

Momentum

Joy Awaits Behind Bars

David Hearn, President of the C&MA in Canada

It felt incredibly strange. I was visiting my mom at the seniors' home where she lives, but I was not allowed to touch her or even get within 2 metres of her. The kind worker brought her into an open courtyard surrounded by a tall fence made of iron bars. As I talked to my mom through the bars, it seemed like I was visiting her in prison.

COVID-19 is changing so many things. Words such as 'social distancing' and 'self-quarantine' are becoming part of everyday conversations. My concern is greatest for those at 'high-risk', like my mom. Could it be she won't feel my touch again?

Even before COVID-19, my mom struggled with the transition to a long-term care facility. She is in a great place with amazing care, but she longs to escape. With increased isolation her mood is even more depressed.

During my recent visit I asked her, "How are you feeling?" I braced myself for a long list of concerns and complaints and was shocked as she wrote on the mini white board (she is deaf) we use to communicate the word, "JOY" In fact, I was so surprised that I asked the caregiver sitting

beside her to clarify what she meant. The caregiver asked my mom, "Are you joyful?" Mom smiled and nodded her head. Outwardly, mom's situation of confinement is absolutely devastating to her, and yet inwardly she is experiencing joy. This is a mystery to me, but it is also a clear invitation from Christ, calling me to focus on Him.

I have not been very joyful lately. Too many video calls, challenging decisions, and an overwhelming sense of uncertainty has felt like leading from 'behind bars'. It is challenging and intriguing to recall that a significant amount of Paul's leadership was conducted from behind bars. His letters, known as the prison epistles, were all written while Paul was incarcerated. Most surprising is that the theme of one of these letters is joy.

Paul writes in Philippians, "Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4 NLT). This statement makes no sense unless the source of joy is completely unrelated to Paul's circumstances and finds its origin is something much deeper. In John 15:11, Jesus says, "I have told you this so that my joy might be [remain] in you and that your joy may be complete."

Adrian Rogers in his article, *The Joy of Jesus*, writes, “The joy you have as a Christian is the joy of Jesus. He says my joy, not joy like mine. Jesus wants to take the joy that He has and place it in you...The joy of Jesus is not a joy that comes and goes; it is constant. Jesus says, “that this joy will remain in you.” ¹

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The question is, “How do we access the joy of Jesus?” The context of John 15 reveals a profound answer. Jesus speaks of accessing His joy through ‘constantly abiding’ in Him. He is the vine and we are the branches. It is His very life that flows into us by this dynamic union. We do not have to work up joy or somehow force joy into our lives. The focus is intimacy not imitation. Rogers frames it this way, “As I am in union and communion with Him, as my life is blended with His and His life infuses mine—just as the sap flows from the vine into the branch—the life of Jesus Christ flows into me and the joy that is in Him is now in me.” ²

Perhaps you are reading this today and feeling those “behind bars” frustrations and limitations. Your inability to connect with loved ones or your own personal isolation has left you discouraged and downcast. I get it—I can’t even hug my grandkids! Yet, together, let’s embrace the reality that it is the life of Jesus, the Vine, flowing into and through us that unleashes His supernatural joy. Don’t seek joy, seek Jesus! Let’s allow His joy to overflow in our lives—even from behind the bars—and give those around us an opportunity to hear the invitation too!



1. Adrian Rogers, "The Joy of Jesus", *Decision: The Evangelical Voice for Today*, 2009.
2. Adrian Rogers, "The Joy of Jesus", *Decision: The Evangelical Voice for Today*, 2009.



The Christian and Missionary
Alliance in Canada

Global Advance Fund Update

The Global Advance Fund (GAF) covers the costs of sending and supporting international workers (IWs) overseas—salaries, benefits, and the costs associated with ministry in various countries. Some is also designated to training IWs.

Through the GAF, IWs take the Gospel to people groups, where few or none have heard the name of Jesus.

Year to date (as of May 31, 2020)

Total 2020 Faith Goal	\$16,067,161
YTD Income	\$5,492,226*
Excess/Shortfall	(10,574,935)

*34.18% of total 2020 Faith Goal