

Goodwood NEXT CHAPTER

Living the next chapter in the story of God's church.

VERSE FIVE

MAY

CELEBRATION

01 INTRODUCTION

Imagine Genesis if God approached his work as we so often do: In the beginning, it was nine o'clock, so God had to go to work. He filled out a requisition to separate light from darkness. He considered making stars to beautify the night, and planets to fill the skies, but thought it sounded like too much work; and besides, thought God, "That's not my job." So he decided to knock off early and call it a day. And he looked at what he had done and he said, "It'll have to do." - John Ortberg's *The Life You've Always Wanted*

Thankfully, this isn't the tone of Genesis. Ortberg instead describes the Creator as "a supremely joyful being." As His image-bearers, we fall short of the mark when we plod through our days with a grim outlook; we were created to live a joyful life of celebration!

But it seems that life itself gets in the way. We're busy with activity and bored with monotony. Celebration is often the last thing on our minds. Children, however, are in good practice; the happiest humans are the little ones, and Jesus asserts that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those with the essence of children (Matthew 19:14). Their pure, unbridled enthusiasm is precious to God.

When enthusiasm dwindles and life gets predictable, consider G.K. Chesterson's thoughts:

Because children...are in spirit fierce and free...they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, "Do it again"; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, "Do it again" to the sun; and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.

Chesterson suggests that children embrace repetition because their souls are fervent with celebration. Celebration invigorates us; it lifts our hearts; it dispels monotony. To practice the discipline of celebration is to free up the burden of our souls.

As adults, we often abandon the ardor of youth in favor of safe respectability. After all, we reason, our faith won't be taken seriously unless we appear holy.

We tend to separate "holy" and "happy" far too often.

For God, the Holy One, is the creator of happiness.

When we allow Satan to deprive us of the blessing of celebration – when he convinces us that living a holy life is living a somber life – we damage our testimony for Christ. Ortberg asks, "How often have people misunderstood God because they attributed to him the grim, judgmental, defensive, soul-wearying spirit of many who claim to be his followers?" A Christ-filled life of celebration brings blessing to us and to others...it gives a broken world reason to seek Jesus...it brings glory and honor to His name.

02 DEFINITION

The discipline of celebration involves focusing on an attitude of joy, gratitude, and praise in appreciation of events both great and small.

When I practice celebration, God blesses me with:

- a joyful life
- an uplifted heart
- a burden-free soul
- an increased endurance
- a strengthened testimony

03 SCRIPTURE

May's memory verse:

"This day belongs to the LORD! Let's celebrate and be glad today."

Psalm 118:24 CEV

Other Scriptures for study:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 2 Samuel 6 | Nehemiah 8:10 |
| John 15:11 | Acts 16:22-25 |
| Philippians 4:4 | Revelation 19:7 |

INTERESTED IN GOING DEEPER?

- Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster
- Spiritual Disciplines Handbook by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun
- The Life You've Always Wanted by John Ortberg

04 PRACTICE

Here are some training exercises to practice individually or with others this month. Choose one or two from each list and try them.

Personal Practice

- Memorize Philippians 4:8. When you're having difficulty celebrating, use this verse as a guide to get you on track.
- Take time to consider the great gift of salvation. Celebrate it! Follow David's example by writing a song or poem, or memorizing verses of praise (try Psalms 103, 145, 146) . . . whatever you do, do it with joy, praise, and thanksgiving in your heart.
- Read Zephaniah 3:17. Contemplate how God loves you and the ways in which He celebrates you. Take time to celebrate Him, and ask Him to show you how to appreciate yourself in the way that He does.
- Do something to encourage the people in your life that give you reason to celebrate.
- If celebration doesn't come easily for you, set aside one day a week as your personal Celebration Day. Exercise the discipline of joy; make a special effort to find reason for thankfulness and praise in your activities that day.

Interpersonal Practice

- Make a point to be aware of the victories in the lives of your family and friends. Turn those events into times of celebration. Host a special meal; read Psalm 136 together; have a group game night.
- Spend time with someone who is obviously joyful and celebratory. Ask them what their mind-set is.
- Focus on celebration during Sunday's worship service. The Lord's Supper contains beautiful symbols in commemoration of Christ's sacrifice. Singing is a natural time of celebration. Pay special attention to the words as you praise and celebrate our Father.
- As you practice the discipline of celebration this month, do so in anticipation of our 5th Sunday evening singing service on May 29.

Don't forget, true inward transformation leads toward action. Where are you going this year?

05 PRAYER

Richard J. Foster writes, "In the spiritual life only one thing will produce genuine joy, and that is obedience." Are you living in obedience to God? Pray that He will show you areas of your life which need complete surrender.

Realize that celebration isn't dependent on your circumstances. People often feel that they will be free to engage in celebration after certain changes occur. Use the words of Psalm 118:24 to write a prayer to God, asking Him to help you start today in practicing joy, regardless of your situation.

Other things you are praying for this month:

God's answers to your prayers:

06 MY STORY

Isn't it amazing to know that you are part of God's ongoing narrative? Use this section to record your thoughts and experiences on the discipline of praise so you can pick up this book in the years to come and reflect on how God is faithful in your life.

Be creative! Use these pages to write a journal entry. Attach a picture. Paste in a text message, Tweet, or e-mail. Do anything that will help you document your personal journey of celebration this month. You can get additional blank pages in the foyer or at www.goodwoodchurch.org.

Here are some questions to get you started:

- ? What new areas of celebration became known to you this month?
- ? What aspects of celebration come naturally to you?
- ? What ones are most difficult?
- ? How did you see your outlook change because you were practicing the discipline of celebration?
- ? Did others, especially non-Christians, notice your attitude of celebration?
- ? How did it affect them?
- ? In what ways did God bless you because of your attitude of celebration?

