



## **Celebrating God's Goodness!**

Traditions can be a wonderful tool for your family to celebrate God's goodness; to instill values; to establish a unique identity for your family; to provide security; and to build memories.

"The joy of the Lord is my strength." (Nehemiah 8:10) is a verse we often quote; but did you know that the context of that verse is celebrating the Lord's goodness with feasting?

**Where does this verse come from?**

Nehemiah had returned to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon to administrate the rebuilding of the wall of the city. With his strong leadership and the people's diligent work, the wall was completed in only two months. When the seventh month came, they gathered to celebrate the Feast of Trumpets, which was an assembly on the Sabbath, to present themselves before the Lord to seek His favor. (A week later they were to assemble again for the Day of Atonement where they were to repent and fast.) The people assembled and Ezra (the priest), Nehemiah (the governor) and the Levites began to read the Law and explain it so that they could understand. The Truth penetrated their hearts and they were broken and weeping. This response was appropriate; but not at this time. The following week, they were to focus on their sins, as well as their nation's sins and repent with all their hearts. Nehemiah told them that this day set aside for feasting and joy was sacred to the Lord and they were to **not** grieve, but to celebrate! The next day, they heard the Law read and explained again and their response was to obey the command to live in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles for a week celebrating the Lord's goodness.



### **A Time to Rejoice & a Time to Mourn**

God was in essence speaking to the Israelites through their authority: "Don't focus on where you have blown it right now (that will have to happen!); but instead rejoice that the Law has been uncovered and explained to you. Rejoice that you now know what's on my heart; what I desire for you to do to honor me. Enter back into relationship with me."

We tend to think of praying and fasting as sacred and celebrations as frivolous. God however sees both as sacred. In fact, as our Creator, His instruction manual commands times set aside for fasting and times for feasting; times set aside for weeping and times set aside for rejoicing. We need both. Both honor the Lord.

*"Don't focus on where you have blown it right now  
(That will have to happen!); but instead rejoice that the Law  
has been uncovered and explained to you."*

When we celebrate God's goodness, the result will be joy in our hearts. Nehemiah gave the Israelites some instructions on how to celebrate:

*"Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength....Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them."  
Nehemiah 8:10 & 12*



**What does this verse remind you of?**

Hmmmm, sound likes eggnog and freshly baked cinnamon rolls to me. Or hot cocoa with gingerbread. Or a gift basket of goodies to a needy family. It sounds like gatherings of relatives laughing, joking and hugging. It sounds like singing and smiling.

Besides delicious food and an atmosphere of celebration, Psalm 145:4-7 gives us a deeper picture of celebrating God's goodness:

*"One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.*

*They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty and I will meditate on your wonderful works.*

*They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds.*

*They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness."*

### **Telling Stories to the next generation!**

Celebrating God's goodness involves one generation telling their stories of God's intervention and blessing in their lives to the next generation. "When Grandma was a little girl...." "When your Mommy and I were first married...." Family stories have a big place in the celebrating: remembering all the times that we prayed and God came through; remembering all the times that God surprised us with His good gifts; and remembering all the wonderful people that He has lovingly placed in our lives.

*Celebrating involves communicating this thanks and praise to God!*

What if you don't have a godly heritage? God sends blessings to the just and unjust, the sinner and the righteous. Ask God to reveal His goodness in your lives (and family members) before Christ. Just because people don't acknowledge Him, doesn't mean He has blessed and prospered and intervened.

### **There is Cause for Celebration in the Bible!**

Another place we find the mighty acts, wonderful works, and great deeds of the Lord Almighty is in the Bible. Reading His word and telling Bible stories has a big place in celebrating His goodness.

When we hear about all the awesome things our dear Lord has done for us and those we love, thanks and praise will fill our hearts. Celebrating involves communicating this thanks and praise to God. We can sing to Him! We can pray and thank Him! We can write Him poems or letters. We can dance for Him!

When the woman found her lost coin, she had a party to celebrate!  
When the prodigal son came home, his dad had a feast to celebrate! As our hearts are filled with praise, we want to draw others in with us to celebrate.

*Celebrating leads to joy and joy leads to Celebrating!*

One of my friends told me how she got so grumpy at Christmastime because she hated the secularization of Christmas and all the gift-giving expectations when she and her husband had a meager salary with a small gift-giving budget. I encouraged her to change her perspective. You can focus on the negative or the positive. No one can secularize **your** Christmas except for you. You can choose what you will or will not participate in. We can have a cheerful heart and a happy smile as we shop in the crowded store in December and be lights for Him! We can use the worldly holiday celebrations to spark our prayer life praying fervently for revival to break out in this country. But we can rejoice that some "meaty" (filled with good theology and doctrine) Christmas carols are played loudly for the lost to hear. As I shop, I pray that the words would penetrate the hearts of those around me. We can give our own and other people's expectations to the Lord and ask Him what he is calling us to do and give. Then with a light heart, we can give generously, expecting nothing in return. Mary took my advice and on New Year's Eve, she told me that the past Christmas had been wonderful; in fact, her best ever.

Celebrating leads to joy and joy leads to Celebrating! Christmas is a wonderful time for joy because a Great and Holy God extended love and hope to a people who didn't deserve it. That is amazing grace! Our God is so good! And Christmas is a wonderful reason to celebrate!

