



Releasing Joy in Lent

Joy is more than happiness: it has a quality of eternity and promises deep contentment that withstands the ups and downs of each day's journey. Revd Michaela Youngson (Methodist minister)

In our Lent book *Opening our Lives*, Trystan Owain Hughes invites us to **Just Open Your eyes** to the presence of joy. He acknowledges that there are times in life when joy seems absent, but he says, even in times of struggle, God's joy will not be far away from us – sometimes we just need to open our eyes.

Joy is a deep word. It's a gift of the spirit and the word joy is found throughout the Bible. However, it is a gift which can defy definition; perhaps we best define joy when we experience it. So this Lent, more than any other, we are invited, *'to open ourselves to recognising [the] kingdom's beauty, wonder, comfort and love all around us.'* (p11) Sometimes we need a little assistance with this; so below I just offer 5 spiritual practices, which might be of help.

Maybe there is a practice you might wish to take up for Lent (and beyond!) or perhaps there is something here that will enhance what you already do.

May you experience God's joy, hope, and love this Lent. Elaine

1. **GRATITUDE DIARY:** Each day write down 3 new things you are grateful for, things that have brought life to your day and give thanks for what you have received.

You could place these in a blessings jar; at the end of Lent remind yourself of the blessings you have received.

*O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures for ever.*

1 Chronicles 16:34

*Gracious God
Source of all JOY
Revealer of all beauty,
Centre of all love,
I thank you for this day,
Open my soul, eyes and
heart
to the gifts you offer.
Amen*

2. **TWO MINUTE JOURNAL:** Just journal, free write (as it comes), something in your day/week that has brought you life. i.e. a positive experience, a kindness – whatever you choose.

*Once again I'll go over what GOD has done,...
I'll ponder all the things you've accomplished,
and give a long, loving look at your acts.*

Psalm 77:11-12 (The Message)

3. **EXERCISE:** Paul describes our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor 6:19)

When you can, take your daily exercise out in nature (subject to any current COVID-19 regulations of course!) and try this: stop and pause occasionally – perhaps at a favourite view or tree, or a bench where you often take a break. Pray a verse or two from a favourite/suitable psalm: Psalms 8 or 19 might be good choices.

If you cannot get out, this could equally be done looking at the view through a window or by a favourite plant.

*LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*
Psalm 8:1

4. **TIME OF MEDITATIVE PRAYER/ STILLNESS:** Jesus, we are told, often disappeared to a quiet place to pray.

"In the inner stillness where meditation leads, the Spirit secretly anoints the soul and heals our deepest wounds." **John of the Cross**

Try this to help settle into a time of quiet.

*Be still and know that I am God
Be still and know that I am
Be still and know
Be still
Be.* (Psalm 46:10)

5. **CONSCIOUS ACTS OF KINDNESS:** (and this includes kindness to ourselves)

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*¹ The second is this: **"Love your neighbour as yourself."**¹ There is no commandment greater than these.' Mark 12: 30-32

As Paul writes: "Love never fails."
(1 Cor 13:8, New Testament for Everyone)

*May the God of hope fill you
with all joy and peace
in believing,
So that you may abound in hope by
the power of the
Holy Spirit.*

*Amen
(Romans 15:13)*

May you experience God's joy, hope, and love this Lent.