



EXPLORATION

Joy

Readings



1. *Joy Is of Many Kinds*

by Howard Thurman

Joy is of many kinds. Sometimes it comes silently, opening all closed doors and making itself at home in the desolate heart. It has no forerunner save itself; it brings its own welcome and salutation. Sometimes joy is a compound of many elements: a touch of sadness, a whimper of pain, a harsh word tenderly held until all its arrogance dies, the casting of the eye into the face that understands, the clasp of a hand that holds, then releases, a murmur of tenderness where no word is spoken, the distilled moment or remembrance of day, a night, an hour, lived beyond the sweep of the daily round—joy is often compounded of many things.

There is the joy that is given. There are those who have in themselves the gift of Joy. It has no relation to merit or demerit. It is not a quality they have wrested from the vicissitudes of life. Such people have not fought and won a hard battle; they have made no conquest. To them Joy is given as a precious ingredient in life. Wherever they go, they give birth to Joy in others – they are the heavenly troubadours, earthbound, who spread their music all around and who sing their song without words and without sounds. To be touched by them is to be blessed.

Source: *The Mood of Christmas & Other Celebrations* by Howard Turman

2. *Joy in the Hard Stuff*

by Carolyn Hobbs

...Doing the things we love, no matter how much we love them, brings only a fleeting joy. Try as we may to cram every weekend, every vacation, every free moment with the things we love, we still have to return to the rest of our lives: We still have work to do, groceries to buy, bills to pay, and the car to keep running. We still have to wake up four or five times in the night to nurse the infant and get up early to taxi the older kids to school, then get ourselves to work on time. ...

We can't expect to find joy in all this hard stuff. Or can we? I'm here to tell you that we can. In fact, if we only expect to find joy while doing what we really love, we end up spending about 90 percent of our lives joyless. And, as you will soon find out, we are the ones who limit our joy. That's not only a lousy deal, it's not at all the way it's supposed to be.

I want to introduce you to a broader, more expanded version of joy. I want to reacquaint you with the unlimited joy that lives deep in your core. Not that over-the-top ecstatic joy we feel after dancing, skiing or doing what we love all day (though it can be) but the softer, subtler joy that can flood our awareness with a sense of inner peace and well-being, no matter what is happening around us.

Source: <https://www spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/14669>

3. *Joy Sundays* by Edward Hays

The goal of every religious seeker should be to be giddy, since in Old English it once meant, “possessed by a god or spirit.” Being possessed by the Spirit wasn't such a desirable state, since those caught in the grip of God were considered to be insane, simpleminded, or reli-

gious fanatics. In time the word changed from connoting foolish to being incapable of serious thinking. And you can be assured that if you strive to be constantly cheerful, even in the most dismal of situations, you will be judged as a shallow thinker or at best uninformed. After all, who can be always joyful if they live in the “real” world?

The Church, preoccupied with the need to be taken seriously by the world, is constantly cautious of appearing as foolish or silly, and so has wisely limited celebrating rejoicing to only two Sundays out of the year. One comes in the middle of Advent, and in the Old Latin is called *Gaudete*, “Rejoice” Sunday. The second one comes in the middle of Lent and was called *Laetare* Sunday, also Latin for rejoice. To live in joy ... seems to require a change in the Church's liturgical calendar. To remind the faithful of their duty to remain joyful while confronting all of the terrible sufferings plaguing the human family — wars, violence, famine, and global poverty — the Church should have at least one *Gaudete-Laetare* Sunday a month!

Source: <https://www spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/16653/chasing-joy>

4. *Create Spaces of Joy*

by Angela Williams Gorrell

Like other powerful emotions, joy can be difficult for us, even terrifying, as researcher Brené Brown has discussed, because it requires vulnerability and courage. The moment we experience joy, we might wonder when we will lose it, or we might immediately anticipate that disappointment or disaster are sure to follow.

We also do not share our joy boldly lest we be seen as overly excited or too expressive. To display joy fully requires being “too demonstrative,” “too passionate” — or so we might imagine. We



may be anxious about being “too much.”

Joy, like other emotions, longs to be shared though. Expressing joy, as with other challenging emotions, requires support.

Not only do we need permission to be honest about emotions like sadness, anger, and fear, we need permission to be joy-filled. And we need this permission from other people and ourselves. We can give one another and ourselves permission to experience joy in many ways.

One is to create spaces of joy.

Like preparing for joy (ladders against fences), we can organize spaces that are meant to invite and cultivate joy — spaces that suggest joy is both anticipated and welcomed.”

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28674>

5. *Altruistic Joy*

by Chade-Meng Tan

... Altruistic joy is usually defined as joy derived from the success and good fortune of others, but it can also refer in general to joy that is free of selfishness, resentment, jealousy, and envy. It is the direct opposite of the German word *schadenfreude*, which is pleasure derived from the misfortunes of others.

Altruistic joy can be delicious because other people's good fortune tends to be quite visible, so if only I'm capable of rejoicing at other people's good fortune, I can rejoice a lot.

...In my experience, altruistic joy is much harder to cultivate than loving-kindness and compassion. Some meditation masters appear to have arrived at the same conclusion. The revered German-born Buddhist scholar-monk Nyanaponika Thera said, for example, that “it is relatively easier for man to feel compassion [or loving-kindness] in situations which demand them, than

to cherish a spontaneous feeling of shared joy, outside a narrow circle of one's family and friends.”

...There is a subset of altruistic joy that is easy and uplifting, and that is rejoicing in the inner goodness and altruistic behavior of others. It is easy and uplifting because we are hardwired to be awed and inspired. Bring to mind somebody who you know is very kind and generous, and you feel awed, inspired, and uplifted. Rejoice! When you read of a woman who spends all her days volunteering at the local hospital to bring joy to cancer patients, you feel awed, inspired, and uplifted. Rejoice! When you hear of a man running into a burning building to save a total stranger, you feel awed, inspired, and uplifted. Rejoice!

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/28088>

6. *The Last Word? A Smile!*

by Thomas A. Forsthoefel

...What exactly do smiles have to do with holiness? Everything. Something known and knowing occurs in a smile. The smile contains, perhaps, everything we need as humans to negotiate the convoluted paths of our lives. The smile addresses very local realities, but it also intimates and transmits something broader, something bolder, something utterly free. We live in a world shaken by tumult, disorder, and abject confusion. ...To what do we turn for reassurance? Where is some consolation amid the heartache of personal and social chaos? ...Our own suffering and that which we witness everywhere bear down upon us, and we feel our world — and perhaps our hearts — closing. And then we see a smile of someone special. It could be the smile of one's beloved, a smile that somehow holds everything in great tenderness. Or it may be a smile of a child, a smile that reminds us of beauty and innocence in the world. Or it may be the smile of ordinary persons who have lived life in extraordinary ways. These people seem to have won something for their efforts, a peace that, far from being disingenuous in the face of the world's troubles, often appears to penetrate much deeper

than those struggles. Their smiles seem somehow to possess extra value, owing to the host of choices made in their lives, all of which become a cogent word, an exquisite soulsong [of joy] Their smiles are congruent with a particular vision of reality, one in which love and kindness, and not aggression or despair, speak the last word, no matter the extent of sorrow and suffering.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/16324>

7. *Hopping over the Surface*

by Rev. Doug Kraft

When I was a kid, I liked to skip stones on lakes. If I threw a flat stone at the correct angle and with enough speed and energy it would kiss the surface and leap into the air again and again.

If we have too much stuff in our lives, our attention skips from one object to another without really enjoying anything. If we have too many activities, our attention jumps from past to future without settling into the present. If we have too many opinions, we end up thinking about how things should be without fully seeing how things are.

Happiness and ease flow from the bottom of the lake. They aren't found hopping over the surface of life. We have to slow down enough to settle into the depths.

Joy and ease are simple and uncomplicated. Having lots of things to do, stuff to manage, places to go and opinions to consult make life complicated.

Practices that cultivate simplicity do two things.

(1) They reduce the amount of stuff, activities or preferences so we have a better chance of settling into the present. They get the outward to resonate a little better with the happiness, joy and ease in our depths. And

(2) they help us become more aware of our relationship to stuff, experience and thought.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/hopping-over-surface-life>

Wisdom Story

Knowing How to Fish by Christina Feldman & Jack Kornfield

The rich industrialist from the North was horrified to find the Southern fisherman lying lazily beside his boat, smoking a pipe.

“Why aren't you out fishing?” asked the industrialist.

“Because I have caught enough fish for the day,” said the fisherman.

“Why don't you catch some more?”

“What would I do with it?”

“You could earn more money,” was the reply. “With that you could have a motor fixed to your boat to go into deeper waters and catch more fish. Then you would make enough money to buy nylon nets. These would bring you more fish and more money. Soon you would have enough money to own two boats ...maybe even a fleet of boats. Then you would be a rich man like me.”

“What would I do then?”

“Then you could really enjoy life.”

“What do you think I am doing right now?”

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/21636>

Snippets

“The Japanese have a centuries old ritual called Waraiko they use to greet a new year and to celebrate birthdays. The ritual consists of giving three hearty belly laughs! The first robust laugh is of gratitude for the previous year just ended. The second hearty laugh is in gratitude for being given a new year of life to enjoy. The third is a really full-bodied belly laugh, since it is to blow the dust off your mind, heart, and soul. ... Consider the possibilities of using this ritual of three hearty laughs as your morning prayer. ... Your first prayer laugh would be in gratitude for all the gifts of yesterday.... Your second laugh could be for the wondrous gift of a new day.... The third and boisterous laugh would be to blow the dust off your soul....”

Edward Hays

“Finding joy in the midst of everyday life and sharing it with others is crucial to leading a happy life. I will never forget driving down Hogan Road in Nashville each week when I was growing up. Without fail, on just about every sunny day, a man who was mentally handicapped would sit in a lawn chair in his front yard and wave to everyone who drove past. His smile was brilliant, and it almost never failed to make me smile as well. He always seemed so excited to see you drive by. Despite his disability, he had the capability to make others happy. He shared his joy for life with others. And all it took was a big-hearted wave.”

Angela Perkey

“I heard the Second Brandenburg Concerto played in honor of Bach's 300th birthday, and I was swept away. ... Some say we get what we deserve in life, but I don't believe it. We certainly don't deserve Bach. What have I done to deserve the Second Brandenburg Concerto? I have not been kind enough; I have not done enough justice; I have not loved my neighbor, or myself, sufficiently.... Life is a gift we have not earned and for which we cannot pay. ... Since we have not earned Bach—or crocuses or lovers—the best we can do is express our gratitude for the undeserved gifts, and do our share of the work of creation.” *Rev. Robert Walsh*

“Reason is an important tool, sure — an essential arbiter of truth claims about the world. But religion is grounded someplace deeper, where we experience the joy of living and are connected intimately with all that is. Religion is an entirely human experience but one that we get in touch with using some pathway other than intellectual argument. In religion, we seek to address not just what is but also what we hope for and what we dedicate ourselves to. We rely on it to navigate the shoals of love and grief, compassion and estrangement, gratitude and disappointment, and mystery and wonder.” *Rev. Mark Ward*

“Do not ask your children / to strive for extraordinary lives. / Such striving may seem admirable, / but it is the way of foolishness. / Help them instead to find the wonder / and the marvel of an



The dark does not destroy the light; it defines it. It's our fear of the dark that casts our joy into the shadows. Brene Brown

Photo by Simta Leurent on Pixels

ordinary life. / Show them the joy of tasting / tomatoes, apples and pears. / Show them how to cry / when pets and people die. / Show them the infinite pleasure / in the touch of a hand. / And make the ordinary come alive for them. / The extraordinary will take care of itself.” *William Martin*

So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservation, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality, nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future. ... The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun.

Jon Krakauer and Christopher McCandless

“Sorrow prepares you for joy. It violently sweeps everything out of your house, so that new joy can find space to enter. It shakes the yellow leaves from the bough of your heart, so that fresh, green leaves can grow in their place. It pulls up the rotten roots, so that new roots hidden beneath have room to grow. Whatever sorrow shakes from your heart, far better things will take their place.” *Rumi*

“Tell me about a joy in your life that came unexpectedly, a moment that you did not even know you were waiting for, that caught you off guard and made you smile. As I left the university one afternoon, excited by the ideas I had been writing and reading about, a thought flashed through me: 'This is what I was made for.' I stopped in the street, stunned by the joy of it. People passing paused to look at me standing there alone, grinning from ear to ear. You



find those places, inside ourselves and in the world, where we belong, to find that for which we were made and to recognize it—this is joy.” *Oriah*

“The slogan, ‘Hold sadness and joy,’ reminds us that we are constantly being touched by life. ... Whether we are weathering a snowstorm, gazing at our grandmother for the last time, or letting go of a sparrow, this slogan reminds us that living fearlessly is a matter of gentleness, where delight and sadness, joy and heartache, shock and relief arise perfectly balanced together, inseparable. And it is here as we hold sadness and joy that we discover that we can live life confidently—we can hold such richness and smile and cry at the same time.”
Michael Carroll

“There are lots of occasions for joy, but we can think of joy as a way of feeling, of being that underlies our particular responses and which we tap into when the occasion offers itself. I think it is important not only to recognize when we are in a joyful mood, but also to perceive that we are beings of joy. We can do this when we take continual notice of situations that stimulate joy, when we search for them as far as we are able. We experience ourselves most clearly as joyful beings when we construct our biographies of joy.”
Verena Kast

Questions

1. In reading #1, Howard Thurman wrote that sometimes joy comes silently, while at other times “joy is ... compounded of many things,” including sadness, pain, arrogance, understanding, tenderness, remembrance, and more. Has joy come silently to you? What were the circumstances? Have you experienced

joy that was compounded with one thing or another? Can you give an example? How did the things that were compounded, or better, mixed with joy shape your experience of the joy? Thurman adds, “There are those who have in themselves the gift of Joy.” Have you known people for whom this was true? What impact did they have on people? On you?

2. In reading #2, Carolyn Hobbs writes, “if we only expect to find joy while doing what we really love, we end up spending about 90 percent of our lives joyless.” Do you agree? Why or why not? Her invitation is to also find joy in the everyday hard things. Is this possible? Why or why not? If yes, how might we cultivate “softer, subtler joy that can flood our awareness with a sense of inner peace and well-being, no matter what is happening around us?”
3. In reading #3, Edward Hays writes that there are just two Sundays in the Christian liturgical calendar set aside for rejoicing. What special Sundays in your congregation do you associate with rejoicing? Why? In what ways are these important to you? Are there elements in your weekly order of service that promote rejoicing? Which? How? Hays suggests, given the terrible suffering surrounding us, that we should set aside more Sundays to cultivate joy. Do you agree? Why or why not? How can your congregation promote more joy?
4. In reading #4, Angela Williams Gorrell refers to Brené Brown’s conclusion that joy “requires vulnerability and courage.” Why might this be so? What and/or who can get in the way of experiencing joy? How can these barriers be addressed? Gorrell also writes that “we need permission to be joy-filled ... from other people and ourselves.” Have you given yourself such permission? Have others? What are the conditions of being joy-filled? Gorrell writes that one condition “is to create spaces of joy.” Do you agree? Why or why not? How can we make our homes

spaces for joy? Our congregations?

5. In reading #5, Chade-Meng Tan discusses altruistic joy, the joy in the success and good fortune of others. While this might seem like a natural response, he writes, “altruistic joy is much harder to cultivate than loving-kindness and compassion.” Do you agree? Why or why not? Have you experienced altruistic joy? Can you give an example? Have you been the recipient of altruistic joy? How did it make you feel? Tan suggests that “a subset of altruistic joy that is easy and uplifting,” ... involves “rejoicing in the inner goodness and altruistic behavior of others.” Why would this be easier? Have you experienced this kind of altruistic joy? Can you give an example?
6. In reading #6, Thomas Forsthoefel writes about smiles. What meaning do you associate with a smile? Why? How do you react when someone greets you with a smile? Regarding a smile, Forsthoefel asks and answers, “What exactly do smiles have to do with holiness? Everything.” How might a smile partake of holiness? What are some of the things that lead you to smile? Forsthoefel concludes that some ordinary people smile because they have lived life in extraordinary ways writing, “Their smiles are congruent with a particular vision of reality, one in which love and kindness, and not aggression or despair, speak the last word, no matter the extent of sorrow and suffering.” Have you known someone for whom this seemed true? How did/do you regard them? What do they have to teach us? In this regard, consider the smile of a Thích Nhất Hạnh, Dali Lama, Desmond Tutu, or Nelson Mandela. What do their smiles suggest? Who might you add to this group?
7. In reading #7, Doug Kraft, recalling skipping flat stones on the surface of a lake as a child, writes, “Happiness and ease flow from the bottom of the lake. They aren’t found hopping over the surface of life. We have to slow down enough to settle into the depths.” What



would it mean to life live from “the bottom of the lake” rather than on the surface? Kraft suggests that we move to the “bottom of the lake” by practicing simplicity. Do you agree? Why or why not? How might the practice of simplicity bring joy to your life?

The following questions are related to the Snippets

8. Edward Hays writes about the Japanese ritual Waraiko, which involves three hearty belly laughs. The first two belly laughs express gratitude for the past and the present, while the third blows “the dust off your mind, heart, and soul.” He suggests doing these as a morning prayer. Do you express gratitude for your life on a daily basis? Why or why not? Linda Ellerbee said, “In this world, a good time to laugh is any time you can.” Do you agree? What causes you to laugh? What value do you place on laughter? How does laughter relate to joy?
9. Angela Perkey writes, “Finding joy in the midst of everyday life and sharing it with others is crucial to leading a happy life.” Is doing this easy or difficult? Why? Where do you find joy? Do you share your joy with others? Why? How?
10. Robert Walsh wrote that he did not deserve the Second Brandenburg Concerto. He writes, “Life is a gift we have not earned and for which we cannot pay.” Do you agree? Why or why not? He concludes, “the best we can do is express our gratitude for the undeserved gifts, and do our share of the work of creation.” Is joy an undeserved gift? Do you take joy for granted or with gratitude? Why? If the latter, how do you express gratitude for joy? Does being grateful for joy make for a more joyous life? Why or why not? How?

11. Mark Ward writes that reason is important, yet religion is deeply grounded in the experience of the joy of living. What value do you place on reason? Why? Where is religion grounded for you? Why? How do you “navigate the shoals of love and grief, compassion and estrangement, gratitude and disappointment, and mystery and wonder?”
12. William Martin suggests that parents should support their children in living ordinary lives filled with wonder and joy because, he concludes, “The extraordinary will take care of itself.” How can we make the ordinary come alive? Where can joy be found in the ordinary? In her 1984 essay, *The Riddle of the Ordinary*, Cynthia Ozick lamented that we take the ordinary for granted. Why do we tend to do this? Should, instead, we take the ordinary with gratitude? How might this help us in finding and responding to “ordinary” joy?
13. Jon Krakauer and Christopher McCandless write that unhappy circumstances arise from preferring security and conformity. How might these contribute to unhappiness? For them, the antidote to unhappy circumstances is encountering new experiences. How might new experiences open our eyes? Our heart? How might new experiences contribute to joy in our life? Is the point here novelty for the sake of novelty, or the invitation to awaken from a deadening slumber?
14. Rumi wrote, “Sorrow prepares you for joy.” While this could be viewed be as a justification for sorrow, perhaps he was reaching for something deeper and more profound. Rumi’s assertion was not uncommon. Psalm 30:5b states, “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” What connections do you draw between joy and sorrow? If sorrow is felt more acutely, can the same be true of joy? In the depth of sorrow, how often does joy seem to be even a possibility?
15. Oriah asks, “Tell me about a joy in your life that came unexpectedly, a

moment that you did not even know you were waiting for, that caught you off guard and made you smile.” How would you respond? Have you ever discovered that you were involved in something for which you were made as Oriah did? If yes, did this bring you joy? If you haven’t, would it result in joy if it happened?

16. As Michael Carroll suggests, to “hold sadness and joy” is to live fearlessly and confidently. Do you agree? Doing so is to embrace and balance the yin and yang of life. Have you been able to do this? What are the challenges in doing so? The benefits?
17. Verena Kast writes about the importance of acknowledging that we are beings of joy. Are you a being of joy? If yes, when did you first realize this? What has it meant for you to embrace this? Does embracing that we are made for joy cause us to be more aware of joy? Does it make us more capable of sharing joy?