

CANADIAN
BAPTISTS

Together in Mission



Reflecting Light

QUESTIONS FOR GOING DEEPER

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Joy

Reflection by
Dr. Janet Clark



INTRODUCTION

Dr. Janet Clark takes us through the paradox of joy, particularly how our capacity for joy is expanded by its opposite: sorrow. She brings to light the reality of the troubles we face with a reminder that Christ has overcome the world. Within this paradox, she helps us understand the nature of joy by drawing out concepts of duty and delight as well as gift and choice. As we head into the Christmas season, we are reminded of how much joy and heartbreak this occasion holds historically and for those struggling today.

EXCERPT

The idea that joy and sorrow are mutually exclusive – that we must bury and forget our pain to experience joy – is a cultural rather than biblical concept. Throughout scripture, especially the Psalms, we see agonizing lament intermingled with joy and praise, often within a few verses. Modern psychology echoes ancient wisdom, warning that to numb our negative emotions is to suppress them all. In learning to grieve deeply, surprisingly, our capacity for joy expands.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In his beautiful hymn, Isaac Watts, captures the paradox of the cross as a place where “sorrow and love flow mingled down.” Have you known this in your own life – that in a place of deep sorrow, glimmers of love and joy were also found?
2. Scriptural promises of joy and delight coexist with teachings and commands regarding our duties as Christ followers. What are real world examples of duties you undertake that in no way are “convenient”? What can transform duty from drudgery to delight?
3. Author Kate Bowler challenges the “toxic positivity” in some Christian circles that minimizes or dismisses painful emotions and creates pressure to be joyful, without acknowledging the very real struggles of life. In her words, we need to accept that life is both “beautiful and terrible.” What do you think is the difference between positive thinking and biblical joy?
4. Have you known someone in your life who carries the fragrance of joy, who embodies quiet, durable joy? What have you learned from their life about the fullness of joy?



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