

WEEK OF
PRAYER



joy

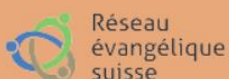


8-15 JANUARY, 2023

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LIBERATED TO JOY; JOY - THE FOUNDATIONAL MELODY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The title of this Week of Prayer already ignites joy. I could not resist just trailing along the topics and taglines and just by glancing through them I realised that there are so many reasons to rejoice!

Yes, there is climate change. Creation is suffering. And yet, despite all these negative effects, there is still so much beauty, so much cause for wonder, so much resilience and fertility. We therefore can have joy in creation and all of us may rejoice in God's gifts!

Going into the Week of Prayer 2023 Christmas lays just behind us. We have celebrated and rejoiced in Jesus Christ, the Bringer of Joy. And once more we have wondered about a manger full of joy. Not a palace, but a manger!

One of the results of Jesus coming into this world is that he sent us his Holy Spirit. As believers we can enjoy the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This power makes joy grow on the path of discipleship.

And even when it times get tough, we can cling to the promise that we are created for joy. Joy as the core characteristic of a fulfilled life. Not only a life that feels right, but a life which is set right by the triune God and in the company of his people.

There is joy in togetherness. In a world where loneliness is more and more rampant, we can celebrate the great deeds of God together. Joy in and through fellowship.

And yes, things sometimes get messed up. But there is hope and we can rejoice in repentance. As repentance means coming home to where we belong, and it involves salvation and redemption not only for our own lives but also for others who are found by God. Yet another reason to rejoice.

Looking back over the past year we can notice much misery. And yet there are so many stories of people who testify to their joy in suffering. It is amazing, and it is hard to grasp. But it is a reality: joy in and joy despite of suffering.

Considering the above there are overwhelming reasons to rejoice within this world. And yet, there is one aspect of joy that still remains: Eternal Joy. This is not escapism, as joy has much to do with the here and now. Eternal joy anchors the "here and now joy" in a rock solid place with an invitation by God himself who says to his faithful servants: enter into the great joy!

Enjoy this Week of Prayer in a special way! May God bless you with joyful perspectives as you pray together!



Thomas Bucher
Former EEA General Secretary
until the preparation for the joyful Week of Prayer was finished



JOY – «THAT THEY MAY HAVE THE FULL MEASURE OF MY JOY WITHIN THEM»

More than once the Bible talks about an apostle Paul who feels joy in affliction, suffering and weakness. Paul encourages us to do the same: «Rejoice!» Easier said than done! For example, when we rise in the morning with pain and have to struggle throughout the day. – When we see pictures of wars and people on the run and feel powerless about the suffering in the world. – When we stand at the grave of a loved one and long for his or her comforting presence. Yes, even in such adverse circumstances, God's word urges us through Paul's letters to rejoice. Is God demonstrating bad humor with this? Or can this attitude actually point the way to a fulfilled life?

«I might believe in the Redeemer (...) if his followers looked more redeemed.» This much-quoted statement of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche is typical of our frequent inability to give room to joy in our lives. In fact, we can never create joy at the push of a button, try as we might. However, if we allow ourselves to be caught up in God's act of love and redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, joy will inevitably enter our lives. Or in other words: Easter is not just one day in the year, but every day of our lives.

During the Evangelical Alliance Week of Prayer 2023, we will explore the secret of such a paschal life by looking at a different facet of the Christian message of joy each day: the joy in creation, the joy in Jesus Christ, the joy as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, to be created for joy, the joy in being together, the joy over redemption, the joy in suffering and finally eternal joy. May we be blessed with the joy that springs from the Gospel, by meditating on the daily readings which include questions for reflection and by praying together.



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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOSTING A WOP PRAYER MEETING

Many local churches in Europe take this Week of Prayer as an opportunity to organise joint prayer meetings, which we would like to encourage. Here a few suggestions for you to keep in mind when you plan:

1. Please make sure that ALL Evangelical churches are invited and included in your prayer gatherings. Make an extra effort to also reach out to the migrant churches.
Do you have Roma churches that you could invite?
Including everyone will make your unity richer and more diverse.
2. It's always a richer experience to go to various places, don't forget about the smaller ones?
Each place is different and adds colour to your unity.
3. How can you practically express the vast diversity in your country? Do you make room for that?
Opening up, making room adds surprising perspectives to unity.
4. Is your event relevant and appealing for youth as well? We encourage you to allow youth to participate and even help you plan and prepare. Unity across generations is really important for the church.
5. Plan a creative, relevant and appealing prayer meeting? Double check to make sure that prayer has the bulk of time?
6. We urge you to keep a gender balance. Have both men and women working together to create a program that will help express diversity?
7. Consider the future. Imagine seeing this event grow throughout the years. How can you create this year's prayer event that will draw people back and bring their friends with them?

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JOY IN CREATION

VERSES

Yet he has not left himself without testimony: he has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy. (Acts 14,17)

MEDITATION

You, who are thinking, breathing, feeling your heart beating and life flowing through your veins, haven't you ever wondered about this abnormal, bizarre, extraordinary thing that is life? Not only your life but all life and all created things! Shouldn't we rather have been part of nothingness forever? By what grace did we enter into existence? To become aware of this tremendous privilege of existence is a source of joy for us as creatures and children of God. A joy that we share and that connects us to the entire creation.

The Bible begins with the joyful exuberance of the world created by God. In Genesis 1,20 God says: «Let the water teem with living creatures, and birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky». The infinite variety of colors, shapes and expressions of life are like a shout of joy and of praise. In Psalm 148 the heavenly bodies, the trees of the field, the animals, all nations praise the Lord for having created them. «They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.» (Ps 19,4-5)

The joy in creation is the answer to the joy of God himself: «May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; may the Lord rejoice in his works!» (Ps 104,31) The joy we feel at being alive connects us to the joy of God who deeply desired for us to exist.

On my journey of faith, I gradually realized how much my view of God and redemption through Jesus Christ was reduced to human existence, as if the rest of creation were merely a backdrop or a self-service shop in which the only thing that mattered concerned human beings. It was by discovering the richness of creation and an honest reading of the Bible that let me recognize that God's love, plans and redemption extend to all of His creation (cf. Col 1,20). «Look at Behemoth, which I made along with you.» (Job 40,15)

God's abundance and generosity are another source of joy in the creation that produces everything we need to live. They are God's gifts for His children. Everybody can rejoice in them. Like manna, there is enough for everyone.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- The joy in creation: Are my eyes opened to the joy of creatures? Do I come into contact with the flowers in the field and the birds in the sky and have I listened to their songs of joy?
- The joy of God: Have I taken in the joy of the creator which he expressed when he created the world and which we experience anew every morning and every spring?
- The abundance of creation: Have I realized that we are dependent on nature for life and that it provides us with everything we need in abundance? Is this proof for me of God's love and generosity? Is it a reason for joy?

PRAYER TOPICS

- For open hearts that take in God's joy over all creation. Let us join the praise of all of God's creatures.
- That the often excessive desires in our lives are not a reason to destroy creation and its creatures which manifest God's joy.
- For all those who have a special calling to care for God's creation; may they be blessed and guided so that the joy we find in it may endure and glorify God's name.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

My God, Your joy can be heard in the deep forest, in the lapping of the waves, in the breeze caressing the flowers. What grace You give me to live. I want to share Your joy and make it resound! Lord, You know my struggles in the face of what we do to Your creation. Help me fix my eyes on You and abandon my idols called consumption, obsession with always more, conformism and laziness. My desire, Lord, is to honor You, and I need You to change my life. Lord, let Your joy be my motivation! Amen.



Steve Tanner

President of A Rocha Suisse

JOY IN JESUS CHRIST

VERSES

As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her! (Luke 1,44-45)

MEDITATION

Anticipation is an enormously beautiful kind of joy. Anticipation of Christmas or of a special event or of a person we are going to meet. How unspeakably great then is the joy, when what we have been waiting for becomes reality. Mary visits her cousin Elisabeth when both of them are pregnant. John leaps for joy in the womb of his mother Elisabeth when she meets Mary who is pregnant with Jesus. This is more than just anticipation; the promise of the long-awaited savior is about to be fulfilled. Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, is going to be born soon.

Joy is the all-embracing theme around Jesus' birth. Jesus comes into the world and the angels announce the message of joy to the shepherds. The three Wise Men bring gifts full of joy. Old Simon rejoices when he finally sees the Savior with his own eyes. Gospel means message of joy because it proclaims Jesus Christ, the giver of joy. But not only this: Jesus is also the object of the joy. He himself sacrifices his life on the cross for us. In Greek, the word joy («chara») is derived from the word grace («charis»). Thus, joy and grace are very closely related. Because Jesus died for us and God has shown us mercy, we rejoice and give Him thanks.

After walking by faith in Jesus Christ for some time, we may forget what great joy we have in him. The baby in Elisabeth's womb was touched by the encounter with Jesus. God becomes man. He gives himself completely. He dies for our sins. We are forgiven. We no longer have to fight over how to become free. We no longer have to suffer from sin. We are liberated through Jesus Christ who saved us. What a gift of grace and what a reason for joy! Hallelujah! May we therefore rejoice in this gift every day.

REFLECTION

- Have I ever consciously accepted this gift of grace from Jesus Christ?
- When I think back to the moment when I consciously embraced this joy through Jesus Christ: What feelings and thoughts did this trigger in me?
- If I have been walking with God for some time: Do I still rejoice in the grace that was given to me by Jesus Christ? And if I've lost this joy: How can I rediscover it?

PRAYER TOPICS

- That I may rediscover the joy in Jesus Christ.
- That I may be completely filled with Jesus' joy.
- For the Gospel and the gift of grace that Jesus gave to me.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Jesus Christ, thank You for bringing joy through coming to earth and through dying on the cross. Thank You for the great gift of grace which fills my heart with joy. Lord, help me to consciously embrace this gift every day so that I may be full of joy. Even though each day may have many challenges, we still rejoice because of Your gift of grace. Help me to remember this every day. Fill me with Your joy. Amen.



Viviane Baud

Reformed Pastor

JOY AS A FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

VERSES

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5,22)

MEDITATION

Being on a journey with Jesus as his disciple is a wonderful invitation to know him, to follow him and to become like him. When Paul speaks about this, he particularly mentions the character of Christ, which he also calls the fruit of the Holy Spirit. (cf. Gal 5,22)

A fruit contains within itself everything needed to multiply and it makes no special effort to taste sweet or look beautiful; it simply is what it is. What this shows us is that we don't have to make any effort for the fruit of the Spirit to be visible. The Spirit who lives in us will show Himself through joy. Yet, it isn't always easy to be joyful ... It would indeed be wrong to say to someone who is experiencing difficulties, «You are a disciple so you must rejoice!»

So how can we grow in experiencing and feeling joy? How can we express this joy which is one of the fruits of the Spirit, regardless of our circumstances? It is interesting to return to the image of the fruit to answer these questions. It is not through our own efforts or demonstrating will power or by ignoring challenges that we will feel more joy. On the contrary: our joy will grow when we remind ourselves that it is a fruit of the Spirit and that this fruit will naturally produce joy. The only way we can have real joy is by living with and by the Spirit of God.

At the beginning of our journey as disciples is the «rebirth». We are «born of water and the Spirit» (John 3). Once we are born of the Spirit and become disciples of Christ, we must continue to walk by the Spirit which will result in increasing joy.

In our society, which is considered post-Christian, people yearn for happiness and joy and they seek joy in so many places and in so many ways... But this restless search for joy becomes very tiring. By cultivating the joy of the Spirit in our lives we have a wonderful opportunity to show our fellow human beings a different way to finding true joy. We can introduce them to a joy that originates from a different kingdom, the kingdom of God.

REFLECTION

- How can I become more rooted in the Spirit in order to express more and more of his fruit?
- How can I show the fruit of the Spirit and be full of joy when I go through difficulties in my life?

PRAYER TOPICS

- That we may become more and more like Jesus in our character.
- For a mature and bountiful fruit, especially in regard to joy.
- That the testimony of a fruit of the Spirit may be visible in us and may our lives touch those around us and reveal Christ to them.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Thank You, Lord, for leading me to walk by Your Spirit every day and for renewing my character. Help me to grow the fruit of the Spirit more and more and let me be a blessing to those around me. Amen.



Yves Bulundwe,

Pastor in the church Home, Lausanne

CREATED FOR JOY

VERSES

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! (Philippians 4,4)

MEDITATION

«Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!» This almost euphoric double imperative is typical of Paul. He is not an apostle known to express himself in a cautious or diplomatic manner. He wears his heart on his sleeve. His enthusiasm can seem downright aggressive. In fact, I find the radical demand with which he approaches the Philippians in this sentence to be hard on the edge of manipulation: «How can you command joy?» I ask Paul. «As if joy were possible at the push of a button, a matter of sheer will!»

If Paul were an advocate for the gospel of prosperity or a «fabric softener» of faith, I'd indignantly and emphatically reject his unworldly demands. However, Paul is credible. He lives what he preaches – this makes me think: After a downright violent encounter with God outside Damascus, this man stakes everything on the one card: Jesus! He takes on arduous missionary trips, risks his life and is repeatedly put in chains for his faith. How could he keep alive his joy in the Lord through all the deprivations, torture and distress? He composes his letter to the church in Philippi – like so many of his letters – in prison. His situation is precarious, he must expect the death sentence. And if it were a letter of lament, of complaint – we wouldn't hold it against him. But no: In none of his letters is joy as prominent as in Philippians. «What is your secret, Paul?» I'd like to ask.

I suspect that Paul was never again able to forget the unconditional acceptance that he had experienced in his encounter with Jesus. He had been thwarted in the midst of blind, religious zeal by God and taken into service. As «the worst of sinners», Paul «was shown mercy» (1 Tim 1,15). God has turned towards him. On this ground Paul stands. He has experienced again and again that Jesus' yoke is easy and his burden is light – even in situations where life is an imposition from a human point of view. An old hymn says: «Jesus has come, eternal joy's reason». This lasting joy in the Lord has the power to assert oneself against opposition of all kinds – then in the life of the apostle and also today in my journey with Jesus.

REFLECTION

- What can I rejoice in? What can I be amazed about? What am I grateful to God for?
- Do I allow myself moments of joy? Is it easy for me to bring myself and others joy?
- Do I allow myself to be authentic before God, to give myself to him – not only with pleasant feelings like joy, but also with my grief, my fear, my shame, my disappointment?

PRAYER TOPICS

- For those people around me who are struggling with their life and with God at the moment.
- For a new revival of my own joy in the Gospel and for the courage to bear witness to it in the world.
- For mindfulness so that I can discover God's presence and proximity in my daily life.
- For creativity and dedication to «let my gentleness be evident» to other people (Phil 4,5) and bring them joy.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Good Lord – thank You for challenging and encouraging me with people like Paul. Thank You for constantly trying to gain my trust. Don't ever let me forget that I can come to You with everything that moves and bothers me. Thank You for seeing me and accepting me in love. Thank You that nothing is more reliable than Your proximity. Awaken joy in me through Your good Spirit. May Your peace, which is higher than all reason, protect my heart and my thoughts. Amen.



Andrea Signer-Plüss

Specialist psychologist for psychotherapy FSP (federation of Swiss psychologists) and employee in the Vereinigte Bibelgruppen VBG (united bible groups)

JOY IN BEING TOGETHER

VERSES

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God (Acts 2,46-47a)

MEDITATION

How do we express joy over God's goodness? By thanking Him and sharing our joy with other people. Yet, sometimes the question «Does anyone else have a testimony?» irritates us. In moments like these, often awkward silence falls. We look around and hope that others might have something to say.

So, what's wrong here? Maybe it's simply not the correct setting; should it be arranged differently? Would it be easier if we shared a meal; is it then easier to express joy over the great acts of God? Or is the reason to be found in the lack of culture to express oneself in public and to rejoice together in God's goodness?

In the Bible we are encouraged again and again to remember the great acts of God, to rejoice in them and to give Him praise and thanks for them (cf. Ps 103,2; Eph 5,20). And we shouldn't do so in silence. We should share joy and memories with each other!

Our «news culture» nowadays does just the same. Yet, mostly it reports negative, critical and threatening news. That's the «objectivity» expected and demanded in modern times. However, this doesn't lead to shared joy, but to fear and mistrust – and as a consequence often also to loneliness.

It is in fact the case that shared happiness is double joy. Anyone who reads the sermon Peter holds on Pentecost (cf. Acts 2,14-36), realizes that the telling of stories accomplishes something. Stories draw a thread from the past to the present and convey meaning. They reveal a perspective for the future to us and make transitions possible. In the context of Acts of the Apostles, this was initially true for around 3000 people, then others joined continuously. Yet we see throughout the Bible how great importance is placed on the repeated and shared telling of stories. The Holy Communion is particularly illustrative of this. Also, a shared meal opens up room for storytelling.

The sharing of stories creates joy. And this joy gives perseverance as well as courage and perspective in any given situation in order to go into the future with hope. All of this brings joy. Does anyone have a testimony after all?

REFLECTION

- How can I contribute more often and tell stories that «create joy» for the community?
- How can I develop my capability in storytelling and thereby increasingly create opportunities to create joy?
- What can I rejoice in right now and with whom can I share this now?

PRAYER TOPICS

- That God helps us to remember what He has done for us and how we can share this with others.
- That we may shape a culture that focuses first on what is joyful and encouraging.
- For ideas and creativity on how we can regularly share what is beautiful, good, joyful and encouraging.
- That we may take one thing from the questions for reflection above and implement it in our lives.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Father in heaven, giver of all good gifts. You are our joy. You know how often we focus on negative things and let them rob our joy.

Yet Jesus says to his disciples and to us: «So with you: now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no-one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.» (Joh 16,22-23)

You give joy to Your disciples, to us, and You fill us with Your Holy Spirit. Grant that this may become visible in our lives. Amen.



Thomas Bucher

General secretary of the European Evangelical Alliance EEA until October 2022

JOY OVER REDEMPTION

VERSES

In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (Luke 15,10)

MEDITATION

David expresses the joy of a man whom God has forgiven of his sin when he exclaims: «Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.» (Ps 32,1) Throughout many passages in the Bible, Paul also repeatedly gives expression to his joy at the return of many sons and daughters to the Father's house. And Luke tells us of the same joy in the Acts of the Apostles: «When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralysed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city.» (Acts 8,6-8)

Through many parables like the story of the prodigal son or of the lost sheep or of the lost coin Jesus teaches us about the great joy of the Father and the Son when people who were lost find back to God (cf. Luke 15). When people repent there is a great celebration in heaven. The Gospel of Luke says: «In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.» (Luke 15,10)

God still acts with power today. By being living witnesses of God's powerful actions, our joy grows and our faith is constantly renewed. I regularly tell people that I am privileged to witness how numerous people turn to God. This gives me great joy and that joy is contagious to those I meet.

The joy of salvation spurs us on with new strength. When the Holy Spirit pours out this joy in us, we can't help but put our faith into action. We are compelled to pray and we want to share the Gospel with everyone wherever the Spirit of God leads us. Let's remember the joy and the love that we experienced when we first said «yes» to Jesus Christ. May we be renewed in the joy over redemption through the work of the Holy Spirit!

REFLECTION

- Why is there such delight in God's heart when someone turns to him?
- Have I experienced the joy of helping someone come to know Jesus?
- Is there anyone I know who could encounter God with my support?

PRAYER TOPICS

- That our hearts be filled with God's love so that we are fully moved by His Great Commission to make disciples of all the nations. (cf. Matt 28)
- That all preconceived ideas about the Gospel and faith in God dissolve so that the words and actions sown may achieve the fruit of repentance that leads to redemption.
- That many find the way to the Father's house and join the kingdom of God.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Lord, I ask You for all the fruits that You promised me to receive through Your Holy Spirit. I ask You to change my heart and to pour into my life such a great measure of love that it compels me to proclaim the Gospel and to pray for the people I meet. I ask You to remove all the obstacles that hinder the Spirit from moving in my life. Lord, fill me with the joy that comes from You, and in particular with the joy of seeing many people's lives turned to You. Please fill me with Your joy and peace so that I may have hope in abundance, through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in me! I ask You for all these things in the precious name of Your son Jesus Christ. Amen.



Bob Davet

Responsible of the network of NEW Life-H2O

JOY IN SUFFERING

VERSES

But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. (1 Corinthians 12,24-26)

MEDITATION

The Taliban promised the opening of schools for girls on March 21, 2022 – a promise lauded by the international community. On March 23, just hours after schools officially opened, the ministry of education overturned their previous decision – secondary schools were closed for Afghan girls, to the heartbreak and dismay of thousands of young girls and parents in the country.

A local Christian, Hana Nasri, explains that regardless of whether schools open or not, the Taliban's ideology is aimed at disempowering women: «If you give a woman the ability to leave her house to go to a school building, you give her agency. The Taliban wants to rob women of any agency.» Walking with the most persecuted Christians around the globe teaches us that the church cannot afford to be indifferent to the suffering or disempowerment of a single believer.

Suffering takes many forms: loss of loved ones, limited prospects for achievement, a lack of relationship and affection, etc. These are not only painful but can steal our joy and rob us of hope. Often this pain comes from sources beyond our control, like the Taliban. But sometimes the deepest wounds are caused by those closest to us, from our brothers and sisters in Christ, whose careless or accusatory words compound suffering. Such «friendly fire» is highly effective at stealing joy and destroying hope.

However, Paul describes the Body of Christ as the place where society's rules don't apply. This Gospel truth offers hope and joy in closed countries beyond the limitations which constrict much of life. This Restorations (a resilience-building program for the persecuted church) teaching is simple: «No matter how little you are valued or trusted outside these walls, here your voice is respected and given dignity. No matter how much blame and shame are heaped upon you outside this sanctuary, here you are innocent, empowered and set free.»

REFLECTION

- Can I think of someone who is suffering or marginalised in my community? How can I be the love of Christ to them?
- Do I judge others? Ask God to make you aware of this and ask him to replace your judgement with his love.
- How does my church community practice suffering and rejoicing together as an expression of unity in Christ?

PRAYER TOPICS

- For a renewed identity in Christ; that persecuted Christians can stand firm in the knowledge of Christ and can experience joy in the midst of suffering.
- For the value which is ours as God's sons and daughters and which can never be diminished by what is said or done to us.
- That we embrace our unity in Christ, agreeing to hear and feel each other's suffering as our own.
- For the freedom in Christ from accusation and blame and for the help to rid ourselves of these old habits so that we do not steal joy from others.
- For the innocence which is ours in Christ Jesus and that we reject attempts by society to make us complicit in shaming or belittling a fellow believer.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You that You are not indifferent to our suffering. Thank You for sending Your Son to live in a human body within human society.

Jesus Christ, You who know the pain of unjust accusation and of betrayal by those who are closest, thank You for Your example of humble and gracious sacrifice. Thank You for overcoming all the evil around us, from which we suffer in our own lives. Forgive us for our own part in causing pain.

Holy Spirit, fill us with Yourself today so that we may know again the joy of being Yours and become vessels to bring that joy to others. Amen.



Helene Fisher

Global Gender Persecution Specialist, Open Doors International

ETERNAL JOY

VERSES

Bring back our captives, Lord, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them. (Psalm 126,4-6)

MEDITATION

When I meet with friends from my youth, we reminisce about shared mountain tours. We laugh about sliding over snowfields, surprising encounters with ibexes or remember storms and breathtaking sunsets. What a joy to share such a treasure trove of memories. The psalmist also remembers, and he remembers the great things God has done. «We were like those who dreamed.» (Ps 126,1-2) What once was unthinkable has come to pass: God has liberated his people. Joy grows from memory.

There is something that's almost better than the event itself which is looking forward to it! When a trekking tour is planned, I throw myself enthusiastically into studying maps, tour reports and weather reports. With each piece of the puzzle, the picture of the upcoming tour becomes clearer and the joy increases. The psalmist's joy doesn't grow only from memories either, but from God's promises of a future in which captives will be freed and dried out streams will be filled with water again and when a rich harvest will be brought in (cf. Ps 126,4-6).

Christians believe that the dryness and tears won't remain forever. God promises us a future that is whole, flourishing and overflowing. Christians defiantly cling to this vision of the future because they believe that with Jesus' resurrection, the restoration has already begun. And they hold on to it while they «sow with tears» (Ps 126,5). Laughing and weeping are not mutually exclusive in the lives of Christians. In the middle of sorrow and hardship, we can feel good because we experience that God's promises are sure. One day He will wipe every tear from our eyes (cf. Rev 21,4) and invite us to his table for the great wedding banquet (cf. Rev 19,9; Mt 8,11; 22,2ff.; 25,10; Lk 12,36; 14,8).

The best is yet to come! This is not a cheap consolation that encourages us to inwardly take leave of the world. Rather, Christian hope for the future invites us to celebrate, to have faith and to love here and now. At our banquet tables, people may already taste something of heaven. And in this way a celebration can become one of the most beautiful forms of resistance – we proclaim with it that suffering is not the ultimate reality and that a good future awaits us.

REFLECTION

- What do I imagine God's new creation to look like? Does that inspire joy within me?
- How might some of this joyful expectation find expression in our families, churches and communities?
- Is there room for both laughing AND weeping in my life?

PRAYER TOPICS

- That unchurched people in Europe may discover God's hopeful promises for their lives and the world.
- For those who suffer, that God may give them grace to remain full of joyful expectation in the middle of tears.
- For Christian musicians and artists; may their work help us experience something of the joy and beauty that awaits us in God's new world.

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Full of joyful expectation I reach out to You, God.

For You will bring back to life

what is unfree and dried out.

What is broken here

will be whole in Your new world.

Full of joyful expectation I reach out to You, God.

For You promise growth and thriving to those

who are deprived of their reward, their home or family.

In Your presence we rejoice

because You make all things whole.

Amen.



Andi Bachmann-Roth

Co Secretary General of the Swiss Evangelical Alliance (German-speaking part)