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The Joy to Be, Reflections on John 15

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I am fascinated by joy. Hi everybody, my name is Damon Owens, executive director of Joyful Ever After. A ministry dedicated to helping couples, married couples live that beautiful sacrament of marriage, but really rooted in joy using the great melody of Saint John Paul II's Theology of the Body. It's really a privilege to be part of this, Pray More Healing Retreat. And my contribution for these next few weeks is really going to be on joy itself, the joy to be. It's our first talk here, then we'll move to the joy to be loved. Understanding the true meaning and beauty of love, and the joy to be from, of belonging, of being part of a family and knowing what we're, where we come from. And finally, the joy to be for, exploring the beautiful truth and reality of marriage itself.

But let's begin with a prayer. *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in us the fire of your love, send forth your spirit and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth. Lord, grant us in this previllous time, meditating on the truths of joy and love and zeal, mission. That you give us an insight not only to principles, but to people, beginning with ourselves. Help us to see ourselves through your eyes, as your sons and daughters. Help us to see you as the father that we've never had before and could never find here on earth, and help that surety that confidence of knowing who we are, our identity, of hearing through a relationship, the mission that you have given us, a new lease on life. A new way of looking at what it means to be called by you, and to be ones who call as evangelizers. We ask Lord first for a healing, a renewal, a conversion of our own hearts, helping to see us through your eyes and know the joy that you have ready for us. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

Again, what a joy to be with you! And the series, The Joy To Be really comes from the name of the ministry that gave birth to Joyful Ever After. And we were called Joy To Be for a number of years and I love the tagline still. The joy, to be a man, the joy to be a woman is rooted in the joy to be loved, as sons and daughters of God the Father. It was a real foundational principle there, and that first go round of understanding joy, that it's not just a delight or a pleasure, but has real deep supernatural and natural meaning, as we'll get to in this first presentation here.

But, joy has really been a part of everything the Lord has called me to in ministry in these years and when we're doing a reflection then, and even with Joyful Ever

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After, what are we about, what are the principles? Joy just bubbled up as a theme, and I'd like to think that he's creating me, he's renewing me to be an apostle of joy, if there is such a thing. Because it's what I want, it's what I desire, it's what moves hearts. And what's beautiful about joy, is that even unlike love which we'll get to in the second presentation, the joy to be loved. Joy is also a human universal, like love, but far less controversial. It is really one of the few precious human universals, meaning you'll find it that transcends nationality, culture, race, religion, everyone recognizes it and everybody wants it.

Joy has the power to pierce through our anger, our fear, even apathy, doubt, suffering and even suspicion. Joy is so intoxicatingly attractive, and it's impossible to fake. I mean, you can't put a face on it. But it really is a truth that's meant to radiate. It comes to the innermost being and flows out in a way that people recognize, literally "re-cognize," -come to know again. Joy has a weight, a gravitas. It's a depth, a strength, an endurance, and even a bit of a mystery to its gravitational pole, that we're drawn toward it. It draws us in, and it delights us in a way that's more than just pleasure. It's more than just in a moment or a mood. It's very supernatural. And again, unlike that fickle pleasure, which again is, it comes in and goes, depending on what delights us or even our current modern sense of happiness is like a fair weather mood situation. Joy, possesses its own unmistakable certainty, it's a certainty, a maturity and a meaning. And each of us longs for that certainty, of knowing who we are, of belonging to something or someone, and of having a great meaning and purpose in our life.

You see, joy is more than that sense of pleasure, or happy mood or having things go our way. As good as these things are, it's much deeper than the fleeting emotions and circumstances. It's a deep intuitive knowing that we matter to someone that we're irreplaceable to someone greater than ourselves, and then it reveals our true self. Joy is not rooted in what we do. Here's the key, joy is rooted in who we are, in whose we are, and why we exist. Identity, relationship, and mission.

That's not just a religious proclamation, poets, philosophers, scholars, scientists, and even grandmas, from every culture, every age, every race, and religion, have pondered this secret of joy. And we don't get an exemption, not even our advanced technology and the access to all this information in Google and the internet and the webs and the webs, the web. And our material prosperity, the fact that we have so much stuff here in the west at least, it doesn't give us a pass to this universal human need and desire for joy.

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Here are the key questions. "Who am I? Why am I here? How do I live to be truly happy?" These questions matter most to us even if we can articulate them in different stages of our life. These are deep questions of every human heart, and they deserve and they long for deep answers, true, good and beautiful answers that are like a song to our hearts, a song. Not just words and lyrics not just a melody, but a song of love, a love song that captures our imagination and our memory. It captures our hopes and our dreams. Sometimes of things we even dare to dream of; the dare to hope for. This love song affirms who we believe we are, while at the same time, inspiring us to become what we long to be. Doesn't that ring in your heart? Well, in a very real sense, the entire Christian faith, the salvation story, our proposal to the world, is the Song of Songs, who's lyrics are true, who's melody is beautiful, and who's goodness sings to the deepest recesses of our hearts.

Jesus Christ sings our song to us, so that we might remember, remember. Remember who we are, remember where you're from, why you were created to live, our identity, our relationship and our mission. With the eyes of our heart, gazing into those of a father, we long for, we hear, we can hear deep answers to our deepest questions. Or imagine this conversation, work with me, right?

"Who am I?" We asked a question, and the Father answers, "You are my child. You're my daughter, my son, in who I am delighted. I made you in my image and likeness, yet unlike any other." And we like that answer. But we asked, we said, "who are you?" And he answers, "I am your Father, who loves you, I am life, I am love, I am truth. I am goodness, I am beauty, I am joy, I am."

Well we ask, "why am I here? Why do I exist?" And he looks at us with that delight that we long for in a father, delighted that we asked the question, delighted that we trust in him with the answer. And he says in that fatherly voice that gives us all that confidence, confide the faith. And he says, "You're here to come to know me as your Father to entrust yourself to me as my child. -So that I may share with you my perfect and blessed life, of love and joy."

And we ask in a delighted, innocence and expectation, well, "Then how do I live to be truly happy?" And he keeps it simple. He says, "Come to know me as your Father. Entrust yourself to me, as my son or my daughter. Accept my will for your good." That's love, willing the good of the other. And his very being is one of willing our good. And that's obedience, "obedire,"- to listen to, to know that whatever commandment that may be, remember the law or will, this immutable truth, is for our good, whether we understand it, whether we agree with it. But as a father and a daughter, a father and a son, receiving what the Father says, as it itself an act of love. And he says, "*Hear my testament, my calling to you of truth. Be my*

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*heir, receive an inheritance of eternal life of love and of joy and share it." Share it lavishly, prodigally. That's the prodigal son. There's a prodigal father, and there's even a prodigal brother, right? In that story in John. And the story is that it's just lavish. And the Lord says, **"What I've given you freely, you freely give."** And this is why our verse really for this is taken from the Gospel of John, chapter 15, verse 11. This actually was a key verse for the ministry Joyful Ever After, and some of the reflections I'm sharing with you from an unpublished book of ours, to get to this. But John 15:11, rocks it, you can take this to the chapel with yourself, he says, **"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full."***

And if you think that gives you a pass in terms of the commandments and the law of the doctrine. You need to read John 14 and then back John 15:12. Keep going down this verse, like he says it right again, **"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this than a man, lay down his life for his friends, you are my friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants. For the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you, friends. For all I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you may go and bear fruit" And that your fruit should abide. So that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you, this I command you to love one another"**

I didn't mean to read all of that, but it's just you can't stop when you see the connection between joy, love, commandment, relationship. This joy that Jesus wants us to have, is the joy that's his, because of his relationship with the Father. If you've seen the Father, you have seen me, the Father and I are one. And leading up to John 15:11, that **"I've told you all these things so that my joy may be in you,"** it's all about the commandments.

First, love the Lord God with all of your heart, your soul, your mind, strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. But it includes every law, every Iota. If that's in the Greek. The "Yod" is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, right? But it means everything, everything. So the law and love, we think that they're separate, but they're inseparable, they're distinct. But the expression of love is the acceptance as a child, as the son of God, a son or daughter of God the Father, and everything he's given us is for our good, he is willing our good. Will we let him will our good? And there is the exercise of freedom.

You see this joy that we have is relational. We can move forward to what Pope Benedict says here, because in order to understand joy, we have to understand

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love. And as we move into that next meditation here on love, let's take a look how Pope Benedict connects these two, he says, *"The source of Christian joy, is the certainty of being loved by God" The certainty! So joy is the certainty of being loved by God, loved personally by our creator. By the one who holds the entire universe in his hands and loves each one of us, and the whole great human family, with a passionate and faithful love. A love greater than our infidelities and sins, a love which forgives."* Ain't that beautiful? We're talking about something far deeper than just a servant who does the good and avoids evil. That's a good start, that keeps us alive. The law keeps us alive. But we're alive for a purpose. We were created for that purpose. It's a mission to love. And the fruit of that love is joy. And what we'll explore in again in the next meditation, the details, the depth of this love. Let's abide in the reality of the connection. That God created us for joy. We were created for joy, eternal joy in him. It's an inheritance, it's a birthright. And yet at the same time, it's something that we have to, enter into in freedom, which then involves the will. And the path to that formation is the mission to love.

Joy is the fruit of love, as we said in that great theme of our mission, the joy to be a man and the joy to be a woman, just to be, is rooted in the joy to be loved as sons and daughters of God the Father. Yeah, joy is the fruit of love, and it's the tree of life, is a family tree. Right? Every family on earth takes its name from the family of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, something right out of our catechism. And this is where all creation is rooted. But let's think about that in terms of agriculture again, only mature trees bear fruit. Bearing fruit is a sign of flourishing that a tree has become fully what it is. What is it? Six eight years for apple trees, fruit trees to actually bear fruit. Rooted in life and love itself, we have been created to receive and give life and love, unlike any other creature. It's the way God created us. In our universally human search for joy, is in fact a mission to love, and to be loved. It's a call from our deepest innermost being, to in the words of Saint John Paul II, *"to become what we are."*

He said that in "Familiaris Consortio" The family in the modern world. Families become what you are. I know that drives English majors crazy. It's not even like a funky sentence but, become what you are. Which leads us hopefully to the next question, which is, when do we first experience love? When do we discover the joy that love brings? It's just an exercise of the mind. It's not like we can go back to the memories, of being a baby, when we first discovered love and joy. But we can look at babies now and see the connection, right? It's a special delight when newborn babies are with us. When there's a baby there's just, it lights up a room and it brings joy. Because we love on this baby and we watch what happens. Love on a baby and watch what happens, the room, our cells, our hearts, just quivering with the joy.

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That love we give and receive, and that exchange has its natural and supernatural reality of bringing us joy. And we speak about this mission to love. It brings us to the reality that there's work involved, not necessarily toil. But there's work in order to accept this mission to love, and to build the virtues, the habits, the good habits, that allow us to receive it and to give it to others in that prodigal, lavish way. And we have to engage our minds to know, we have to engage our will in order to choose, and virtues to form good habits, for our passions and for our body. This is that integral view of the person that wholeness but at the same time, almost a paradox, love is not meant to be grasped. We don't just go out and get it. It's meant to be encountered, and experienced and received.

And I'll leave you with this quote from John Paul II, in the Redeemer of Man number 10, And he says, *"Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself. His life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him. If he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. Love gives us the whole truth about who we are."*

So how, how do we love in a way that we can receive the joy that we desire? Well, that is in our next meditation on the joy to be loved. Will see you next time.