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CONFUSING JOY WITH HAPPINESS

By Jim Mathis

My topic for today – joy – is not something we often talk about in the business and professional world. We commonly speak about happiness and being happy, whether it concerns finalizing a contract, attracting a new client, making a sale, receiving a promotion or a pay raise, or finding a new job we feel certain will be more fulfilling and rewarding. Such events make us happy. But when was the last time you heard someone speak about experiencing joy?

Recently some friends and I were talking about these two seemingly similar words, joy and happiness. However, during the course of our discussion we realized that in important ways, they are very different. Happiness, for example, has a lot to do with what is happening at the moment. I can feel happy because it is not raining, or I might become unhappy simply because my coffee got cold. Joy, on the other hand, is more about attitude. Joy is a way of life, how we approach everyday events, both good and bad, while happiness typically is situational. Joy also can be more of a personality trait, an inner quality of well-being that permeates every part of person's life.

An observation that came from our discussion was how our level of joy can have an effect on what brings us happiness. For example, if we are joyful, we tend to see the good in many things: little pleasures will make us happy, and problems can be viewed as challenges rather than as insurmountable obstacles. People without joy in their lives will have a lot of trouble finding happy moments, and every problem they encounter will be perceived as a major hassle.

I consider myself joyful, which means even seemingly inconsequential things can make me happy. I am fortunate that every business I have been involved in was designed to make people happy. Whether as an entertainer, photo finisher, coffee house owner, or most recently, a restorer of old photos, I have seen most people I have worked with leave with big smiles on their faces. A good cup of coffee can bring a smile to a coffee lover's face, but not nearly as much as seeing old family pictures brought back to life.

Interestingly, the Bible says little about "happiness," but it speaks extensively about "joy." Here are a few things it tells us about how we should approach each day, whether we are at work, in our homes, or pursuing our favorite interests and hobbies:

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Joy should be a constant companion. If someone tells you they are always happy, be skeptical. Because everyone faces unpleasant situations in life. But inner joy is a quality that is not dependent on outward circumstances. So we are told to, *“Be joyful always”* (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

Joy is not defined by circumstances. If someone told you, “Be happy, no matter what happens,” would you agree? And yet the Bible instructs us, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything”* (James 1:2-4).

Joy is dictated by our faith and trust in God. Another passage, also written by the apostle Paul, who was no stranger to adversity, declares joy a byproduct of growing faith in God. *“And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God... we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope...”* (Romans 5:2-5).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Based on your understanding, what is the difference between happiness and joy? Do you agree that it is possible to possess joy, even if circumstances are making you unhappy? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of a person you know who seems to exhibit a sense of joy, even when he or she is facing times of hardship or adversity? If so, how would you describe that person – and what do you think makes that individual that way?
3. Describe a situation at work in which you might be able to experience the inner quality of joy, as Mr. Mathis describes it, even if what is occurring at the moment might not be filling you with happiness?

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4. What difference would it make, in your view, to be able to cultivate a sense of joy on a consistent, everyday basis, regardless of how stressful or demanding things might get at work?

NOTE: If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Nehemiah 8:10; Isaiah 51:3; Luke 2:10; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 John 1:3-4; 3 John 4

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