

Monday

Joy

Joy does not come from positive predictions about the state of the world. It does not depend on the ups and downs of the circumstances of our lives. Joy is based on the spiritual knowledge that, while the world in which we live is shrouded in darkness, God has overcome the world. Jesus says it loudly and clearly: "In the world you will have troubles, but rejoice, I have overcome the world." The surprise is not that, unexpectedly, things turn out better than expected. No, the real surprise is that God's light is more real than all the darkness, that God's truth is more powerful than all human lies, that God's love is stronger than death.

—Henri Nouwen, *Here and Now*

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete

(John 15.9-11)

Tuesday

Claiming the Light

People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself and that a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness. They point each other to flashes of light here and there, and remind each other that they reveal the hidden but real presence of God. They discover that there are people who heal each other's wounds, forgive each other's offenses, share their possessions, foster the spirit of community, celebrate the gifts they have received, and live in constant anticipation of the full manifestation of God's glory.

—Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

(John 1.1-5)

Wednesday

A Time for Deepening

Surrounded by a loving, supportive community, Advent and Christmas seem pure joy. But let me not forget my lonely moments because it does not take much to make that loneliness reappear. If I am able to remember loneliness during joy, I might be able in the future to remember joy during loneliness and so be stronger to face it and help others face it....I hope that the day will come when the memory of my present joy will give me the strength to keep giving even when loneliness gnaws at my heart. When Jesus was loneliest, he gave most. That realization should help to deepen my commitment to service and let my desire to give become independent of my actual experience of joy. Only a deepening of my life in Christ will make that possible.

—Henri Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary*

*O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.*

*My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.*

(Psalm 63.1-8)

Thursday

The Joyful Person

Joyful persons do not necessarily make jokes, laugh, or even smile. They are not people with an optimistic outlook on life who always relativize the seriousness of a moment or an event. No, joyful persons see with open eyes the hard reality of human existence and at the same time are not imprisoned by it. They have no illusion about the evil powers that roam around, “looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8), but they also know that death has no final power. They suffer with those who suffer, yet they do not hold on to suffering; they point beyond it to an everlasting peace.

—Henri Nouwen, *Lifesigns*

Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

(John 16.20-22)

Friday

Choosing Joy

I am convinced we can choose joy. Every moment we decide to respond to an event or a person with joy instead of sadness. When we truly believe that God is life and only life, then nothing need have the power to draw us into the sad realm of death. To choose joy does not mean to choose happy feelings or an artificial atmosphere of hilarity. But it does mean the determination to let whatever takes place bring us one step closer to the God of life.

Maybe this is what is so important about quiet moments of meditation and prayer. They allow me to take a critical look at my moods and to move from victimization to free choice.

—Henri Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak*

For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

(Colossians 1.9-12)

Saturday

The Christ Child Within

I think that we have hardly thought through the immense implications of the mystery of the incarnation. Where is God? God is where we are weak, vulnerable, small, and dependent. God is where the poor are, the hungry, the handicapped, the mentally ill, the elderly, the powerless. How can we come to know God when our focus is elsewhere, on success, influence, and power? I increasingly believe that our faithfulness will depend on our willingness to go where there is brokenness, loneliness, and human need....Each one of us is very seriously searching to live and grow in this belief, and by friendship we can support each other. I realize that the only way for us to stay well in the midst of the many “worlds” is to stay close to the small, vulnerable child that lives in our hearts and in every other human being. Often we do not know that the Christ child is within us. When we discover him we can truly rejoice.

—Henri Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey*

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

(Luke 18.15-17)