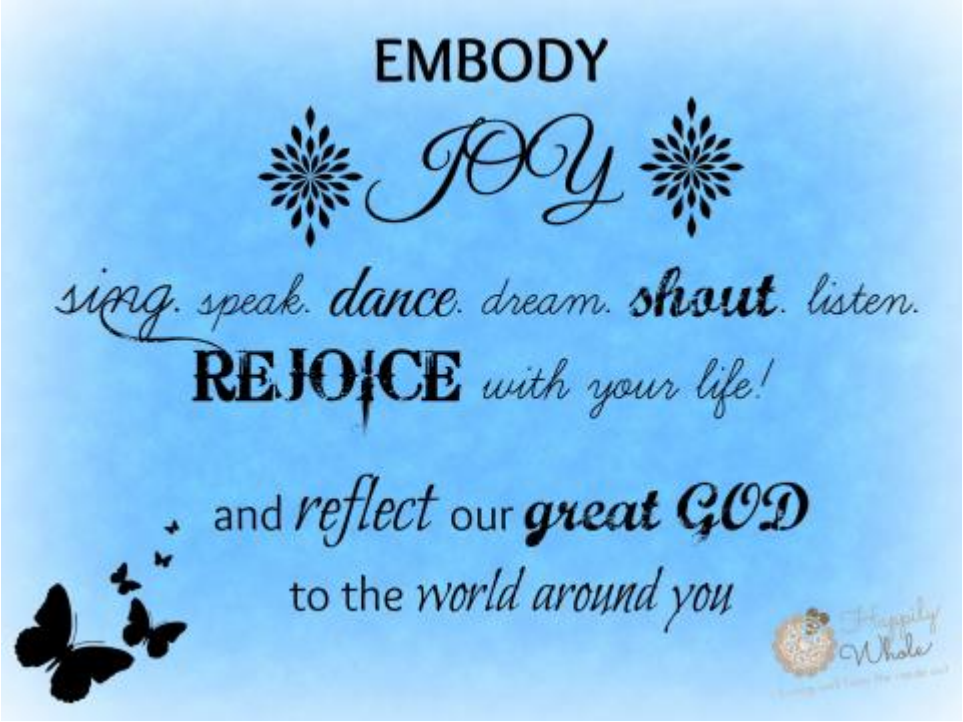
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Redefine, Embody & Reflect Real JOY

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I learned something new just now. This little tid bit about my favorite Book ignites my yearning to search out the JOY my Savior supplies even alongside His suffering. This little known detail about the only Book we can consume as nourishment for our souls and in return it recreates us, affirms my quest for the joy of Christ. What I learned just now leaves me knowing I missed an important detail when I dove into my **reverse resolutions** [1]. *What is this fact intriguing my mind and busting up stereotypes about our Savior, challenging beliefs about a depressing or boring ole' Bible? Here it is:*

Did you know that there are more than 500 references to JOY, GLADNESS, REJOICING, DELIGHTING and LAUGHING in the Bible? It's true. If this big Book came to life it might just laugh, dance or look at YOU with pure delight! With words like that etching the pages, we should be itching

to search for its soul-saving, uncontainable contentment all the time.

The Bible is actually a transformative *BOOK OF JOY*! "So what?", you say. Sooooo...that means it's where our journey begins. It means the living Word tells of a GLAD, loving God and a Jesus who joyfully came to save you. And sometimes we miss that amidst the messages of suffering....just like we so easily miss living joy in our lives.

Try containing your smile reading this sample: ***"Yahweh your God is there with you, the warrior-Savior. He will rejoice over you with happy song, He will renew you by His love, He will dance with shouts of joy for you."*** Zephaniah 3:17

WOW. Rejoicing is my least likely reaction when I look at my reflection. I don't dare laugh, let alone dance. But I've already told you how **I lost my laughter** **[2]**.... Yet, of all 500 references related to joy, this single verse reveals ***HE REJOICES over ME!*** How can it be that our sovereign God of the universe shouts with joy looking at sinful me?!

He's dancing, shouting and renewing you with His uncontainable love, too! He rejoices looking at you, His beautiful creation!

Go ahead, look at yourself. He sings a happy song seeing you. Isn't it amazing? It's the reason I'm on this journey to discover the deep down meaning, to experience Jesus-joy [3]. It's why I desperately desire to unpack its essence and embody it. It'll reveal peace beyond understanding in any situation and something *better than happiness* no matter what's happening.

THIS dancing, loving, rejoicing, joyful God is the God I want the world to know through me.

Yes. God wants the world to know HIM through US. And, my sweet friends, since we are creatively made with His hand, we are both an expression and a result of God's love. It's no wonder the God of the universe sees us with eyes of JOY. So, we MUST reflect it!

~We must embody JOY to reflect His LOVE, brightly blessing the world around us!~

Wait...maybe you're a little like me. Maybe you've lost your laugh [2]or you're searching for how to express such delight when you wake up feeling doomed [3]by your to-do list. Maybe you feel complacent and your creative touch on the world around you has been squelched with mundane, everyday duties. *What if we're all just a bit beaten down?*

You see, the truth is this life carries struggles and sorrows. His Word proclaims we won't ever see perfection this side of heaven's gates. The exact opposite, actually. Alongside those 500 references to joy and rejoicing in Scripture, don't we read many more about sadness, mourning and tears?

Now, here's what really surprised me.....NO! We don't. **Alongside those 500 JOYFUL terms, we read 158 words like sadness, tears and sorrow.**

If that doesn't tell you something about our Savior, what will? While we may feel stuck amidst sorrows and stresses, we are assured that Jesus, *who IS the very essence of our glad God*, arrived with JOY alongside His suffering. So, set your stereotypes aside and start seeing truth: Our Savior is more than a man of sacrificial suffering, ***Jesus brough great JOY by the very essence of who He is.***

Just like Jesus, our lives will always ride parallel train tracks of GOOD TIMES and GRIEF, between PLEASURE and PAIN. But because we know the destination, we ride the eternal train of joy.

When I started all this, maybe my problem was my own expectation, my definition of what I should

experience in a day. Joy isn't the same as instant happiness. *Fleeting happiness really isn't enough for me*. Joy's track runs much deeper and that's what I'm digging for.

Real joy isn't just about being 'up'. It's leaning into the Lord, embracing His love lessons and lingering in His promises through any circumstance. It's joining Him in rejoicing over who He's creating us to be through both happy and hard situations. Try this description of JOY by an unknown author:

JOY is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, it's the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in all things.

I love that. Joy is the ***determined CHOICE*** to praise Him alongside the tough train tracks because we know His hand is at work, always carving us out for HIS good purposes. ***And only when our lives align with His good purposes do we truly experience the JOY Jesus came to bring.***

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