

Follow God's Path Towards Joy



Christopher News Notes

WE ALL GO THROUGH LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LEAVE US TIRED, DRAINED, OR DEPRESSED. During these periods, happiness and joy seem elusive or non-existent. Though we can't wish or pray all our troubles away, we do have a choice to make. We can let ourselves be dominated by negativity—or we can try to find light in a dark situation. And focusing on that light may even lead us towards joy again.

The idea of “choosing joy” doesn’t mean forced cheerfulness or toxic positivity, but rather living in a way in which we trust in God’s guidance and strength, while focusing on the blessings around us.

Let Us Rejoice and Be Glad

Actor Josh Swickard, who portrays Detective Harrison Chase on ABC’s *General Hospital*, grew up in Illinois as the son of a pastor. When Josh turned 18, he asked himself an important spiritual question: “My parents believe this, and my grandparents believe this, but what do I believe for myself?”

He realized that Christianity felt true to him, so he lived his life accordingly. Still, Josh knew there was a lot more room to grow in his faith, and the perfect person from whom to learn had served as the best man at his wedding: his 97-year-old grandfather Arthur Brown, a World War II veteran who had run with a gang in high school, but who changed his ways after picking up a Bible that someone had given him.

When production of *General Hospital* shut down for several months in 2020 due to COVID, Josh called his grandpa and asked him if he wanted to do Bible studies over FaceTime. Mr. Brown was happy to oblige, so they connected for one to three hours every morning. Not only did Josh gain a greater understanding of Scripture, he came to appreciate his grandfather even more. During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Josh explained that his grandfather begins every day saying out loud the Scripture verse, “This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad.” He does it with a smile, regardless of how he’s feeling.

That ritual taught Josh that we can all choose thoughts and actions that affect our disposition. And while there are certain days when Josh’s spirit may be in the doldrums anyway, he finds comfort in the verse from Lamentations 2, which asserts that God’s “mercies...are new every morning.” In addition, Josh has begun his own daily conversation with God by saying, “Lord, I hope all my thoughts, my actions, and the words that come

The late John Scott endured tragedy after tragedy in his life, from the death of his father, to twice being hit by cars, to having his leg amputated. With no other family, John’s uncle welcomed him into his home to care for him.

Through all of John’s suffering, his joyful nature became legendary. Everyone knew him wherever he went, giving him hugs and stopping to chat. When he lost his leg, doctors were amazed at how well he took the news. John was so upbeat that doctors asked him to counsel other patients distressed at the prospect of having an amputation. This calling to visit the sick came to define John. He became a Third Order Carmelite, and, in addition to his work with prospective amputees, he undertook an informal ministry to nursing home patients.

John’s final days were marked by suffering, but he spent hours offering prayers for the intentions of friends, many of whom claimed those prayers were answered. May John Scott be a saint in heaven now and continue to intercede and spread joy to those in need.

out of my mouth glorify You.”

This practice has helped him see life in a more beautiful way—and to live with a sense of joy, humility, and kindness. He credits those virtues also to seeing the way his family has lived out their faith, without an overemphasis on judging others. “All I know,” Josh said, “is that God has called me to be the light or the salt, and He’s called me to love. When I break it down to that simple truth, everything else goes out the window.”

Suffering Doesn’t Undo Joy

At the end of December one year, Joy Marie Clarkson had a mystical experience that told her the coming year would be one of suffering. Initially, she wrote it off as OCD or intrusive thoughts, but she soon learned this was a message meant to prepare her for what was to come.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview about her book *Aggressively Happy: A Realist’s Guide to Believing in the Goodness of Life*, Joy said, “I feel like that period of my life was one of the first times I woke up to the fact that Jesus says, ‘In this life, you will have tribulation, but take heart for I have overcome the world.’ Having that sense of preparation made me feel like I wasn’t alone in it, that I was being guided through it. It helped me...get in touch with reality, which is that there will be diffi-

cult things. Then [it ushered] me into a posture towards life, which I have to learn again and again: to not be surprised by suffering and to know that it doesn’t undo the joy and beautiful things we experience. Also, to let it become something that softens you and makes you open to others, open to other people’s pain, and aware of God’s love in the midst of life.”

Joy notes that she doesn’t endorse toxic positivity, which is “an inability to deal with the actual griefs and heaviness of life.” Rather, she found comfort in both spiritual and tangible aspects of her faith, such as an elderly priest at Holy Thursday Mass washing her feet and then kissing them in a gesture of humility. Joy explained, “We experience these specific graces in the church, but also as Gerard Manley Hopkins says, ‘The world is charged with the grandeur of God.’ So, from poetry to the beauty of nature to the comfort of the sacraments, those were all things that helped me know that God was with me, that I was never alone in suffering, and that the suffering was never the fundamental thing...It didn’t have the final word in my life.”

Among the consolations of looking at life through the eyes of faith is the belief “that at the heart of reality is goodness, is joy—and that in choosing to cultivate happiness, we are speaking to that reality...Sometimes when I’m encountering difficulties,

trying to give kindness to other people is something that helps me feel better, because it also reminds me that I'm not just a victim to the rest of life. I can be an agent of positivity."

The Joy of Selflessness

A couple's wedding day tends to be a joyful experience for them. But when Diann Maurer and Donovan Poe of Irving, Texas, tied the knot in 2021, they aimed to spread the joy around through a unique act of selflessness.

Rather than guests bringing gifts for the newlyweds, Maurer and Poe asked those celebrating their day to either volunteer their time or make a financial contribution to the local St. Vincent de Paul pharmacy, which provides free medications to uninsured Texans in need.

The donation was met with gratitude from Sean Myers, President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of North Texas. He told *The Dallas Morning News*, "For them to take the spirit of joy that comes with celebrating marriage and use it as a catalyst to help others is unique and inspiring."

Participate in God's Joy

Father John Catoir, who served as Director of The Christophers from 1978 to 1994, passed into eternal life in April 2022. But his legacy as a "messenger of joy" lives on. Father Catoir grew up during a time when the Church's message was often focused on fear and sin, while ignoring the more

positive aspects of life and faith. When he heard Pope John Paul II note that joy was the keynote message of Christianity, Father Catoir felt called to share that idea himself.

In one video, he offered the following thoughts: "Accepting the life God has destined for us and living it as courageously as possible is the highest act of worship we can offer to the Father. The Lord God has always loved you, even in your sinfulness. He's desired to unite Himself with you before you even knew Him. God is with you now...the degree of your participation in God's interior happiness increases as you gradually open [yourself] to His love, responding to it with gratitude and joy."

"It's not enough just to know theoretically that God is love or that God is present," Father Catoir continued. "We should consciously experience His presence and respond to His love with joy. Simple, unforced, uncomplicated joy is the highest prayer. Spiritual joy—I call it Joy with a capital J—it's really God's life abiding in you. It is an awareness that lasts. It is something added to any other happiness you might have, anything that you may be feeling at any given moment. Eternal bliss may be a distant goal, but you don't have to wait until you get to heaven to enjoy your precious life. You can begin right now, in the bright and beautiful promise of eternal happiness."

In the end, it's important to admit that none of us will go through life feeling happy every day. There will be times when life simply wears us down. We shouldn't, however, stay stuck in the dark places. We can give ourselves permission to feel and deal with the negative emotions, then make a conscious choice to lift ourselves up and choose joy again. It isn't always easy, but it is worth the effort.


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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"Joy is a sign of generosity. When you are full of joy, you move faster, and you want to go about doing good to everyone."

—Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta