

Celebration

A Spiritual Discipline

Most people think of the Spiritual Disciplines as something to be dreaded. Something that could mean hard work or even something that deprives us of our freedom to live as we want to. But here we have a Spiritual Discipline—and a very valid one—that certainly destroys that negative thinking.

CELEBRATION!

But surely celebration isn't a Discipline! Celebration is a joy; it's fun; it's partying and enjoying ourselves. How can that be classed as a Discipline?

But the Bible teaches us that God wants us to Celebrate. He even commanded the Israelites to Celebrate as part of their Jewish faith. He taught them that celebrating and having fun, relaxing and enjoying yourself is actually good for your inner being. It rejuvenates you and brings healing and wholeness to you—body and spirit.

Originally in the Old Testament the whole concept of the **Sabbath** was an opportunity to celebrate. For the first time in history a nation had a pattern of living that included a time of legitimate rest. They were to work for six days and then they were to take a rest. The seventh day was a day of recreation. Look at that word and see how it is made up. RE-CREATION. Do you see? The Sabbath was to become an opportunity to allow God to re-create you, body and soul. The command to do no work was never intended to be a troublesome weight, it was an opportunity to relax, meet with the family, spend time with our Creator God, and have lives replenished. Those early Israelites really CELEBRATED their Sabbath. It was a joy to them, because until they were given the Sabbath they worked day in and day out without any rest at all.

Sadly we are slipping back into those bad old days, and our modern world no longer enjoys a Sabbath. Probably because the Sabbath has lost its original meaning and it has become a nuisance rather than a joy.

God also gave the Children of Israel festivals to celebrate. Their Passover was a celebration of freedom from slavery, their Pentecost was an early harvest festival. The Feast of Trumpets was a celebration and so was Chanukah and Purim. Nowadays we have Christmas as a celebration and Easter Sunday is a day we celebrate new life in Jesus Christ. Harvest festival seems to be gradually disappearing and the joyful festival of Ascension Day has all but gone from our calendar.

God also gave the early Israelites Times of Jubilee. Times when everything stopped in order to come back to basics and rejoice in all that God was and is. "Jubilee" is a wonderful word, full of gladness and joy.

The Psalms give us a clear understanding of our Father Gods command to celebrate.

Psalms 118 = "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures for ever."

Psalms 149 = "Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. Let them praise His name with dancing and make music to Him..."

Psalms 8 = "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth! You have set Your glory above the heavens..."

Psalm 19 = "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands."

Psalm 34 = "I will extol the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice."

Go through the Psalms (and the rest of the Bible) for yourself and see how frequently we are called on to rejoice and praise God.

So—how can we obey this call from God to practice the Discipline of CELEBRATION?

Surely the main thing we can do is to wake up each morning with a real sense of JOY. To consider each new day as a wonderful adventure, an opportunity to enjoy each other and to glorify our Father in heaven. It is now Spring, what a marvellous time to begin to practice this happy Discipline. Winter has gone, the cold and snow have disappeared at least for a few months and each day is bound to get warmer and brighter. This is the time of year when the Discipline of Celebration should be almost automatic. So, every morning before your feet touch the ground tell Jesus how much you appreciate the new day, and ask Him to teach you how to celebrate His beautiful world—EVEN ON A MONDAY!

After that great start we can then present a smiling face to all the family at breakfast, and to everyone we meet during the day. Okay, I'm not suggesting that you walk around like a loon, but a happy cheerful disposition (whatever your circumstances) will certainly brighten up everyone's day.

Why not "celebrate" each other? This is EASTER, a time of glorious celebration; as you send out your Easter cards why not include a note of encouragement? Or even better, why not make it a habit to notice what other people are doing and send them little notes of appreciation. In many ways that's what we do with "Secret Sisters", but there's no reason why this kind of encouragement can't be a part of our everyday lives.

Do you remember the story of little "Polly Anna"? She was the little girl who saw something happy and good in every circumstance, no matter

how bad things got. "Polly Anna" always saw the bright side of life, and if something dreadful happened she would say, "Oh well, it could have been much worse, so-and-so could have happened!" Let's make WBC a church full of "Polly Annas".

Just think.....a whole community with no grumbles, no moans and no one feeling hard done by! This Discipline of Celebration could become one of the greatest GIFTS that God ever gave to us.

We have so very much to Celebrate. We have homes, families, friends, a country without war, a land without too many earthquakes and disasters. And, at the present moment, we live in freedom and without persecution. How dare we not Celebrate and give God the glory for all that He has done and is doing for each and every one of us. Difficulties may come in the future; even persecution may become prevalent in the years to come; but if we have learned the Discipline of Celebration then we will be able to ride out any storm in the power of His Holy Spirit.

That's the whole point of the Spiritual Disciplines. They are there to help us to overcome anything and everything that the world might throw at us. They are not there to limit our freedom or to blight our lives, the Disciplines are designed to strengthen and encourage us to cope with a world that is naturally at variance to the Life in Jesus Christ.

So, how are you going to embrace this Discipline? What can you do to, daily, CELEBRATE the goodness of God? How can you begin to weave this Discipline into your every day living? What is Jesus saying to you about celebrating all that He has done for you? Take a new look at Calvary and all that He won for you there; take a new look at His promise to "go and prepare a place for you" in Glory. Look around you at the glorious creation He made and remember that this was for your benefit. Look up and see the Lord Jesus Christ crowned King of kings and Lord of lords, and recognise that He is your kinsman. Surely it is impossible not to CELEBRATE and REJOICE and be GLAD for all that we have as brothers and sisters of Christ and Children of the Most High God.

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