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Dear Friends:

JOY JUGGLE

Alright, everybody step back a bit and take a deep breath. Take a break from the tube, radio, internet and run from Brother and Sister "We live to give the bad news". These days, bad news is the easiest thing to locate and, sadly, a lot of it is true. It zaps our strength and robs our joy.

Frightened Americans are now vehemently vilified because they dare to question the self propagating wind bags who have forgotten they work for us. Government web sites have now been set up so that Americans can rat out other Americans if they dare choose to avoid the Kool-Aid Communion. IRAs dwindle daily, all of the Social Security money has been spent, other countries now own us, and millions of good folks are in unprecedented struggles while getting a front row seat to the historic, pre-meditated desecration and destruction of life as we have known it. In the light of some of those fiascos, joy seems mighty hard to come by these days.

With plenteous bad news to go around our stomachs are in knots and our little psyches, like our financial futures, are taxed to the max when attempting to look on the bright side. But, (as the kids say) you gotta!

So, a guy like me comes along and dares to remind you, "The Joy of the Lord is your strength." Don't sneer at me, the Bible said it!

There is real power and consolation in the truth, the Joy of the Lord is your strength! Not superficial. Not a rabbit's foot.

We've all seen those who rip out Bibles quotes in rapid fire, polly parrot fashion with nary a clue of its real power and depth. Any of us who lived through the Charismatic 70's likely have a mind picture of someone, eyes rolled back, bobbing up and down while singing, "Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha", to the tune of the little chorus, "The Joy of the Lord". I'm not being facetious, but history has proved, a shallow refrain won't sustain and stabilize during the Bad News times. But it's that "build your house on the Rock" thing we keep banging the boards about.

The Word didn't come to us as a "whistle in the dark" tool or to foster vain repetitive slogans without substance, power and consistency. It is the Light that really shines in the toughest of times. Feel free to check it out.

In Nehemiah, where the famous "joy" quote is found, the few words just before are often missed but they are a powerful set up that adds to the solid faith and security foundation needed. Here's how four different translations set it up:

King James says, "Do not be sorry. . ."
New Living says, "Do not be dejected and sad . . ."
Amplified says, "Do not be grieved and depressed . . ."
Message says, "Don't feel bad . . ."

. . .the joy of the Lord is your strength!!!!
Got that?

None of us have much problem agreeing with this when we are in our Sunday Holy Huddles. We're encouraged, inspired and, hopefully, among friends. We still feel strong in the cafeteria line and perhaps all the way to the end of the day's final football game. Then, Monday comes and all it brings with it. The Word refers to this as, "The Cares of this World" and things can get real miserable, real fast. Right in the middle of those tough times we're tempted to ask, "Where is the God from Sunday Morning? I really need Him, now!"

Our goofy carnal minds are always prone to give in to the fear, the anxiety and the torment drills (those are real enemies of the Joy of the Lord). And, at times like this, we must, with a solid, feet on the floor, conviction, decide to really put our weight down and act like we believe it.

You might even have to talk it out loud; remember, faith comes by hearing (even hearing your own voice speaking) Words like . . ."I will not walk in fear, I will not walk in despair, I will avoid the decisions, choices and relationships that torpedo the Word in my life, I will not be dejected or discouraged, I will not be sad or grieved by the mistakes of the past, I will walk in the reality of this Word . . ."The Joy of the Lord is MY strength!"

One time is not enough; it has to get down in you.

Appropriate it for you. Personalize it, put your name on it, put the wife, the kids and even the dog right up there with you. Speak it, meditate on it, and practice it. It is not a mere addendum to your life; as the Child of God, it is who you are.

Make a note to keep reminding yourself until it gets through, "The Joy of the Lord is MY strength!" It is THE strength to stand, THE strength to run and not be weary, THE strength that will bring renewal and the soaring capacity of an eagle!!

Paul, in Galatians, was puzzled as some of the Believers seemed weary, discouraged and lethargic. Some, because of difficult times, were lax in doctrine and fervor. He reminded them of the awful, joy stealing, things that he had personally experienced but his joy and faith was intact. One modern translation relates his words of coaching, "What happened to the sense of blessing you once had? What happened to your positive attitudes?" One other translation said, "What happened to your joy?"

Real joy is not frivolous or giddy. Real joy doesn't deny a circumstance but does dictate how close and how deep those circumstances get into our core. Even with Hell's joy sucking machines working full blast, we can be joyful, even (oh, I hate this part) in our trials. Count it all joy?

How important is this? Jesus, in John 16 said it this way, "You may have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice and no one can rob you of that joy . . .ask, using my Name, and you will receive and you will have abundant joy." (NLT, John 16: 22 and 24)

This week, work on the joy part of your walk. Try humming a few bars of "Joy to the world, the Lord is come", even on a hot August day. How about, "Joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea!" You can even in throw in a few "Ha, ha's" for a real stimulus package. Then, some who have known you, and your typical past responses, may assume you've now lost your mind. Have fun and just make 'em wonder. It will make you smile; it will make you strong. It's what joy does.

Michael