

## The Only One Like You

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Dale Carnegie wrote this wonderful, very brief, poem:

Two prisoners look out from prison bars;  
one saw the mud, the other saw stars.

Fred Rogers used to sing, "You are the only one like you. Like you, my friend, I like you". Each of us is unique. We have different ....

- ...personalities
- ...gifts and abilities
- ...childhood experiences and life experiences
- ...health issues and challenges
- ...mental/emotional strengths and challenges
- ...schedules and responsibilities

Therefore, each of us responds in our own way to every situation. Contrary to an overwhelming number of Facebook posts, you're not an idiot, or stupid, or an imbecile if support this candidate or that one, or if you believe and follow the recommendations of the World Health Organization and the American Medical Association and the Center for Disease Control—or if you believe they're part of a huge, global conspiracy.

Today's Lectionary Scriptures address times like these:

**ACTS 2:42-47** *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. we came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being*

*saved.*  
**PHILIPPIANS 4:10-14** *I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.*

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**Theme:** God is present in all situations and can be the source of peace and contentment.

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*"...for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty."* What was Paul's secret? He truly believed what he wrote: *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."*

This letter to the church at Philippi was written from prison—actually he was under house arrest—essentially like being in your own home but wearing an anklet that set off an alarm if you left the house. Sort of like being self-quarantined during a pandemic. And yet this letter is one of the most joyful writings in the Bible!

Recently I re-read Charles Swindoll's book, *Laugh Again* and was reminded of those wonderful, carefree hours I spent as a boy in front of the radio, before television. The radio was my ticket to adventure and imagination: The Lone Ranger, Gang Busters, Fibber McGee and Molly, Big John and Sparky, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy... One my favorites was Mr. District Attorney. I memorized the announcer's introduction, and used to strut around the house carefully enunciating, "...defender of our right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

I didn't know it then, but those are Thomas Jefferson's words in our nation's "Declaration of Independence": "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.*"

It's our unalienable right to pursue happiness, to seek out a life of joy. But for too many people, joy's a forgotten pursuit, a dream that died.

I've struggled with that throughout my ministry. Why is joy so elusive? It's virtually universal in whatever church you attend: if there is a time of sharing Joys and Concerns, concerns almost always will outnumber joys. Why is that?

Swindoll's book reminded me of what I already knew. Joy eludes people because we see it as something that happens to us, rather than something we deliberately choose and diligently pursue. Circumstances seldom generate smiles and laughter. Joy comes to those who pursue it *in spite* of circumstances.

Now, I make no claim that Christians don't have problems or will always be happy. But there's a difference between Joy and Happiness. Happiness is a feeling based on our perception of circumstances around us. As such, it's fleeting and passing, subject to any change in those circumstances.

Joy is *not* a feeling. It's an attitude—a way of understanding life and living it. It's possible to be joyful even in unhappy circumstances because joy comes from within. It's based on a confidence that God is at work in this world.

Joy—like love—doesn't "just happen"; we *choose* it; and it's crucial to set your sails for Joy at the beginning of each day's voyage; don't wait for the storms to begin. One of my heroes is Grant Teaff, long-time football coach at Baylor University. He's been a hero since I was nine, and watched him play high school football in Snyder, Texas. He was the first all-state player I ever met. His mother was my Sunday school teacher, and I used to sit in worship and stare at Grant.

Several years ago I invited him to address a men's retreat in the church I was serving. One thing he said stays with me: every day, before he gets out of bed, he offers a prayer he learned as a boy:

*"Lord, I thank you for today and for the opportunity to live it. I know there will be challenges ahead in this day. I am only one man, but I am one man, and you*

*know my strengths, and you know my weaknesses. I can do whatever you call me to do. Lord, I know that today there will be no challenge so big that you and I can't handle it together."*

The first secret to choosing joy is to set your sails at *the beginning* of the voyage. Have you ever watched a skilled sailor work? It's not the direction of the wind; it's the set of the sails that determines the direction the boat sails. And the pursuit of Joy *is* a matter of choice: an attitude that *can* be developed—a habit we *can* intentionally form.

Here are five "Joy Principles" I've collected over the years. I don't recall where they all came from; but when I do them regularly, life always is better:

1. First, for the next 21 days, *act joyful*—even when you don't "feel happy". Zig Ziglar used to say do something for 21 straight days and it becomes a habit. And if we don't choose our habits, they'll choose us; so, find something to laugh about every day for 21 days. Sing passionately at least once a day for the next 21 days. Sing in the shower, sing when you're driving. Don't wait until you "feel like it". If we waited until we felt like it for everything, the world would come to a grinding halt. Fred Craddock once said, "The heart follows the hand much more frequently than the reverse." *Act joyful.*
2. Second, pray for 21 minutes, every day for the next 21 days. Pray for seven minutes, three times a day, or for three minutes seven times a day. And as you pray, ask God to bring you true Joy.
3. Third, Read joyful scriptures every day. Start with Paul's letter to Philippi. Read it this week. It's short—only 104 verses; so start today and read 15 Or 16 verses a day. I'll have a list of additional joyful scriptures for you next week so you can continue.
4. Fourth, as you read or listen to music or watch TV or scroll through Facebook, make a conscious effort to be your own censor. Counter the flood of negative input that bombards us; surround yourself with positive people and fill your mind and your heart with positive input. That's not the same as denying bad things. But you don't have to be intentional about those bad things. They'll come whether you invite them or not.
5. Finally, remember Paul's secret: "*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*" Claim that promise and live every day as if you really believe it! Come to think of it: that's my definition of faith: "Living as if we truly believe what we say we believe."

Isaiah 40:31