



Arrival of Joy

Laura Urista

From a young age, we are taught that Christmas time is always filled with happiness, joy and fun. We are assured, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year!” We are inundated with advertisements about products, foods and experiences guaranteed to fill us with joy. We rush around, busy with extra activities meant to brighten the holidays for ourselves and others—addressing and mailing greeting cards, purchasing gifts, wrapping and hiding them. We search for the perfect tree, haul it into our house and spend hours decorating it. We purchase all the ingredients to prepare our favorite holiday recipes. Amid bright, sparkling lights and festive decorations, we enjoy delicious meals with loved ones and sing carols about “tidings of comfort and joy.”

Great Expectations— Bitter Disappointments

But during the holidays we are often filled with great expectations that only result in bitter disappointments. Perhaps you spend most of Christmas day putting together a new bike or special toy that your child so desperately wanted. But then she only plays with it for a short time and quickly gets bored.

Maybe family dramas and arguments at the table overshadow the perfect meal you spent days planning for and preparing. Perhaps a few

family members just decide to show up without letting you know, so you scramble to rearrange and find folding chairs. Beyond these temporary disappointments, perhaps a serious health crisis or the death of a loved one makes Christmas a less than joyful time.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of my dad’s passing. After struggling with Alzheimer’s disease for several years, Dad died the day after Christmas in 1998. So Christmas time is always bittersweet for me, especially if I reflect on so many “if onlys” and regrets—rehearsing memories I wish I could somehow change.

Count it All Joy?

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience (James 1:2-3, NKJV).

How can anyone be expected to remain joyful when disappointments and trials come along and suck the joy out of life? It seems like an impossible task, and humanly speaking it truly is impossible. But for Christ-followers, joy is so much more than a fleeting human emotion. Galatians 5:22 lists joy as the second fruit of the Holy Spirit, a fruit which comes from God’s love and the risen life of Christ dwelling in us.

This kind of joy provides an enduring sense of peace and confidence, knowing we are infinitely

loved by our heavenly Father and we are ultimately safe in him. Enduring joy is like a lens through which we glimpse God's eternal plan in every situation we encounter. Whether facing good times or bad, God's joy reminds us there is a bigger picture and that we are part of God's heavenly family.

Seen in this light, joy can permeate our thoughts even when we experience disappointments, heartache, pain, health concerns or even death. But because we are human, our minds are not naturally inclined to think on a spiritual level. We must intentionally focus our minds to meditate on spiritual things.

Think on These Things

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things (Philippians 4:8).

What is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy? These are the spiritual qualities or attributes of Christ. When we allow Christ to live in us and love through us, our natural, human responses and reactions begin to change for the better. We learn to filter our immediate thoughts and reactions, replacing them with the mind of Christ. We begin to act more like Christ and treat others the way we would want to be treated.

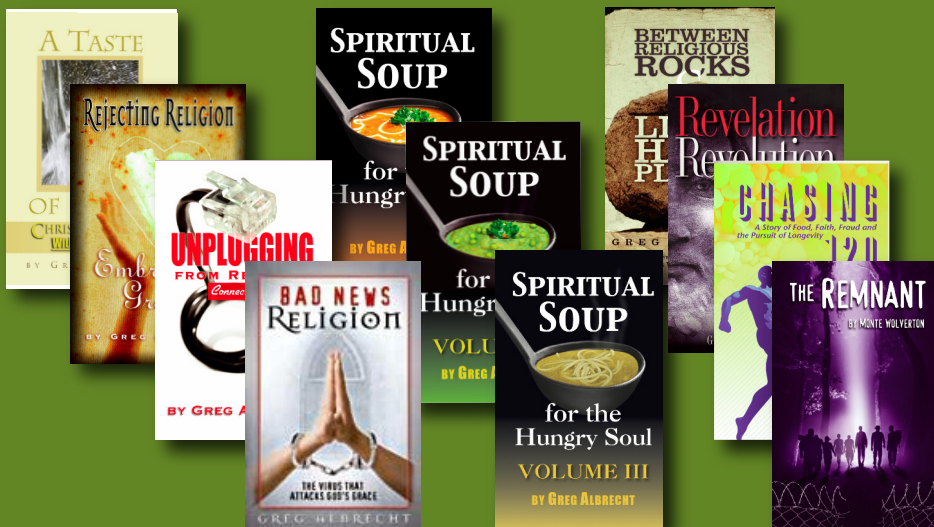
This change may happen gradually. We'll have ups and downs, but eventually, we will better understand the depth of God's love for us and for all his children. As we deliberately meditate and "think on these things," we will realize that the end of the story is about living happily ever after with the God who loves all his children beyond our human understanding. Then we can rest in and share God's ultimate "tidings of comfort and joy." □

Laura Urista is managing editor of CWRm.

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