

**QUIET DESPERATION, OR JOYFUL ANTICIPATION?****By Robert J. Tamasy**

Back in the mid-1800s, essayist, poet and philosopher Henry David Thoreau made a statement that has become familiar to many of us, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” In Thoreau’s extended quotation, he said, “What is called resignation is confirmed desperation.... A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind.”

Not the most uplifting observation, right? But more than 150 years later, it still carries a ring of truth, doesn’t it? This “quiet desperation” he cited seemed to become more acute for many people just a few years ago during the global pandemic. Daily routines were disrupted, people lost jobs, quarantines and lockdowns heightened the sense of isolation. What we knew as ‘normal’ was turned upside-down.

Perhaps you know someone whose life fits the description of “quiet desperation.” Or maybe you have felt that way yourself at times. We respond to change in different ways, but when life’s uncertainty sometimes borders on chaos, it is understandable if desperation becomes a good word for describing our state of mind. The pace of change is ever-escalating. Workplace demands are more complex than ever. If we find ourselves in a downward emotional spiral, is it possible to find joy in the midst of all the despair?

The answer is yes if we believe the timeless teachings and truths of the Bible. The Scriptures give us numerous examples of people who were delivered from desperate circumstances by God: the Israelites, enslaved in Egypt for many years but freed and then led by the Lord into the Promised Land; David, facing deadly opposition before and after he became king; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, saved from a fiery furnace; Daniel thrown into a den of lions.

They all could have given in to despair, yet God transformed their desperation into joy. Thousands of years later, God has changed. Situations we face each day may be different, but as the Bible affirms again and again, “quiet desperation” need not define the hearts and minds of those who know and follow the Lord – even in the marketplace of the 21st century. Here are some assurances it gives to us:

**Joy is found in the unchanging Word of God.** We face a barrage of bad news every day, tempting us to wonder if all hope is lost. Scottish-born pastor and author Alistair Begg writes, “the path toward lasting happiness is not just rejecting deceitful counsel; it also involves embracing the beauty of truth.” “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.... But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law, he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2).

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地址：香港上環禧利街2號東寧大廈20樓2004室 Tel: (852) 2805-1923

Email: [enquiry@cbmc.org.hk](mailto:enquiry@cbmc.org.hk) Web: [www.cbmc.org.hk](http://www.cbmc.org.hk)

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**Joy follows God's correction.** Sometimes the difficulties we face are of our own making, and the Lord uses those for needed discipline. But He remains faithful and His love for His people never fades, "For His anger lasts only for a moment but His favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

**Joy can overcome opposition.** People we work with are not always pleased when we stand up for our faith. We might even encounter aggressive opposition and ridicule. But so did Jesus Christ. He said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:11-12).

© 2023. Robert J. Tamasy has written *Marketplace Ambassadors: CBMC's Continuing Legacy of Evangelism and Discipleship*; *Business at Its Best: Timeless Wisdom from Proverbs for Today's Workplace*; *Pursuing Life With a Shepherd's Heart*, coauthored with Ken Johnson; and *The Heart of Mentoring*, coauthored with David A.

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### Reflection/Discussion Questions Challenge

1. Had you previously heard the quote from Henry David Thoreau about people leading lives of "quiet desperation"? What is your reaction to that observation? Do you believe it remains true even today? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of a time when you yourself might have qualified for the "quiet desperation" description? If so, what were the circumstances – and how were they resolved?
3. When you find yourself feeling discouraged, even if not in the throes of despair, how do you typically respond? Do you turn to trusted friends and colleagues for encouragement and support? Have you found that reading the Bible has been helpful at such times? Explain your answers.
4. In what ways do you think a faith anchored in God can help in enduring difficult, even desperate times, whether they come about in the workplace or in one's personal life and pursuits? Have you ever experienced a time when despite troubling circumstances, you found that your trust in the Lord enabled you to discover "joy (or rejoicing) in the morning"? If so, what impact did that have on you?

### Challenge

We may find ourselves tempted to suffer alone when going through times of adversity, but we all can benefit from the encouragement, support and when necessary, wise counsel of others. Who do you have that you can turn to when you feel discouraged or on the brink of desperation? What steps can you take today to establish that kind of support group when it is needed?

### NOTE:

*If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:*  
Acts 5:40-42; Romans 5:1-5, 11, 12:10-12; James 1:2-8; 1 Peter 4:12-13

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