



## CHRONIC JOY® DEVOTIONAL

### JOY & SUFFERING

By Kara Plett

Have you ever bought a mug, wall hanging, or T-shirt with a saying on it? I have a T-shirt with the words “Choose Joy” that I bought a few years ago when I was trying to put a brave face on my chronic illnesses. I had hoped it would remind me of how I wanted to choose joy amid my circumstances.

I knew I could expect difficulties in life (*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds...James 1:2*). I was trying to face my challenges the way I thought God wanted me to, but striving day by day in my failing body made me feel like I was failing at exhibiting external joy to others.

If you are reading this, you probably encounter difficulties in your life, too. Maybe it's the day-to-day burden of caring for someone you love. Perhaps you endure chronic pain or fatigue. Maybe you suffer from depression or anxiety. The daily burden of any of these (or many other challenges) is heavy.

Over the years, God has been teaching me a wonderful lesson: He never intended for me to try to choose joy in my own strength. As I studied His Word, I realized I was approaching God's joy as if it were like happiness – but joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness is momentary, while joy comes from the Holy Spirit as we seek after God – and happiness is closely linked to the other fruits of the Spirit (like hope and peace).

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)*

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Romans 15:13)*



*And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 1:6)*

I have found that times of suffering have led me into a new kind of joy, a deeper intimacy with God as I reach the end of myself. When I ask for joy amid the daily challenges, I am met with just that. I have come to understand God's character more and trust that He is fully sufficient in difficult times. If not for the challenges, I might never have known His joy in this way.

His joy does not ask us to deny our pain, fatigue, fear, frustrations, or sorrow—but it does remind us to lay our burdens at the feet of the one who fully understands and offers us abundant life in Him within the suffering. It seems almost unbelievable because this joy is not something we can achieve on our own. It is something we receive as we spend time with our good Father.

As we press into Him, joy may look like

- a peace that passes our understanding when we don't know how to carry on.
- a never-ending gift of hope that this earthly life is not all there is.
- the ability to trust His character and goodness as we lay awake at night or face another medical appointment.

We may begin to see the gifts He gives each day with a new sense of gratitude.

Experiencing His presence throughout our days brings ultimate joy. It is *such* a comfort to know that attaining ultimate joy is not up to me. I think I would like a new T-shirt now – one that says “Receive His Joy!”

I Receive YOUR Joy, Father!

### PRAYER

Dear Father, thank You that our suffering can bring us into Your joy as we press into our relationship with You. Thank You that we can learn more about who You are and fully trust You throughout our days. We want to receive Your joy, Father. In Jesus' name, amen.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Timothy Keller wrote: “If God is treated as God during suffering, then suffering can reveal and present Him in all His greatness.” What do think about Keller's quote? Has this been your experience?
- Pray through the prayers found in *Chronic Joy's Prayers for Suffering* (printable). Which prayers resonate with you?
- What connection do you see between suffering and joy?

