Where Is Your Joy?

Anyone who has ever suffered unfair criticism or gossip, cruel bullying or abuse of any kind knows what it is like to be without joy, whether momentary or long lasting. Those who have experienced abuse at the hands of their spiritual leader often feel as though they have nowhere to turn for help. Where is the hope? How can joy be found once more? Where is God in the midst of this heartache and pain?

While it has been many years since my husband and I endured the heartache, shame and devastation of clergy sexual abuse, we still encounter times when it seems Satan would be pleased to steal our joy completely and forever. Being in ministry is certainly not for the faint in heart! In fact, after an especially difficult few days of trials, we were blessed by God's perfect timing, once again.

In each of our devotionals for that particular morning, the focus was on joy and how to obtain and keep that joy in our hearts throughout every trial, large or small. Later that morning, as I began reading my Bible, I was touched as the Lord continued the theme of joy in my reading of 1 Chronicles 16. To set the stage, King David is bringing the Ark of God to Jerusalem. It is a solemn time, yet it is a joyous time. Everyone is celebrating. In the midst of this chapter, you will read the psalm of thanksgiving David delivered to the crowd. Verses 8-12 call us to rejoice in God, to praise Him, to show our gratitude for His countless blessings and to be mindful of His mercy. "Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth;"

When your joy is slipping away, do you sing songs of praise to God? Do you recount the marvelous works He has done in your life and offer Him praise and thanksgiving? If not, try it. It will help restore your joy!

Are you so discouraged that you think this chapter has nothing to do with your situation? Think again! Notice in verse 22 the saying that always seems to get twisted in instances of clergy sexual abuse, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." Many church members (not to mention victims!) feel as though they can't correct or discipline a pastor or spiritual leader because he or she is considered "God's
"anointed." That is simply not true! If a spiritual leader is acting outside the will of God and against a plain "thus says the Lord," there needs to be correction. This verse is not speaking of an abusive pastor who should not be removed from the pulpit because he is "God's anointed." In reality, this passage is referring the children of Israel as God's anointed and it is the heathen nations around them that are to "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

You, precious daughter (or son) of God, are His children. **You are special to God.** As if that were not enough reason to restore joy to your heart, you can rest assured that **God will contend with those who contend with you** (Isaiah 49:25). Let's read the rest of the passage in 1 Chronicles 16 now, starting with verse 23-36. "Sing unto the Lord, all the earth; shew forth from day to day his salvation. Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols: but the Lord made the heavens. Glory and honour are in his presence; strength and gladness are in his place. Give unto the Lord, ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Fear before him, all the earth: the world also shall be stable, that it be not moved. Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice: and let men say among the nations, The Lord reigneth. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof: let the fields rejoice, and all that is therein. Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the Lord, because he cometh to judge the earth. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. And say ye, Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen, that we may give thanks to thy holy name, and glory in thy praise. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for ever and ever. And all the people said, Amen, and praised the Lord."

What do you notice from these passages? What does this have to do with joy? Well, I noticed an outline for having joy and peace in one's heart. Do you see it? It includes seeking God with your whole heart, singing to God, declaring His wonderful works (sharing your testimony of what He has done in your life), praising Him for being God and Creator of all heavens and earth, glorifying Him for His goodness and mercy, worshiping God (not men or idols), acknowledging the gift of salvation through Jesus, and so much more. What hope! What comfort! What peace and joy can be found as we truly praise our God for what He has done in our lives!

Do you still think you have nothing to be thankful or joyful about? Think again! I have gone through this exercise with many victims who have come to me depressed, discouraged, feeling forsaken and abandoned by God. It's hard to start this exercise but, once you do, you will find your burdens get lighter and your peace and joy return. Ready to try it? Start by thanking the Lord for all the blessings He's given you. Can't think of anything? Well, start with the basics then. Can you see? Thank Him for the gift of eyesight. There are many who would wish to see as you do. Can you hear? Thank Him for the gift of hearing. So many suffer with hearing loss or deafness and would love to be able to hear birds singing or the sweet voice of a child saying, "I love you." Are you able to walk? Use your hands, feet, fingers and toes? Then thank God! Did you eat today? Praise God! Hunger and starvation abound not only in foreign countries, but also in the United States. Do you have a car to drive, a house to dwell in? That's more than our dear Savior had, so praise Him for those blessings!

I think you see my point. No matter how discouraged or depressed you may feel, no matter how bleak times may seem, or how low your level of joy may be, you can still choose to praise God. I promise, my friend, if you will do what the psalm of David outlines above, your joy will be full.

God bless you!