God's son or God's daughter, you wouldn't be so much like, well, you. You would feel differently, you would act differently, you wouldn't be struggling as you are with sexual sin. But the enemy is a liar. And when

we believe his lies, we are more prone to grasp at some bit of pleasure, some morsel of heaven.

Here's the reality: The joy you're after cannot be grasped. At least not without doing damage to its fullness. Joy is available to us, but it must be received.

Jesus responded differently than Adam and Eve, and in Him and with Him, we can respond differently, too. Jesus didn't grasp. He surrendered, waiting for God's timing and God's provision. He chose the path of receiving.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name . . . (Philippians 2:4 – 9, underline mine).

Receiving is different than apathy or sloth. It is not relinquishing ourselves without a fight to whatever comes. It isn't responding to our triggers by sitting down in front of the TV "waiting" for God to do something for us. No, receiving is active. Even children spring from their beds Christmas morning to run downstairs to open their gifts. The fact that the gifts are theirs to receive doesn't mean they wait in bed for them.

God is not calling us away from one pleasure into an eternal abyss and telling us to like it. He is calling us away from faulty pleasures to encounter real ones. Sin diminishes our minds, our spirits, our sight, so that we become myopic—seeing sin as our source for pleasure, when there is a world of legitimate joy awaiting us. Take a look again at Adam and Eve's encounter with the serpent on Genesis 3. In his crafty way, he drew their attention from all God had given them, and got them to focus on the one thing they were not permitted to have. Consider all the joy they lost when their eyes followed the enemy's pointed finger to focus on the forbidden fruit. Could the enemy be doing the same thing to you?

At minimum, we make it more difficult to receive the joy God gives us when we are also grasping for "joy" He hasn't given. In my experience, grasping requires something from me that leaves me encumbered and distracted from what God has given me to enjoy. The obvious example of this is the husband who looks at pornography while his wife is in bed in the next room. But this also applies when I have my mind set on how my life isn't as good as someone else's, or how I don't have as much, or if only I were married, or if only I were single, or

Please Pray With Us . . .

PRAY FOR:

- That our Northern Virginia banquet would glorify Christ, help men and women who are struggling with sexual issues, and inspire those who attend to partner with us financially.
- Several new programs and groups this summer in Northern VA and Baltimore (see p. 4).
- God's financial provision during the summer.
- Intercessors to join us in Project Rhoda that many might be set free (see p. 4).

We THANK GOD FOR:

- A successful 2010 Baltimore Banquet. Men and women heard testimonies of Christ's power to change lives, & \$30,000 was raised and pledged.
- Cheryl Durgin, who did so much for us as Administrative Assistant in her two years with the ministry.
- The opportunity to minister to those who seek His healing in the area of their sexuality.

For more information or in-depth monthly prayer requests,
E-mail info@RegenerationMinistries.org.

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if only my struggle were as easy as theirs, and on and on. Envy, lust, and coveting, keep us from receiving gifts that will bring real joy right where we are, with the life we have today.

Therefore, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1, 2).

WHERE TO BEGIN

Is godly joy readily available to us? Yes. And no. No in the sense that godly joy does not usually come to us in the same overpowering way that sexual pleasure does. We are invited into joy, but joy will not hold us captive against our wills. But yes in the sense that godly joy is always offered to us, and we can choose to open ourselves—to receive—God’s joy.

Now that you’ve read this entire article, I’ll share with you I consider myself somewhat of a novice at entering into joy. As a child, I think I was better at it than I am now. As an adult, with all the internal and external pressures of marriage, parenthood, ministry, management, home-ownership, etc., I have missed out on much joy. But the Father has been patiently walking with me, enabling me to embrace more joy, more of His life in the gifts He’s given.

So where do we begin? I’ll offer just a few ways that have been helpful for me, in hopes that they’ll be helpful for you.

- **Practice gratitude** – Spend deliberate time focusing on the joyous gifts you already have—physically, relationally, and spiritually. So many of us miss out on the life we have while we restlessly pursue the life we think we want.
- **Practice receiving** – Whether something God has given you (like mercy, for instance), or a compliment from a co-worker, or a gift from a family member, receive it with thanks and purpose to enjoy receiving it.
- **Laugh at yourself** – Often for me it is either pride or fear of rejection that makes it difficult to accept myself when I fail. But if the Father loves me as I am and remains faithful even when I fail, why should I treat myself differently?

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- **Honor your body** – I find the more I treat my body well through eating healthily, exercising regularly, and using my body for good, the easier it is for me experience joy.

- **Get into nature** – No matter the weather, there is something refreshing and orienting about spending even a short time outside. Take time to notice the beauty (both big and small) of nature—one of God’s first free gifts to us.

- **Banish the enemy** – In John, Jesus says, “The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy,” and I’ve found in my life that one way he does this is through words of accusation and condemnation. Taking time daily to bring the full work of Christ against the enemy has helped me tremendously.

- **Spend time daily with the Lord** – The operative word here is “with”. Many of us—even during daily devotional times, worship times, or prayer times—remain inwardly aloof toward God, as though He is far away. He isn’t. Jesus, “Immanuel” (*God with us*), is the “good news of *great joy* for all the people” (cf. Matthew 1:23, Luke 2:10). We do well to practice simply allowing ourselves to accept that He is walking *with* us moment by moment. It does our hearts good to spend time *with* someone as wonderful as He is who loves us so much.

Many of us know the erosive power of sexual sin on our lives. We’ve lost a great deal. We’ve traded real relationships for false ones, long-term progress for a momentary thrill, hard-earned responsibilities for fleeting pleasure, and authentic love for lust. Some of us have let friendships or family relationships fade. Some of us have forgotten our first Love. And in so doing, we’ve lost parts of ourselves.

Contrary to what the enemy says, you, too, are made in God’s likeness. You, too, are God’s beloved son or daughter in whom He is well pleased. This is why God says ‘No’ to sexual sin: He doesn’t want you preoccupied with grasping for self-worth, or love, or joy. He has life for you. As a gift. ■

God did not create us for his sake. . . . God created us for our own sakes, in total generosity, so that he might bestow on us a share in his own bliss. Our existence is a sheer gift, given so that we might experience God’s self-giving love. Gift. All is gift. If we let this truth sink in, it changes everything.

(Christopher West, *The Love that Satisfies*)

MINISTRY NEWS

Project Rhoda

In Acts 12, Peter was rescued from prison (and certain death) by an angel of the Lord. Once free, he made his way to a house where a group of believers were gathered praying. When Rhoda, a servant girl, heard Peter at the gate she told them he was free, but they couldn't believe it. It was too good to be true.

Prompted by the Lord in a time of corporate prayer for the ministry, this fall we are launching *Project Rhoda*. We're recruiting people to pray weekly in their homes in groups of 2 or more. Each group will pray for healing and freedom for one participant (anonymously) in the 2010-2011 *Living Waters* program.

Call Josh Glaser at 410-661-0284 or visit www.RegenerationMinistries.org to learn more.

RESCUE

Men are finding freedom from sexual sin! Rescue, one of our programs for men desiring purity through greater intimacy with Christ, will meet in Baltimore, Tuesday evening from 7:30 to 9:30 from July 6, 2010 to September 21, 2010. Please call the Baltimore office at 410-661-0284 for more information or to register.

CROSSCURRENT

CrossCurrent runs for 8 weeks (June 17-August 5) from 7:30 to 9:30 in Baltimore. CrossCurrent is an introduction to the more intensive Living Waters, and similarly, addresses issues related to sexual and relational brokenness. To enroll, contact Jamie Glaser at Jamie@regenerationministries.org or 410-661-0284, ext. 200.

EXODUS FREEDOM CONFERENCE

Registration is available for the 2010 Exodus Freedom Conference in Irvine, CA from June 23 through June 26, 2010. Please don't miss this incredible opportunity to learn more about God's truth, grace, and justice towards a world impacted by homosexuality. For more information or to register, visit www.exodusfreedom.org or call toll free (888)-264-0877.

LIVING WATERS

Anyone struggling to overcome relational or sexual issues, such as pornography, promiscuity, sexual addiction, homosexuality, codependency, and past sexual abuse is eligible to apply for the Living Waters support group. Regeneration is now accepting applications for the next 24 week session. Please contact the Baltimore office at 410-661-0284 or the Northern Virginia office at 703-591-HOPE (4673) for more information or to apply.

FOUR WEEKS TO GROW

For men struggling with SSA, Peter Mitchell will lead this 4-week program focusing on the connection between learning to hear God's voice and experiencing healing. Some healing prayer will be offered and participants will have the opportunity to practice listening prayer in a non-threatening environment. The program will meet Mondays, September 13-October 4 in Fairfax. Contact Peter at 703-591-4673 or peter@regenerationministries.org for more information.

Regeneration Is . . .

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Groups and Programs

Baltimore, MD

- Living Waters
- Rescue
(Sexual Purity Group)
- New Directions
- Just for Wives

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- Living Waters
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