


# “Shout to God with joyful praise!”

## Finding joy beyond laughter

Carrie Badertscher and David C. Cramer

### Joy beyond laughter

When we think of joy, our thoughts instantly go to Raelly Kate (Carrie’s youngest daughter). She exudes joy in a way we have not witnessed in



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any other person. There are times when joy seems to completely fill her little body, making her arms flap and her feet bounce. The epitome of her joy comes out in the highest pitched squeal as it squeezes through her bright smile. She is the picture of the “glorious, inexpressible joy” that Peter writes about in one of his letters (1 Peter 1:8). It’s a joy that goes beyond laughter.

Another individual in our church who exudes joy is our dear sister Bonnie Brown. Bonnie is a matriarch in our church and always sits in her wheelchair

on the left side of the sanctuary. It is as if you can feel Bonnie’s joyful presence before you can even see her. There is deep joy within her and it radiates onto the space and people around her.

What is most gripping about the joy these individuals possess is that their joy does not appear to be dependent on their current situation or circumstance. Both of these individuals, in their own journeys through life, have faced barriers and struggles that could have drained the joy from their heart and the hope from their reservoir. Yet, their joy has remained steadfast because the source of their joy has remained steadfast.

### Shouting for joy

When you do a search for the word *joy* in Scripture, you repeatedly find a startling image: the people of Israel *shouting* for joy. Sometimes their

joyful shouting is so loud that it can be heard from far away (Ezra 3:13); sometimes it even makes the earth shake (1 Kings 1:40). When most of us

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think of joy, we might picture someone smiling or laughing. But *shouting*? What could possibly cause someone to shout with joy?

The emotions that most naturally cause us to shout today are anger and sorrow. There’s a lot to be angry over or sorrowful about right now. At times like these, the injustice and suffering in the world are enough to make one want to shout. Perhaps this is why those who devote their lives to the cause of justice are sometimes perceived as joyless, angry people. The term *social justice warrior* is used more often as a derogatory term

than as a term of praise. We imagine those fighting for justice joylessly shouting others down, whether literally or over social media.

But while God’s people are indeed angry at the injustice of the world, according to Scripture they find great joy in the pursuit of justice. As the Psalmist writes, “There is joy for those who deal justly with others and always do what is right” (Psalm 106:3).<sup>1</sup> And according to Proverbs, “Justice is a joy to the godly, but it terrifies evildoers” (Proverbs 21:15). Those who fight for justice can indeed shout: shouts of joy to be partnering with God.


### **Joy grounded in faith, hope, and love**

The joy we see in our community and read about in Scripture is grounded in the theological virtues. This joy is grounded first in *faith*—faith that the God of the universe is a God of justice and that God is therefore working right alongside those seeking justice. Again, the Psalmist writes, “Let the whole world sing for joy, because you govern the nations with justice and guide the people of the whole world” (Psalm 67:4). Even in the bleakest of times, those working for justice can find joy in the knowledge that God is actively working behind the scenes to renew and restore: “But let all who

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture citations are to the New Living Translation (NLT), the preferred translation of our congregation, with slight modifications toward greater gender inclusivity.

take refuge in you rejoice; let them sing joyful praises forever. Spread your protection over them, that all who love your name may be filled with joy” (Psalm 5:11).

This joy is grounded second in *hope*—hope that ultimately justice will prevail. Even in times of distress, we can have joy in the hope-filled confidence that someday all wrongs will be made right. As Isaiah writes, “To



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all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the Lord has planted for God’s own glory” (Isaiah 61:3). Paul writes about this joyful hope in his letter to the Romans: “I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in God. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13). We can have joy in the knowl-


edge that “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well,” as Julian of Norwich records the words Jesus spoke in her *Revelations of Divine Love*.

This joy is grounded third in *love*—love for those on whose behalf we seek justice and love for the God who loves us unfailingly: “But as for me, I will sing about your power. Each morning I will sing with joy about your unfailing love. For you have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress” (Psalm 59:16).

It is because our joy is grounded in faith, hope, and love that Paul can instruct us: “Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). Or simply: “Always be joyful” (1 Thessalonians 5:16). This joy isn’t based on our present circumstances. If it were, then our joy would be fleeting indeed. Rather, our joy is based on our faith in Christ, our love of God, and our hope in God’s kingdom, in which “sorrow and mourning will disappear,” and we “will be filled with joy and gladness” (Isaiah 51:11). When that day comes, there will be no response more natural and appropriate than to “shout to God with joyful praise!” (Psalm 47:1).

## Joy in the midst of heartache

The *glorious, inexpressible joy* that Peter describes is more than happy flaps and dancing feet, although these are beautiful outpourings of joy. Joy, as we see it in Scripture, is not a feeling based on mood or current circumstance. It is not the absence of pain, heartache, or trouble. Joy is an attitude embraced by God's people. It is the sincere decision by a believer



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to trust in God's love and goodness. Joy is the anticipation of the promised redemption and restoration that is coming. It is not simply reframing all that is bad into something good. It is the deep belief that God is working to renew and restore every last part of us and this world.

In a letter to the church in Corinth, Paul writes, "Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything" (2 Corinthians 6:10). All too often we are made to feel like we have to hold either heartache or joy—that we must first put

down grief in order to pick up joy. What we see in Paul's letter, however, is that there can be joy even when the heart is aching and laughter is elusive.

This year has been a difficult one, to say the least. People are dying from a virus that has no vaccine, racism and violence scream loudly from our television screens, and the deep complexities of homelessness have come right to our doorsteps here in South Bend. Our hearts are aching, for ourselves and for our sisters and brothers. It is all right to sit in that ache, in the grief of it all. Our world is broken, and it is painful to live here.

Yet, we can also choose joy, knowing that God didn't leave us here in this broken world alone; and because of the resurrection, we do not grieve like people who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). God's presence is near, providing hope, peace, and joy even in the ashes of grief and heartache. God is working to make all things new (Revelation 21:5). And so, with the apostle Paul, we "pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in God" until you "overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen.

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