

# May We All Find Joy

For the Home and Family section this month, the publications department asked writers what things in their lives bring joy – faith, home, family, their pastimes or workplace? In turn, we received heartfelt articles that described how they find joy, beautiful sentiments of contentment through service and fellowship in God's kingdom.

However, along with these articles, another message arrived in our inbox – that joy, even the joy of believing can be stolen by acts of ostracism, discrimination and bullying, even within a congregation. This Home and Family page reflects those contradictory images of life as believers: we are both sinners and believers whose sins are forgiven. We have included articles, an anonymous letter, and questions for discussion. Our wish is that these articles will help us all understand that in this journey we have responsibilities to care for others, we are escorts. In this task we have both our good intentions, our weaknesses and the power of the gospel. May God help us in this as He has in the past.

## God's Kingdom is a Source of Joy

**Tom Skoog**

Joy is a word worth contemplating. There are many blessings in my life that bring joy. I have been able to pursue many of my dreams and it seems that the few that I have left are not so important anymore. What seems to be important is hanging on to faith that I have been gifted with from my childhood. It seems a matter of prayer that I, and those close to me would be preserved in faith, that we would maintain the hope of meeting one day in heaven. Therefore, it seems that joy for me is precious, when I can live in the shelter of the kingdom of God, living of grace under the reassurance of the redeeming gospel. I understand by faith that my earthly home is a temporary place. If I endeavor to stay in the middle of the flock, I can securely get to the destination of heaven.

I am thankful for the unity of God's kingdom. The work that is happening is truly amazing. The gifts that God has given to do the work are abundant. It is humbling to see the candlestick of visitation moving to the uttermost parts of the earth. Vast amounts of God's work are being done over the internet. This is being done in so many forms: songs, programs, sermons, Bible classes, Sunday school, etc.

The world is churning like a storm. The wind is blowing. Yet, inside God's kingdom there is righteousness, peace and joy. It is a safe place.

The last two verses of SHZ 208 remind me of the Holy Spirit which is only found in God's kingdom. When I sing it, it brings me great, comforting joy.

*The Holy Spirit calls and gathers and by the spoken gospel gives new birth.*

*This Spirit never teaches errors, it makes His church the ground of truth on earth....*

The end of this verse and the beginning of the next are remarkable. They speak of “trusting hearts.” The last line of verse 5 refers to living faith as trusting: “...in hearts He makes to trust what they have heard.” Do children have trusting hearts? Peter hopes that we would be as newborn babes, desiring the sincere milk of the Word. He advises to lay aside “all malice, all guile, hypocrisies, envies and evil speaking” (1 Pet. 2:1–2). The last verse also speaks of trust:

*These trusting hearts make up His kingdom wherein the only living hope is found;*

*The Spirit holds this flock in union, And here the hearts of men are loosed and bound.*

I find it a source of joy, that the kingdom of God on earth is like a building, built with earthly stones, faulty, poor and sinful. Nevertheless, Peter describes these stones as “lively stones, which are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:5). Paul says the house of God is “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). I pray to God that He would continue to reveal the preciousness of God’s kingdom to me and my loved ones. Here trusting hearts can be content to sit on the green grass at the feet of the Good Shepherd, be in subjection to one another, and taste the graciousness of God. Then, as the poet Niilo Rauhala assures us in the final line of SHZ 208, “And when the Lord shall resurrect the dead He’ll bring His flock unto himself! Amen.”

## Joy Is Serving

**Perry Simonson**

My experiences serving in the congregation have brought joy in each phase of life. In my youth, I assisted my parents in janitorial duties and helped with various church construction projects. One of the more memorable projects was assisting in building the Cokato church. This project was an opportunity to get to know other congregation members whom I had previously not known so well. I looked forward to spending my evenings and Saturdays helping in whatever way I was asked. It also was an opportunity to learn new skills. Sometimes we don’t realize all the skills we may have, if we don’t have an opportunity to use them.

As I've grown older, duties in the congregation have changed. I now have duties as a service director, Bible class teacher, and assisting with the congregation's bookkeeping. When I was asked if I could take on these new duties, I had doubts on whether I would be able to fulfill the needs of the congregation. Many questions swirled in my mind. Would I be able to put together Bible class lessons, or would I have enough time to help with bookkeeping? I've found the need to put my trust in God and that He will bless.

Each duty in a congregation has its own blessings and serves the congregation in its own way. Each one of us has our own God-given gifts that we are able use in serving our brothers and sisters in faith. If we're asked to serve in the congregation, we can accept the duty and give it our best effort. We all know that many hands make the workload light. God's Word reminds us: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Often when we are asked to serve in the congregation, the blessings are greater than any of the inconveniences we encounter in serving. If we do our duties willingly and cheerfully, God will bless the work.

## Ostracism Hinders Joy

**Sandra Pylvainen**

Many young people struggle to fit in with their age group, whether at school or at church. This struggle is a part of growing up and integral to self-identity and character development. As we move toward adulthood, it is essential that we discover who we are, what we stand for, and what we will not stand for. In this, young believers want to find friends who share values and interests that coincide with their own, both at school and at church.

But what happens when a middle-schooler cannot find friends in their congregation? What about teenage years without a believing friend? This situation can make other areas of personal growth and development even harder. This situation can also cause a teen to feel forsaken, even though we know that a believer is never truly alone. Still, a depressed or sorrowful teen may feel that the love in God's congregation does not extend to them, especially if love given by the Holy Spirit is not felt from peers. If a situation of being friendless continues, those left alone may feel ostracized and unlovable. Then the joy of believing may be elusive or concealed by a cloak of depression.

In these situations, we pray as the Psalmist "lead me beside the still waters and restore my soul." The lone individual can pray and trust that God will provide comfort. Also, we pray that parents, teachers and camp directors, all of us, will be given the thoughts and hearts to diligently prepare for camps and events, always planning to introduce all children to each other, create activities that promote bonding

and sharing, and that we ourselves will exhibit God's love to all children, seeking the loner, the reticent, the out-of-towner, or the one who has no cousins nearby – whether or not the child is from a believing home. May we teach our children in love that a group, even if two people, have the ability to invite the one left alone.

Joy of the believer is also the joy of belonging and showing others that they can belong. We can all reach out to someone who is alone, feels left out, or is not included. If at first they are hesitant to join our group, we can patiently ask again and show that we do want them along. Showing this love is a fruit of faith, and the joy of believing is the feeling that “my cup overfloweth.”

\*Ostracize: to exclude from a group by common consent.

## Anonymous Letter, March 2021

### **Subject: How Do We Treat Others?**

Dear *Voice of Zion* Publications Staff,

My mother's heart is aching. Other moms across American Zion also have the same aching hearts.

We are concerned about how our children treat each other, especially around the ages of eleven-twelve through sixteen-seventeen. Kids are being ostracized in the middle-school years and then also in the teen years – if they are not “cool” enough.

Parents like me want and need this issue to be discussed in truth and in love. Would it be appropriate to address this in *Voice of Zion* articles, in Sunday School lessons, and at camps?

The pain and trauma from ostracism can be deep and long-lasting. One teenage boy asked, “Why is it that when I'm at school or the store people are more kind to me than at services?”

We need each other. Kids need each other. Love needs to be extended to others outside of our friend groups or even our extended family groups.

God's Peace, *A Concerned Parent*

## An Elder's Joy

**Verna Jacobson**

*“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17).*

Along life's way of varied challenges are moments of pure joy. First in my life, of all the joys I have known, is the joy of being a child of God and knowing that my sins are forgiven in Jesus' name and precious blood. I can now look back to my years as a child in the kingdom of children, and I see they included many rich experiences. All stages of life offer joy.

Many, many memories of these joys come to mind, but some memories come back with love that warms my heart. I recall those days when we were raising our children, trying to teach them in the way they should go: the simple ABCs of living faith. I think of teaching them that when they offend these matters should be taken care of with the gospel, asking for their sins to be forgiven. Bedtime was always so beautiful for us, especially when the children, down to the littlest one, would come running to ask for their sins forgiven, then with happiness run to bed.

I also remember how much joy there was when a new baby was brought home from the hospital. There was so much love to share towards that little one from everyone in the family! My arms still ache to cuddle and feel that newborn baby. If you were blessed to be a mother, you may know that great joy.

The joy as an elder is just a little different. We have gone to school, graduated, maybe gone to college, worked and perhaps retired, maybe married and had children who have grown up and gone their own way. There is then a change to your life. It can be quiet, and sometimes lonely. There is still that joy of memories you have when you worked outside the home.

But now you have slowed down your pace of life. Days are silent without the hustle and bustle of raising children and all that comes with it. This is when joy takes on a quiet and reflective mood. This time of life allows other choices that bring joy. Some may decide to travel, others choose hobbies – baking, which is my joy to this day, gardening, crafting, volunteering, grandparenting, carpentry and so many more.

Depending on gifts, retirees can find joy in helping at camps, giving presentations, maintaining the church building and maintaining their own homes. Health issues may arise, but still at the end of the day a weak prayer rises from deep within as we fold our hands and pray to God. The prayer is beautifully expressed in SHZ 490, that He will carry us to that joyous homeland shore where we can sing songs of praise forevermore!

*Remember me, dear Father, in my declining years;*

*With sin I still must battle; I oft have pain and fears,*

*You are my staff and stay, oh carry me, I pray.*

*As when I was an infant, and cast me not away.*

*Oh Jesus, I am feeble, and powerless in all;  
I sigh beneath my burdens; my faith is weak and small;  
My strength of youth is gone; oh leave me not alone;  
when health and senses fail me, may angels lead me home.*

*When near the hour of parting I weaken ev'ry day.  
O gracious Holy Spirit, on my behalf You pray.  
I soon will be undressed of my corrupted flesh!  
Oh, take me home to heaven, to everlasting rest.*

## Joy and Friendship with Ida

**Carol Tiffany**

Are all our friends of similar age and do they have similar life experiences? Sharing a similar age and having similar life experiences can be the basis of friendship. However, having friends of all ages can bring special joy to our lives. When I was a college student, just having graduated from high school, I had a special believing friend much older than I was, Ida Leppa.

After my high school graduation, I moved to Esko, Minnesota to attend college in Duluth. At the time, there was a small believing congregation in Esko. Since the congregation was small, about twenty members when I moved there, it was easy to become friends with everyone of all ages. I was busy with my studies, but I still craved believing friends and having connections with a congregation.

Ida was a believing woman, retired, widowed, and living alone in a home in Cloquet, a town about five miles from Esko. Ida was friendly and took interest in everyone and their lives, regardless of age. She thoroughly enjoyed the company of other believers and loved to have believers visit in her home. Ida invited me over for coffee and Sunday lunches. These lunches were a delight as Ida was a talented cook. I would often worry about eating too much because everything tasted so good. However, Ida would advise, "If we're blessed with good food, we should eat."

During our visits, Ida was always interested in my life and how everything, including my studies, were going for me. She also shared about her life, her joys, her struggles and experiences. As a young adult it felt warm and comforting to share about the way and the journey with this older believer. It brought me joy to know that this older sister was believing the same way I endeavored to believe. Often, we preached the gospel to each other.

Ida freely shared her life experiences with me. She had lost family members to previous heresies which caused her sorrow. However, Ida found joy in believing day to day. She eagerly attended any services in our area and entertained visiting believers. If she had believers from other localities visiting, she would often invite me to join them.

Ida was an artist. She shared the background to each of her paintings with me. Ida also wrote a hymn, which is SHZ 288, “The Blood of Christ is Far More Dear.” Along with Ida, I also made another lifelong friend, Ida’s daughter Pauline Leppamaki. While I lived in Esko, Pauline moved back to live in Cloquet.

Even after I moved from Esko, I maintained my close friendship with Ida and Pauline as they moved to Menahga, Minnesota and then to Brainerd, Minnesota. Thinking about Ida makes me lonesome for her and other dear older believing friends from the Esko congregation that have gone to “...the place prepared for me where I shall praise the Holy Lamb whose blood has set me free” (SHZ 288:7).

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What is joy? How is it different from contentment?
2. What is special about the joy found in God’s kingdom?
3. If joy is a fruit of personal faith, why would ostracism or bullying prevent another from feeling joy?
4. If you have prevented someone from feeling joy at camp or church, how can you restore the joy?
5. In everyday life, what kind of pastimes give you joy? What about your family members?