

## Comfort for the Depressed

David implores God in Psalm 51: 12: *“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and support me with a willing spirit.”* Many people are quite content to go to church, but don’t feel much of the excitement or joy that comes from walking closely with God. In fact, they seem to be afraid to show any feeling at all about their faith.

If people know that their sins are forgiven and that God loves them, they cannot but share the joy that they have in Him. Jesus said, *“I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”* Joy that is complete spills over to others.

Of course, joy isn’t something that we human beings can conjure up on our own. It isn’t something that we can have just by applying the strength of our own wills. Joy comes from faith, and saving faith in Jesus Christ comes from the Holy Spirit as He works through God’s Word to create it in our hearts.

Obviously, you and I, because of the weakness of our sinful natures, won’t always feel joyful. There will be moments or days when a physical ailment or a vexing problem will steal our joy away from us. Usually this is only temporary. And it doesn’t mean that faith is absent. But there may be seasons for both you and me when lack of joy becomes a chronic problem. Perhaps a personal tragedy, the loss of a loved one for instance, weakens our confidence and drains the joy out of our Christian lives. Or perhaps the devil or our sinful nature generates an unrepentant attitude, which likewise weakens our faith and drains the joy away. In cases like this we have a spiritual malady, for which God alone has the cure. Some Christians may not know exactly where the cure is to be found. Others may know, but the devil successfully keeps them away from it. Still others may know where the cure is, and they fail to expose themselves to it, but they don’t let it do its healing work. The cure is to remember that we have been redeemed, and to have the Word of God and His Sacraments do their work in us. We have to know that this is the cure for our spiritual blues. We must expose ourselves to the Word, and receive its healing power.

Doubt and fear are the chief the joy-stealers. But the Word of God can conquer doubt and fear. When we look to God’s Word, believing and receiving what it says, faith and trust can be strengthened, and joy and confidence can reappear. We look to the promise of Jesus that He will be with us to the end of the world (Mt 28:20), and that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hb 13:5), and we are greatly strengthened in our faith. We are bolstered by such Scripture passages as Psalm 37:4-5, where the Holy Spirit proclaims through David, *“Delight in the LORD, and He will give you your heart’s desire. Commit your ways to the LORD, trust Him, and He will act.”*

We read in Psalm 40 that our God lifts us out of the pit of our troubles and sets our feet on a rock, giving us a firm place to stand, and our trust increases. We read in God’s Word that the Lord is our Shepherd, who guards us from our enemies (Ps 23), that He is our Refuge (Ps 31 and 46), and that He is our Fortress (Ps 18, 62, 71). As we read, we receive, and believe what God says to us; our trust in Him is strengthened, and joy increases.

Perhaps bitterness, lack of forgiveness, or an unloving attitude toward others is festering in our hearts, eating away at our faith, and killing our joy. Then we need to take heed of Paul’s inspired words in Ephesians 4:31-32: *“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, and slander, along with every way of hurting one another. Be kind to one another and tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.”* When we look to God’s pronouncement of forgiveness upon us through our Lord Jesus, really receiving that message in faith, the Holy Spirit works within us to motivate us and enable us to forgive those with whom we are having a dispute. As the Holy Spirit through God’s Word helps us to release our anger and bitterness to God, confidence and love begin to return.

Let us implore our God in prayer to break down every barrier and remove every wall in our hearts so that the Spirit may have free course through baptism, His Word, and the Lord’s Supper to strengthen our faith, transform our lives, and increase the joy of our salvation. As children of God, bought and purchased with Christ’s own blood, we have everything in the world to be joyful about.

[Adapted from *Christian News*, 28 Sept., 1998, page 5.]