**GOD'S JOY - HE IS CRAZY ABOUT ME**

At creation God looked at what he had done with delight...that includes us! Have you ever thought about God looking at you with tremendous joy? How can he be crazy about me? One reason is that he sees us through the blood of his son, Jesus, and sees that while we are already his children, we are still becoming what he designed us to be.

The old saying is that love is blind. Maybe it is, blind to the faults of the other person, perhaps. We fall so head-over-heels in love (or “like”) that we cannot see the shortcomings in the one we love. I know my wife is either totally blind to my faults are just a person of huge grace that loves me with my faults.

That is the kind of love called “grace”…it doesn’t love us in spite of our faults or because it is blind to our faults. God’s grace and nature is to love us WITH our faults! He knows us better than we know ourselves. He sees our faults/sins, knows the sins of our future, realizes how much we will fail him, even walk away from him…BUT he loves us anyway.

*Genesis 1:31 God looked over everything he had made;  it was so good, so very good!  It was evening, it was morning — Day Six.*

*Isaiah 62:5 And as a bridegroom is happy in his bride, so your God is happy with you.*

*Zephaniah 3:17 The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*

God loves me, he sees me as so very good, he delights and exults in me! I don’t know about you but I love being with people who are crazy about me. It is totally awesome to spend time with someone whose words and actions just keep saying “I love being with you”. How much greater is it to know that God almighty is just that way!

Okay, a little exercise in realizing how God feels about you: go ahead, verbally, out loud, say to yourself “The creator of the universe, the only true and living God, is CRAZY about me!” Feels good, doesn’t it? It’s the truth so let’s live our lives as God’s delight, not fearful of an angry God, but ever drawing closer to a God that is just plain nutso about us.

Now the nitty-gritty:

\*in light of this, how should you live out your life today knowing that God is crazy about you?

\*if God loves us this way what does it tell us about the way we are to love?

\*since God is holy and just, how is it that he is crazy about us, his sinful creation?

***God, today I worship you for being so crazy in love with me just the way I am. Let that love shine out of my life today so others can see your grace and forgiveness. Never let me forget that I make you smile, even laugh, and that you could never love me any more than you already do. Amen***

**GOD'S FRIEND - HE LOVES BEING WITH ME**

Corinne and I have been married now 39 years (December, 2008). I have been head-over-heels in love with her since I was 19 and so very blessed to have her as my wife. I have said many times she is enough to make me believe in reincarnation because I really feel like I loved her in another life as well.

On our 35 anniversary we were having dinner at her favorite restaurant in New Smyrna Beach and I was again trying to tell her just how much she means to me. At that very moment it dawned on me (slow learner that I am) that she was much more than my wife, lover, and confidante – she was my very best friend as well! Telling that made her cry (a lot of things do) as we sat there and recognized together just how much we love being with each other. I guess that is necessary if you are going to stay married this long! We love being with each other even when we are doing things we don’t enjoy, like going to the dentist or working on our taxes. Neither of us feels complete when the other one is not within easy reach. I cannot think of anything I want more in the rest of my life than to hang out with this amazing woman!

As awesome as this is, however, it pales in comparison to having God call me his friend. The Bible tells us in Genesis of God hanging out with Adam and Eve in Eden, not for any theological reason, but just because God loved being with them. Read this and see how God feels about you, his friend:

*Psalm 16:11 Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

*John 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

*John 15:15 I’m no longer calling you servants because servants don’t understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I’ve named you friends because I’ve let you in on everything I’ve heard from the Father.*

God calls us to him, he wants to be a part of our everyday, and he loves it when we knowingly hang out with him. Sure, he is there with us everywhere, everyday, but do we recognized that? Do we spend our days looking for him in our routine, our normal agenda?

\*when was the last time you realized that you were a friend of God’s?

\*how should being his friend change the way we treat others? Change the way we hang out with him?

\*how do we hang out with God?

***Dear God, may your presence as my friend be a constant reality in my life. Thank you for being my friend, for hanging out with me, for loving me and loving to be with me. Help me to see you today in the people around me and to let them in on the joy of being your friend. Amen***

**GOD'S CHOSEN - HE PICKED ME FOR HIMSELF**

It seems just about all of us had a moment in our lives when teams were picked and we were the last one picked…how humiliating! It really hurts us all deeply when it is obvious that others were chosen before us, that we were left until the last possible choice.

IT’S NOT THAT WAY WITH GOD! The Bible says that he loves us beyond anyone’s ability to measure that love. He chose us for his team; the very God of the universe picked ME to be on his team. I don’t know about you but that makes me feel pretty special!

Just look at what he says about you and me:

*John 15:16 You didn't choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won't spoil.*

 *I Peter 2:9 -10 But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.*

God chose me, he chose you, not because he had to but because he wanted to! He chooses us as his children, his friends, and created us with a specific purpose and joy to our lives. We are not cosmic accidents but divinely created and chosen people to help our Father in bringing his “kingdom on earth as it is in heaven”. We are priests of God by his choosing, a holy people by the blood of Jesus on Calvary, God’s instruments for his work of bringing his lost creation back into relationship with him. God has made us something from nothing, from one that was rejected to one accepted by the King!

So think about it:

\*what does it mean to you to be on God’s team?

\*why do you think God wants you on his team?

\*how will that affect you on your missionary journey?

\*what does it mean to you to be a priest of God?

\*what kind of “fruit” does God expect us to produce?

***God, thank you for choosing me long before the world was ever created. Thank you for creating me in your image and with a life purpose. Help me to remember each day that I am on your team, a part of your family, as a kingdom-builder. Amen***

**GOD'S PASSION - HE PROVIDES FOR ME**

All of us are passionate about something, most times about several somethings. I have several passions: hunting, fishing, surfing, Corinne, my grandkids, student ministry, missions. I love each of these and would rather spend time in these passions than anything else. To be passionate about something is defined as “having, compelled by, or ruled by intense emotion or strong feeling for something” and that certainly describes how I feel about this list.

Did you ever think about God being passionate about something? The death of Christ on the cross is sometimes referred to as The Passion of God (see movie “The Passion of Christ”) and a famous portrayal of that is called The Passion Play. God is passionate about providing for us, his chosen ones, as seen in Mount Calvary. He was and is passionate to bring his creation back into relationship with him.

His passion extends beyond provision for our sinful nature, however. He is also passionate about providing for every need in our life. Careful, now, don’t turn me off yet. I am not talking about a popular misguided teaching that says God wants us all to be healthy and wealthy. What I am saying is that God never guides where he doesn’t provide. Look at this:

*Genesis 45:9-11 Hurry back to my father. Tell him, 'Your son Joseph says: I'm master of all of Egypt. Come as fast as you can and join me here. I'll give you a place to live in Goshen where you'll be close to me—you, your children, your grandchildren, your flocks, your herds, and anything else you can think of. I'll take care of you there completely. There are still five more years of famine ahead; I'll make sure all your needs are taken care of, you and everyone connected with you—you won't want for a thing.'*

*Psalm 78:20 Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?*

*Luke 12:22-24 He continued this subject with his disciples. "Don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or if the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your inner life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the ravens, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, carefree in the care of God. And you count far more.*

This is God’s passion – PROVIDING FOR YOU AND ME!

So, think about it:

\*how should we then prepare for our missionary journey?

\*what do you believe about the statement “God never guides where he doesn’t provide?

\*how has God provided in your life?

\*how is he currently providing?

***Father, you alone are worthy of my praise as God my provider, the one who provided my salvation through Calvary and my every need every day through Christ’s riches in glory. I praise you for who you are and what you are doing in my life. Amen***

**GOD'S HANDS AND FEET - HE HAS PLANS FOR ME**

Did you ever stop to think that the very maker of the universe, the one who drew on the stars what the Hubble telescope just gets to barely glimpse, that this God also planned you, your life, and how you would be for his glory? We are not cosmic accidents or merely the gleams in our parents’ eyes. We are his workmanship, his creation, with special plans installed in our DNA by God himself!

We are the parents of 4 awesome kids that are the parents of 6 (soon to be 7) stunning grandchildren. It has always been fun for me to watch first our kids and now the grandkids when they don’t know I am watching. Certain things they do are clearly from their parents and it is sometimes amazing to me how genetically they are like me, both in appearance and actions. It is not something they intentionally do but is a part of their DNA…they can’t act any other way!

God built into us a divine DNA that lies within us to reflect his glory and do his will. In the past he has used donkeys, handwriting on the wall, angels, a burning bush, a bright light, a whirlwind, and fire from heaven to show himself to the world. He can still do any and all of those things even today but he generally chooses now to reveal himself to the world through us, his children, the bearers of his DNA and image. We are God’s hands and feet, the instruments of his creation blessed to be the way he manifests himself to his creation! Look at this:

*Ephesians 2:10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

*Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*

So think about it:

\*knowing God has plans for you, how does that make what you do today that much more significant?

\*what has God showed you about his imprint and gifting on your life?

\*how do you think God can use that on your missionary journey?

\*when was the last time something happened to you that made it obvious you are his hands and feet?

***Dear God, thank you for being the God of all creation, even me! Thank you for making us for your glory and using us to reveal yourself to this world. Keep me aware of the fact that everywhere, every day, I am your hands and feet and that you have given me all I need to do this. Amen***

**SO WHAT?**

How awesome it is to know who we are in the eyes and heart of God! How easy it would also be to let US become the center of our thinking, even when we are looking at how God feels about us. We need to remember, above all else, that everything is about God, not his creation, not us. His great love for us should make us love him more, want even more time daily spent just listening to him. It's all about HIM, not us.

*2 Chronicles 20:6 O God, God of our ancestors, are you not God in heaven above and ruler of all kingdoms below? You hold all power and might in your fist—no one stands a chance against you!*

*Isaiah 46:9-11 I am God – I alone! I am God, and there is no one else like me. Only I cant ell you what is going to happen even before it happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish. I will call a swift bird of prey from the east - a leader from a distant land who will come and do my bidding. I have said I would do it, and I will.*

*1 Corinthians 6:20 God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body.*

*2 Corinthians 3:18 But all of us who are Christians…reflect like mirrors the glory of the Lord.*

Every day our lives are a series of divine appointments where God brings us into situations or into the lives of people so that his love, power, and presence can cause great change. People need the salvation, hope, and grace of God and every day he has our path cross with those who need this. Circumstances can become contorted, violent, desperate, and lonely but he brings us into those places so that his glory and power can make a difference. Let’s live our lives this way, recognizing that each day God leads us to people and into places for his glory and our good!

Your life journey will soon take you overseas to a different culture. So think about it:

\*knowing your life is all about God and not you, how will you then serve Him?

\*what do you bring to your team that God can use?

\*just who are you in God’s eyes?

\*how open is your heart to what God is going to show you about him and yourself on this journey?

***Father God, this is the day you have made for me to live as your hands and feet, as your minister of reconciliation. Keep my eyes open today to see what you see, those that need your hope. Let me be the catalyst for change in all situations. Amen***