

## Finding Joy in Unexpected Places

**This week's challenge is to find joy in a place that usually brings you stress or anger.**

With God's help, we can find something to rejoice for in every situation. Sometimes we need to pray for that kind of clarity, especially when life feels chaotic and out of control, and that is okay. Just spend some time this week deliberately searching for joy in places you usually wouldn't expect to find it.

For example, cleaning the house is not my favourite pastime. I usually put off my two least favourite weekly cleaning tasks until the end of the week: vacuuming/washing floors and cleaning the bathrooms. It doesn't matter when I do them though because without fail, every time I go through the effort to clean the house, the kids unleash some disaster on whatever I just accomplished. That will be the day for an accident on the bathroom floor or faces pushed against my recently wiped windows and always immediately after I clean them.

One day, recently after the pandemic was declared, I had kicked the kids outside and I was just finishing up with the upstairs bathroom, having done the floors earlier that day. I heard my husband come home and I headed into the kitchen to greet him. That is when I saw it. I stopped short and I could feel my shoulders slumping and my brow furrowing. There were little muddy footprints all over the floor. Foot prints heading to the downstairs bathroom (so clearly that is also a disaster now) footprints to the fridge, footprints to the cupboard where we keep the cups and then back to the fridge, and to top it off the little culprits had obviously brought the dog along with them on their little journey. I put my head in my hands and I started to freak out. My husband wrapped me in a big hug and whispered in my ear, "It's okay. It's okay, at least it's not worse." I look up at him shocked because this is a small but annoyingly chronic problem. How could it be worse? "How?" I demanded. "Ummmm.....there could be.....no little footprints?" was his response. There was clearly doubt in his eyes that this would alleviate my stress and anger at the situation. But I looked into those eyes, smiled and said "Yes. That would be worse." And I was being honest. That would be worse. I love my children dearly and I am so grateful that they are healthy enough to run and play and get dirty. So we are still working on *not* bringing that dirt into my house, and helping to clean it up when they do, but sometimes, (maybe often would be a more accurate word) there are little footprints pitter pattered throughout the house and in those times I (try) to take a moment, and breath, and say a little prayer of gratitude for my many messy blessings.

Generally when we have big problems, we look for the bright side of things because there has to be a bright side. Life would be too dark without one. When someone loses their home to fire, we always look to the survivors and give thanks that their lives were spared. When a country has been in turmoil, we turn to stories of liberation and rebuilding. We look for

the light in the darkness of these stories, and as we should. It is like the lyrics of that beautiful carol *I heard the Bells on Christmas Day* "God is not dead, nor does He sleep." There are moments of grace in these large, overwhelming disasters and they should be sought out. What we are going to remember this week though, is that God is also in the mundane. He is in our frustrating, every day moments as well as our large, overwhelming disasters. There is joy and blessing in all things if we take a moment and pray for sight to see it.

### **Examples that may speak to the children:**

Homework can be frustrating, but it feels amazing to finally understand how to do a difficult problem.

Cleaning your room can take time from what you'd rather be doing but once completed, a clean room helps calm the mind and it is much easier to find things.

It hurts when we fall off our bikes, but the feeling of accomplishment when we've learned a new trick is overwhelming.

It can be difficult waiting patiently for our parents to finish talking on the phone before requesting something, but if we wait then our parents will have more patience with us and will be able to give us their undivided attention.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

Holy God,  
We say, Holy, Holy, Holy are you, Lord. Your ways are higher than ours and yet, your thoughts are tender towards us. God, we ask that you would pour inexpressible joy on us as we believe you for peace, goodness, and your timing in our circumstances. How you love us and so we love you back.

Lord, we grieve. We grieve over our losses and disappointments, our wounds and our pains, and the thousands of little contradictions and annoyances of our days. We hold our brokenness up to you and surrender the pieces of shattered dreams to your healing touch. Touch us with your love that we might rejoice and bring you glory and honor as you reveal yourself to us.

Lord, we adore you. We surrender because you are love and even when we cannot see you, we trust you. Fill us with your joy as we walk in faith. Mother Mary, please help us to find joy

despite the circumstances surrounding us, just as you did, because you were always close to Jesus. Amen.

(Modified from: <https://welcomegrace.com/2019/07/a-prayer-to-find-joy-when-joy-is-hard-to-find/>)

### **Readings:**

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalms 16:11

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Psalm 51:12

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. Matthew 2:10

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Luke 2:10

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Thessalonians 5:16-18

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. Isaiah 12:3

### **Songs of the Week:**

Ode to Joy, Joy to the World, Sing Mary Sing, Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

### **Video Lectures:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RleRm-GBOA>

Father Mike Schmitz Why Joy Is More Christian Than Happiness (7:46 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Cue0FnwfyQ>

Having Joy in Uncertainty Father Mike Schmitz (9:50 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHmTcxYHzy8>

The Beatitudes: The Key to Joy (by Bishop Robert Barron) (8:18 min)

Please consider checking out Brother Francis Days of Advent program on Formed for your children to enjoy throughout Advent. You may obtain a membership through FFI. (<https://famfi.ca/>) FFI has outstanding resources for the whole family.

### **Joy in Action**

Read Corrie ten Boom's story. She was a woman of bravery, humility and optimism. She was able to see her blessings even in the worst of times and that gift gave her the strength to survive a Nazi concentration camp and to encourage those around her in times of great distress.

<http://vancechristie.com/2016/11/22/giving-thanks-circumstances-corrie-ten-boom/>

### **Little Ones Object Lesson – Egg Drop**

What you need: - 1 egg per child participating, permanent marker, step ladder, plastic sheet (If you don't have a step ladder then just drop the egg from shoulder height)

#### The Activity

Talk to your kids about how God wants us to be joyful and how that is very different than happiness.\* True joy is a virtue that can be practiced and practicing other virtues can increase our joy. Give each child an egg and pass around a marker to label their eggs with a virtue. Then have them line up behind the stepladder which should be on the plastic sheet (table cloth or even a garbage bag). Have the first child climb to the top of the ladder holding the egg. Ask the child what virtue they selected. Then talk about how that virtue can increase your joy. Next, ask about ways it may be tempting to drop that virtue.

For example, it is virtuous to have integrity. We can experience joy when we are honest, trustworthy, dependable and kind. When might we feel tempted to drop that virtue though? Maybe when a friend asks us a question that we don't want to answer honestly? Or maybe if we know that our homework will take a long time to complete correctly we might be tempted to look up the answer in the back of the book or use a calculator? Maybe we said we would do something and then later decided that we don't want to fulfill our obligations. What if we heard something about someone and even though we know that gossip is wrong we passed the information along?

Next, ask the child to drop the egg.

Let everyone have a chance to discuss the virtue they chose and release their egg. Next, ask them

“Do you think it might be fun, exciting and sometimes thrilling to let some of these go?” discuss

“Do you think others might accept you better if you let some of these go?”

“Ultimately, who would you let down...who would be disappointed if you let one or more of these go?”

The joy that God offers often doesn't look as thrilling as dropping virtues can appear at the time but unvirtuous pleasures are fleeting and often leave a huge mess.

**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. John 10:10**

**Steal-** your true joy, and leave you with crippling guilt and shame and consequences. Steal your future joy too, especially when it comes to purity.

**Kill-** your passion for God and for following him. When we sin, we are separated from God and this often leads to a whole lot more compromise and pain.

**Destroy-** your purpose, some of the very things God has planned for you to do and to accomplish here on earth.

So don't let your virtues go. Hold onto them and God will increase your joy.

Finally, have the kids help you clean up the mess....even if that is messier. What do we do when we sin? We clean it up. We have to recognize the mess, and take it to God through confession. Nobody can do that for us. If we make a mess of our souls we have to bring our sin to God to be made clean. And, thankfully, God is happy to reconcile with us when we have repented and are truly sorry.

(adapted from The Very Best, Hands-On Kinda Dangerous Family Devotions by Tim Shoemaker)

*\* Earthy happiness involves relying on temporal pleasures whereas Christian joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Christian joy is eternal and circumstances do not affect one's spiritual joy. For example the joy we get from trusting in the Lord to guide our lives is much different than the thrill we get when our friends laugh at our jokes. Alternatively, friends not laughing at our jokes do not rob us of our spiritual joy but they make us unhappy in the moment.*



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