

1 JOY

2 Jingle Bells at Funerals

- I know that many of you are wondering, if it is appropriate to sing Christmas Carols at funerals.
- I'm not just talking about funerals during the Holiday season, but year around.
- In other words, since Christmas Carols are full of joy and thanksgiving, shouldn't we be singing them year around—even at funerals.

3 A Real Story

- Dennis Wilson is a backup singer in the country music's unofficial capital, Nashville, Tennessee.
- In the book Real Country Humor, Wilson tells a true story about a friend of his who sings professionally at funerals and weddings.

4 A Widow's Request

- Wilson's friend got a call from a woman whose husband had suddenly died of a heart attack.
- She requested he sing at her husband's funeral
- When asked if she had anything specific for him to sing, she couldn't think of anything.
- Finally, she said, "Jingle Bells,"—confirming that it was his favorite song.
- Not feeling it was appropriate for a funeral, he objected.
- But she insisted, "Jingle Bells" was his favorite song.

5 The Funeral

- When his friend got there for the funeral, everybody was crying and carrying on because it had been such a sudden death.
- But he got up and started singing, "Dashing through the snow . . ."
- People started frowning and giving him dirty looks. He said, he could feel the hostility in the air. But he managed to finish the song and sit back down.
- After the funeral, the lady came over with the money to pay him for singing. As she handed him the envelope she said in a scolding voice, . . .
- "I meant the song 'Glory Bells! not 'Jingle Bells.'"

6 Why Not?

- Why not sing Jingle Bells at a funeral.
- Christmas is a joyous celebration.
- The Christmas season is a time of great joy.
- According to 1 Thessalonians 5:16, which happens to only have two words, it says, "Rejoice always."
- The Apostle Paul, doesn't say "Rejoice sometimes." Or when you feel like. Or when everything is going great. It says simply, "Rejoice always."
- In the Greek, it literally says, "Sing, 'Jingle Bells' at funerals."

7 Seasonal Affect Disorder

- An estimated 10 million Americans suffer from Seasonal Affect Disorder (SAD) or what is often referred to as the "Holiday Blues."

- Symptoms include a lack of energy, difficulty concentrating on or completing tasks, and withdrawal from friends, family, and social activities.
- All of this leads to the depression, pessimistic feelings of hopelessness, and lack of pleasure.

8 Causes

- Experts are not sure what causes SAD, but they think it may be caused by a lack of sunlight.
- Lack of light may upset your sleep–wake cycle and other circadian (24 hour) rhythms.
- And it may cause problems with a brain chemical called serotonin that affects mood.

9 Causes

- Other contributing factors . . .
 - Unrealistic expectations (Our vision of what Christmas ought to be isn't working out)
 - Debt (No money for gifts)
 - World Events (Wars, Rumor of Wars, talk of Financial Collapse, etc.)
 - Relationship Problems (Family reunions that create strife)

10 Offset the Problem

- Bask in the Light
 - One of the most effective treatments for seasonal depression is light therapy.
 - Even twenty minutes seated beside a sunny window or walking outside at lunchtime helps.
 - The other all–important light source is God's word. In the business of the season, don't neglect time in Bible study and prayer.

11 Offset the Problem

- Exercise
 - One of the best ways to combat depression is with physical activity.
 - Often this is difficult but find an accountability partner and hit the gym.
 - Aerobic exercise increases the heart rate and releases endorphins in the brain, which leads to increased feelings of well–being, not to mention helping you avoid those unwanted holiday pounds.

12 Offset the Problem

- Lower your personal goals
 - Many times we overload ourselves with “must do's” during the holidays.
 - Often these goals are unrealistic and leave us with a feeling of defeat when not accomplished.
 - When you're already feeling depressed, a list of undone to–do's can be overwhelming.
 - Take a serious look at what you hope to accomplish and then strike through or decrease requirements for some of the things on your list.
 - If you've ALWAYS done things a certain way, give yourself permission to do it differently and simpler this year.

13 Offset the Problem

- Focus on making pleasant memories
 - Even if Christmas reminds you of a depressing past, you can take steps to create pleasant memories for the future.
 - Begin a new tradition that is unique for you and your immediate family.
 - It can be as simple as a Christmas Eve song–fest and story time or as elaborate as an overnight trip to a fancy hotel.
 - Whatever you choose let it require a minimum of preparation and maximum enjoyment.

14 Offset the Problem

- Perform acts of service for others
 - A great way to overcome feelings of sadness is to focus outward rather than inward.
 - Realize you are not the only one struggling during the holidays.
 - There are many others who are sad, depressed, and lonely.
 - Even though you may not feel like exerting yourself, push yourself to find a way to offer an act of service for an elderly or disabled person in your church or community.
 - It may involve wrapping presents, driving someone to a doctor’s appointment, or simply listening and offering words of comfort and encouragement.

15 Finding Joy

- One woman, Wendy Wright, discovered the joy of the Christmas season in one of the most unlikely of places a homeless shelter in her city.
- Wendy and some others from her church visit homeless shelters each year to sing Christmas carols.
- At the end of their program, they were ready to leave when a homeless man about fifty in a soiled jacket approached Wendy.
- He asked Wendy if she would sing his favorite Christmas song with him. The song was, “O Holy Night.”

16 Finding Joy

- Wendy agreed and they began singing. The crowded room gradually grew silent as the two of them raised up their voices together. “O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining, It is the night of the dear Savior’s birth . . .”
- The man in the soiled jacket leaned on the edge of a tattered sofa about three feet from Wendy singing with his eyes closed. As he sang Wendy noticed a change come over the man.
- As he continued to sing, his face shone and tears fell gently from his lowered eyes. “I knew, at that moment,” Wendy says, “that his longing and mine were one . . . it is etched on both of our hearts.” We have a common precious faith!

17 Joy All Year Long

- But the writer of Thessalonians would have us experience joy all year long.
- He would have us experience joy when the carols and the lights and the nativity scenes have all been put away.
- How do we do that? Or in other words, how do we, “Rejoice in the Lord always”? (Phil 4:4 NIV)
- Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Phil 4:6 NIV)

18 Stop Worrying

- So instead of worrying about our problems we should be praying about our problems to God.
- Then, according to this passage in 1 Thessalonians, we would have the peace that transcends all understand where we would be less likely to complain and worry.
- So then with our conscience clear before God we can rejoice in the Lord because our faith tells us that God will be faithful to intervene.

19 Faith Killer

- If we remain anxious and fail to take our worries before the Lord what will happen.
- We can be tempted to complain, slander, slur, and bad mouth others. Or even withhold respect and love from those we think have failed us.
- If we do these kinds of things does that give us confidence that the Lord will answer the prayers we do pray?
- Will it cause us to rejoice in the Lord or worry more because our conscience testifies against us?

20 Rejoicing in the Lord

- Rejoicing in the Lord comes through the expectation that we will receive from the Lord what he has promised.
- If for the lack of peace in our lives we stumble and our conscience is defiled, so is our faith.
- So then let us seek the peace and presence of God in our lives by taking our worries to him because the Scripture says, “He cares for us.”

21 Percival Bryan

- Bryan came to the United States in 1924, as a stowaway on a banana boat from Jamaica.
- He became a cab driver in Washington D.C. and carried in his cab a “guest book.”
- After 50 years, hundreds of thousands of passengers have signed his book.
- It contains the names of Presidents, jazz greats, senators, scientist, and everyday people; mostly everyday people.
- The 312 books that make up this collection are now on display at the Smithsonian Institute.

22 Percival Bryan

- Bryan is remembered for his friendliness and poise.
- One night, two of his passengers robbed him. But before the ride was over, not only had they given back the money, they had both signed his book.
- When asked what keeps you going?
 - “My priorities,” Bryan said, “friends. Most of all, God.”
 - “Every morning I get down on my knees and I have my little prayers.”
 - “I ask God to go with me, protect me, and ride with me to help others. And I tell you, sometimes I feel very rich. Don’t have nothin’, not much money in my pocket, but inside I feel like I have done my best and that God is indeed with me, in which I greatly rejoice!”

23 Percival Bryan

- Cabby Percival Bryan is with God now, but those autograph collections in the Smithsonian speak of a man who knew how to rejoice always and to pray continually.
- God rode with him in his cab. God was the major influence in how he conducted his life.

•His life was a continuous prayer, and joy was his constant companion. God was with him always.

24 Rejoice in the LORD

- Show me a person that is anxious and I'll show you someone who needs to pray to God.
- If the prayer includes "thanksgiving" we will receive peace from God that will remove the worry from both our hearts and minds.
- Then we will be able to Rejoice in the Lord as our conscience testifies on our behalf that God is with us and no weapon formed against us shall prosper.

25 Conclusion

- Why don't more people have the peace of God in their lives?
- Because our stubborn self-centeredness blinds us from seeing that our real problems are not with our circumstances but with our faith.
- However, if we humble ourselves before the Lord and pray with thanksgiving, the light of God presence will shine upon us.
- It will drive away all darkness and gloom and open our eyes to see that God is indeed with us and so who can be against us.
- Let us therefore, Rejoice in the LORD always! Because he is faithful. Now that is something to be thankful for!