

From the Stacks
By Julie Orf
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Christmas or holiday music evokes some of the widest array of emotions for listeners of all music genres. Personal memories, the cultural significance, the pressure to attend gatherings, to buy gifts, and to appear happy, and more all play a part in the stirred up feelings during the holiday season. Steven Curtis Chapman's "Christmas Is All in the Heart" is one of those songs for me from the first verse as he soothing sings of his first Christmas with his wife and their humble tree and gifts. Yet, the chorus brings out this message: "The joy can still be found wherever you are, 'Cause Christmas is all, all in the heart!" As I hum this melody and sing the words, I know that joy is found in relationships, meaningful purpose and serving others, and gratitude.

As the youngest of five siblings, we have shared a plethora of practical and impractical jokes. "Let's see who can hit the softest? OK, you go first!" is one joke I fell for several times. As I carried a terrible bruise, I would not reveal the reason to Moma. Silly words and nicknames are common in my family, and we use them quite frequently with great affection. My husband may not have had a nickname before we started dating, but he quickly received several endearing, lasting names. In a family gathering or a large crowd anywhere, I can make big eyes at my husband, and he will silently and solemnly nod his head. We both understand. I know whom to call when I drive down a flooded gravel road or lock my keys in my car. Joy is definitely in all of these relationships, in my work family, and in my church family.

Happiness is dependent on something good occurring, and that is fleeting. Leo Tolstoy wrote, "The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity." Joy is the result of what is given. Numerous opportunities abound during the holiday season from food baskets, toy and coat drives, Angel trees, and so much more. A meal delivered to a shut-in, a text to a friend, a note of appreciation to your hairdresser, or a small chore for a neighbor can be an unexpected act for any day or any season. Just like paying it backward in the fast food line--imagine the chain reaction!

As I was changing purses Tuesday morning, I found a Scooters gift card. What a treat! I was also thankful that I had both red Christmas socks. Later on at work, thoughts for the last two columns of the year filled my head so I brainstormed and began to write. I appreciate the opportunity to express my thoughts, tell stories, or share books. Looking at the laundry baskets at home after work, I packed my Jeep to seek the laundromat. A few hours later and after a nice chat with a former student and some quiet time, the laundry was folded and put away. I returned dollars and quarters to the saving jar, which hopefully soon will equal enough for a new washing machine. Watching that money

increase brings contentment. Joy is found in gratitude because gratitude politely taps me on the shoulder and says, "Hey, look at what you already have!" I am blessed.

My son loves the movie, *Inside Out*. The character Joy is the literal personification of happiness and serves as the "team leader" inside the mind of a young girl named Riley. After I had watched the movie at his insistence, Greg calls me Joy because that character reminded him of me. Golly, I love that! The great writer, Warren Wiersbe speaks about "Thieves of Joy". These things threaten to undermine our joy and peace of mind. Thieves of joy could include problem people & people problems, predicaments and possessions. Set boundaries for these thieves, deal with them quickly, and protect your peace. We are joy-setters wherever we go--our places of work and especially in our homes. If it does not start with us, it will not trickle down to our fellow workers, our patrons, and our children.