

## **How to Have More Joy**

### **Ashley Stevens**

Hi, my name is Ashley Stevens, from Mountains Unmoved. And today, I'm excited to talk about how we can find more joy in our lives this advent season. But before I begin, let's open in prayer.

### **Opening Prayer**

*In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, amen. God, I thank you for how joyful this season is. I thank you for the gift of your son. But I also just know there's so much stress and anxiety this year, this time of year, and I just pray in this talk today we would all be reminded to keep our eyes on you, to find our true joy. In your name I pray, amen. In the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.*

### **Deep Seeded Joy**

Before I begin, let me first clarify we all express joy differently. I think my husband would laugh that I'm giving a talk on joy right now. But there are people I think of that come to mind that just literally shine with joy, they're always smiling ear to ear, always giggly, just kind of light up the room. That's not the way I show joy, and that's okay. I was raised right outside Philadelphia, my joy is expressed more a quiet peace, quiet contentment. So, I think what we're going for today is not inauthentic giddiness, but rather a deep-seeded joy in Christ, whatever that looks like for you.

And we're going to dive into the verse many of us know from 1 Thessalonians, that says be joyful always, pray without ceasing, and in everything, give thanks. And really dive into those tenants to figure out how we can live our lives more joyfully this time of year. So, the first, kind of the premise of the talk, be joyful always.

### **Use Your Free Slots for God**

I read recently in a book by Jen Hatmaker, the premise that goodness in, the goodness we put into our lives equals goodness out. And to flush that a little more, the more we go to God's word, the more we go to prayer, the more we go to listening to a holy podcast, the more we fill what we look at and listen to and watch with goodness, the better equipped we are to reflect God's presence, to reflect his joy.

And I found this personally to be true. Some mornings I wake up just five minutes earlier than my girls, and during those five minutes, I pull out my bible and I just choose one chapter. And I read that one chapter, and I pick out one word in one phrase that sticks out to me. And I really

## Pray More Advent Retreat 2021 - Transcript

just in those short five minutes, really pray about why that word in that phrase stick out to me and kind of offer my day to God.

And I found that when I start my morning in this way, instead of scrolling my phone, which to be honest, many mornings I do, but when I fill my mornings with his goodness instead of scrolling Facebook, I am a more patient mom, I'm a more loving spouse, and I'm better able to reflect the joy of Christ.

So, that's a question, a challenge I'll offer it to you today, in your first free slot or in your last free slot, I don't know what your schedule looks like, but can you choose God's goodness? Can you choose the good of his word, can you choose to pray, can you choose to watch a good show with your family, can you choose goodness? Because I truly believe and I've seen when we do that more and more and get into the habit of that, we're much better able to reflect the joy of Christ.

### **What Makes You Come Alive?**

The second tenant is pray without ceasing. And for me personally, my prayer life has been an ebb and flow. There's some times in my life when I was younger that prayer came easily, and going to God came easily. And other times, when my faith walk was less strong, it became harder and less instinctive, I guess. But I think to really truly pray without ceasing, we need to be able to recognize God's voice.

There's a passage I'm going to read today from the Book of John, it's John 10:3-4. And in it, God says, to him the gatekeeper opens, the sheep, we're the sheep, hear his voice. And he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them and the sheep follow him for they know his voice. Do you know God's voice?

What can you do to better hear it? One of my friends in college asked me a question that I think helps me when I hear His voice less clearly, that helps me kind of to retune my ear to hear it better. And the question is, what makes you come alive? And when she first asked me that, I think I said food, oxygen. But what she was really asking, she was referring to the quote that says that vision of God is man fully alive, and she was asking me, which I'll pose to you, same question to you now, what things or activities make you feel closest to God?

And I found that year as I really reflected on that question that for me was three things, and they were the three ways that I came to know God in the first place. They were in the bible, they were in fellowship and bible study, and they were in praise and worship.

I was raised in a nondenominational church and just singing Amazing Grace and other Christian hymns, I really drew close to God listening to those lyrics. And so, in those three ways, when I

## Pray More Advent Retreat 2021 - Transcript

begin to feel distant from God, when prayer becomes harder, when I have a harder time hearing God's voice, I choose just one of those things to return to. I read the bible, I get involved in bible study, or I turn on K-Love, to really hear him better. Could you do one of the things that make you come alive this advent? Because I believe if you do, you'll be more attuned to pray without ceasing.

### **We are so Fortunate**

The last reflection is, in everything give thanks. We have it so fortunate, don't we? Just this morning, I drove in my van on a heated seat, I could turn a knob to be the exact perfect temperature I wanted, Google Map told me which directions I turn. We have it so fortunate.

But I think for many of us this time of year, the world kind of pressures us to make Advent season into a list of checklists. Perfect host, check. Perfect shopper, check. Perfect cook, check. And a lot of times, for me at least, that component of this season robs me of joy, of the joy that is should be about, about celebrating the birth of our savior, about gathering with family and friends in good fellowship.

And so, I think a question I'll ask you today, is what robs you of joy this advent season? Is it shopping and trying to make your presents equal for your kids? Is it traveling? Is it baking and hosting? What robs you of joy this Christmas season? And would you be able to say no to any of those things?

Because I've found personally, when I simplify my advent, when I make it truly be about gathering with my family, and with those I love, and when I limit the gifts to the something my kids wear, read, and do, you know what I mean, when I limit the present amounts, it's so much easier for me to be grateful rather than being tied up in all of the things that come along with the season.

So, if you're feeling stressed this time of year, ask yourself that question. What robs you of joy and really try to come together with your spouse or with your family, to set boundaries to be able to say no before the many opportunities present themselves.

### **A Reminder**

I want to close just with a reminder, our God desires us to have more joy than we can ever imagine. He gave us his son and we celebrate the birth of his son and our savior this time of year. And I truly believe if we fill our free slots with goodness, if we do the things that make us come alive to be able to better hear his voice, and if we give ourselves permission to say no and

## Pray More Advent Retreat 2021 - Transcript

simplify our advent, we'll be more able to give thanks and to reflect the joy of Christ this advent season. Let's close in prayer.

### **Closing Prayer**

*In the name of the father, son, Holy Spirit. Amen. God, I thank you for this holiday season. I thank you for the many gifts you bring, the many joyful moments, and I just pray amidst the busyness and the commitments, that we would remember to choose you, that we would remember to do the things that draw us to you, and we would remember and give ourselves permission to simplify our advent, to be able to truly give thanks and reflect your joy. It's in your name I pray, amen. In the name of the father, son, Holy Spirit. Amen.*