

REDISCOVER MACEDONIA

A spirit of gratitude and
generosity



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Bible Study #6 – Abundant Joy

By Rev. Serena Sellers

During affliction and in poverty...Abundant joy overflowed!

“We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.”
2 Corinthians 8:1-2

In 1962 Dick and Judy Hoyt were told by the doctors that their baby, Rick, would be in a vegetative state for the rest of his life, unable to walk or speak. Their best option, according to their physicians, was to place their son in an institution, try to forget him, and go on with life. His parents held on to the fact that Rick's eyes would follow them around the room. They had hope that he would be able to communicate someday.

Despite his severe cerebral palsy, and inability to speak, Rick's family was determined to include him in every aspect of life along-side his healthy brothers. His mother spent hours each day teaching him the alphabet with sandpaper letters. He played street hockey with the neighborhood children by being pushed in his wheel chair while his brother helped him hold the hockey stick.

Finally in 1973 a miracle arrived in the form of a computer which allowed Rick to communicate for the first time. It was immediately clear that Rick's intellect was not impaired despite his severe physical limitations, and, at age 13, Rick was admitted to public school for the first time.

When Rick was 15 years old a Lacrosse player at his school suffered a debilitating injury and was paralyzed. A five mile charity run was planned as a benefit. Rick was determined to do something to help this other young man know that life can go on despite disability. Rick's father, Dick Hoyt, although not a runner, was so inspired by his

son's determination, that he decided to help Rick "run" the race. He began to train by running with Rick's wheelchair filled with sandbags while Rick was at school. When Rick ran the race with Dick pushing the chair, the son confessed to his father, "Dad, when I'm running, it feels like I'm not handicapped."

That race was the beginning of “Team Hoyt”. Since that first race Rick and Dick have run marathons, duathlons and triathlons including six Ironman competitions. In 2008 they were inducted into the Ironman Hall of Fame. The 2009 Boston Marathon was their one thousandth race. Dick Hoyt will be 70 years old when they run the Boston Marathon in 2011, but the two have no plans to retire.

What strikes me most when I see this extraordinary duo is their overwhelming joy in life. A father’s sacrificial love for his son has given them both abundant gratitude and an exuberant attitude which cannot be hidden and has inspired countless others.

What other examples of determination and love in the face of adversity can you think of? (Pause to share stories!)

Inspired by the love of God, demonstrated in his Son, the Macedonian Christians exhibited determined generosity and abundant joy despite their adverse circumstances. Participation in the offering for Jerusalem was seen as a challenge by the Macedonian congregation. As they exceeded their own expectations and the expectations of others, through the generosity of their gifts, a spirit of joy and adventure bubbled up in the community, and spread throughout the congregation, inspiring even greater giving.

The generosity of one inspired another until their exuberance overflowed. Like the proverbial snowball, each generous act built on another until the joy was unstoppable. The excitement was contagious.

Scientists who study happiness have confirmed the truth of Paul’s observation, attributed to Jesus: ***“It is more blessed to give than to receive.” – Acts 20:35b***

Giving contributes to a sense of purpose and connection in a way that possessing does not. A new purchase may bring a momentary sense of pleasure, but that good feeling is brief and shallow. Meaningful giving creates a more enduring positive attitude and greater long term happiness.

Have you experienced joy in giving? Have you ever experience contagious joy?(Pause to share stories!)

Numerous studies have confirmed that it is a sense of connection and meaning that characterizes the joy-filled life. Once basic needs are met, poverty and adversity may create hardship, but they cannot prevent joy from breaking through like a light in the darkness.

When Jesus stooped down to wash his disciple’s feet, he called them to a life of servanthood. The slave does not live for himself only, but lives to serve. Especially if the ties that bind are not ropes and chains but love.

The life of love and generous self-sacrifice that Christ taught and modeled is not a call to dour self-deprivation, but opens the way to abundance and joy! Who knew?

What are the greatest obstacles in your life to embracing the joyful call of the gospel?

What would have to change if you were to live a more meaningful and generous life?

The joy and excitement of the abundant life cannot be bought on-line, or carried home from the mall. They are found in the need of our neighbor, and in our uninhibited desire to love and care for the lost and the least.

Let us pray,

Lord give us this abundant life. You have generously allowed us to die with you in the waters of baptism so that we might live a new life. Teach us to die to self in service to others that these waters may well up in us, and eternal fountain of unending joy.