

Enthusiasm! The Magic Spark of Life



Christopher News Notes

ENTHUSIASM IS THAT ZEST FOR LIFE THAT MOTIVATES US TO DO THINGS WITH OUR WHOLE SELF. Derived from the Greek word which means “in God,” enthusiasm is that special recognition of God’s life in each of us. When God created man and woman, He gave us each a share in His life so that we could dream great dreams and have the courage to make them come true. He gave us His spirit of love so that we could reach out with that spirit, that love, to others.

That Magic “Spark”

“A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

—Ezekiel 36:26-27

One evening, the father of poet Emily Dickinson hurried to the church building in Amherst, Massachusetts, and began urgently pulling the bell rope. Hearing the sound of the bell, villagers rushed from their homes. “What was the alarm?” they wondered. “Fire? Accident?”

It was neither. Overcome by the beauty of the sunset, Mr. Dickinson was summoning everyone to revel in its magnificence.

It’s been said that life without enthusiasm is like a landscape painted in shades of gray—there is form, but no color. Instead, “be happy, render others happy, proclaim your joy, love passionately your miraculous life,” suggests Robert Muller, former assistant Secretary General, United Nations. “Do not wait for a better world; be grateful for every moment of life.”

- Most people who do things a thousand times do it like they’ve done it a thousand times before. Not Lawrence Avery. In his 40 years as a cantor at the Beth El Synagogue Center in New Rochelle, New York, he has prepared more than 1,000 young people for their bar or bat mitzvah. Says a student’s mother: “That he knows what he is doing is a given. What’s remarkable is his enthusiasm.” At 65, he entertains little thought of retirement. “We all want a foot in eternity,” he says. “I often think this is my way: to convey this beautiful message.”

- Erin Muth lamented her lack of friends. She would watch sadly as groups of other teens passed by, talking and giggling. Then one day, she made up her mind to stop brooding—and start doing something about it. She set out to make friends with those on her softball team. At her after-school job, she resolved, “I’m going to smile a lot at the new people I meet.” In her prayers, Erin concentrated on making Jesus her friend and sharing

Light Your Life with Enthusiasm

As with any fire, the spark of enthusiasm needs care. But, how can we nurture our enthusiasm day-by-day? Consider these ideas:

- **Rest in God.** Pray to hear God and be strengthened by Him. Remember the words of the psalmist: “Be still, and know that I am God.”
- **Refresh yourself.** Take a break from your hectic pace and go for a stroll. Warm yourself in the sun, and listen to the sounds around you.
- **Forgive yourself.** Let go of something that is stifling your enthusiasm.
- **Smile often and affirm others.** A mother writes of her son’s third grade teacher: “Always smiling, helpful and loving, she touched our hearts in everything she did. We have become better by knowing her.”
- **Give it all you’ve got.** If someone asks for help, accept. Doing good for others, making them feel good, will make you feel better about life—and yourself.
- **Celebrate each new day!** Fix a special meal for your family. Take a friend to a movie; have a “celebrate Thursday” party; or watch a sunset. Find something each day to appreciate and celebrate.

everything with Him. As a result of her new enthusiastic, “take-charge” approach to life, Erin has a new attitude these days: “Watch out world! Here comes the most positive person alive.”

- Tom and Nancy Frederick had long wanted to share with others the love of God they had experienced. One Sunday morning, attending church with their infant son, Josh, they heard about lay people serving others in the Third World. At first dismissing the idea as “for single people only,” they learned of a whole family that was going. “The word, ‘family,’ just lit in my mind,” said Nancy. “I looked at Tom and he looked at me; we knew this was something we had to do.”

A “Spark” — in Dark Times

“For a little while you may have to suffer various trials...Though you do not now see Him you believe in Him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy.”
—1 Peter 1:6,8

- For the first time in his life, Daniel Welte found himself out of work and realizing that “joblessness can shake the soul of even a summa cum laude graduate of the school of positive thinking.” Welte developed some practical suggestions to keep his

own and other job seeker’s spirits—and enthusiasm—high: Release tension through exercise. Spend time with family and friends. Thank God first for the gift of life. Welte adds, “No matter how frustrated and terrified we become, we must persevere, trusting in the goodness of God.”

- Minnie Sawyer has had a life riddled with troubles. Her only son died at the age of three from a congenital heart condition. Her husband suffered a nervous breakdown. And Minnie herself was blind by the age of four. But this San Antonio, Texas woman approaches life and her work at the Lighthouse for the Blind with “high energy.” She also volunteers to teach English conversation skills to Spanish-speaking persons in her community. Her credo: “Think positive. Never look back at what could have been. Look at what can be now. God has a way of showing us more.”

- Chris Smith hopes that when he serves Mass at St. John Gualbert Cathedral in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, he shows, in his own words, “that deaf people can do the same things that other people can do.” The 16-year-old, who was born deaf, emphasizes that his hearing impairment doesn’t—and shouldn’t—limit his capabilities.

"That is the lesson I want to show others by my life," he says.

■ When George Allen of Nashville was named "counselor of the year," he thought back to the days when he was sleeping on the streets and under bridges. Having hit bottom from his dependence on alcohol, he was penniless. A counselor found Allen, and challenged him to recover. "The self-pity ends here," she told him. It took time, but his commitment was firm. Now, he reaches out with that same enthusiasm to others. "Isn't life great!" Allen says often. "Just to be here and appreciate what we have is awesome."

Ignite a "Spark" in Others

"Rekindle the gift of God that is within you...for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love."
—2 Timothy 1:6,7

Sometimes our "spark" of enthusiasm can light the way for others. Our attitude and actions can give others a message of encouragement that makes positive things happen.

■ Antonio Valencia came to New York from his native Mexico in 1954. Alone and speaking no English, he eventually landed a job as a live-in housekeeper. "I was tempted to go back many times because I was so lonesome here," Valencia says. "But there was something that made me stay here, the opportunity to help my people." These days, the 70-year-old tells others from his homeland their options, helps them find jobs and housing, and gives them a sense of community.


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

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■ By the time William Lloyd Garrison started publishing his anti-slavery newspaper in Boston in 1831, slavery had marred the history of this nation for more than two centuries. He would wage a war in print for decades: "On this subject...I will not retreat a single inch—and I will be heard." After a time, he and others like him were heard; their passion for justice won out.

■ Tony Giorgio of Orlando, Florida, always thought that children in need got help. Then a friend's child died because money for a bone marrow transplant was a few days late. Today, he works to find money and medical expertise for ill and dying children. He takes time off from work—time he loses pay for—to do this "extra" job. It's his way of ensuring that no child or family ever feels alone during a time of suffering.

■ Naomi Elizabeth would bemoan the death of those younger than she, saying, "Why doesn't God take me? I'm old and useless." Her son-in-law told her, "God probably doesn't want you because you still have something to do." In the last 10 years of her life, living in a Kentucky nursing home, she found her mission. As a kind, positive person, she made others feel good about themselves every day.

As automotive pioneer Henry Ford put it: "Enthusiasm is the yeast that makes your hope rise to the stars...the sparkle in your eye...the swing in your gait, the grip in your hand, the irresistible surge of your will, and your energy to execute your ideas. Enthusiasts are fighters. They have fortitude. They have the staying qualities."

"Enthusiasm is one of the most powerful engines of success. When you do a thing, do it with your might. Put your whole soul into it. Stamp it with your own personality. Be active, be energetic, be enthusiastic and faithful, and you will accomplish your object."
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

This is an edited version of the classic Christopher News Note, "Enthusiasm: The Magic Spark of Life."