

POSTURE PRAYER | *Holding Joy & Pain*

Let's pause together for a moment, to consider a question.

Is our world filled with joy? Or is it wracked with pain?

Which one is truest? Which one is increasing? Does it depend on the day? On the geography? On the privilege level of the inquirer?

Crises like the one currently enveloping our world often bring out both the best, and the worst of humanity. We see grocery store lines of people hoarding essential supplies, telephone scams capitalizing on fear, health care systems struggling under the weight of care. **And** we see social media posts offering to make grocery runs for the vulnerable, people singing to one another from their quarantined balconies, generosity and care-mongering initiatives from businesses and individuals alike.

Bad things are happening. And good ones are too. And while the current global situation is an unprecedented one, this paradigm is actually true most of the time. God seems to allow both profound joy and deep pain to exist side by side, pretty much all of the time.

Our instinct is to think that one of those is all good, and the other is all bad. But what if it's not that simple?

In times of deep pain and crisis, there are still always pockets of joy, pockets of light poking through. And even the brightest joy in the world doesn't eradicate all the pockets of our pain. They don't cancel each other out, they continue to exist, side-by-side (in varying measure).

It's an interesting dance, and sometimes it seems they actually work mysteriously *together* to paint a picture of God's love in a more powerful way than either one could do on its own.

For instance, we are prone to take joy (& its gifts) completely for granted, until a season of suffering comes along, and shows us the alternative.

And even in our moments of deepest hurt, confusion and pain – *when we let God journey us through them as a Father* – those can end up bringing out beauty, hope and redemption in a way we didn't even know was possible before.

Joy and pain both have their place. And both can work together, to help us see Jesus more clearly.

We are going to enter into a spiritual practice together called "Posture Prayer" – it's a practice of trying to say with your body what you're saying with your words when you pray.

Let's start by closing our eyes. Take a deep breath, let it out slowly. Take a few more. Adjust into a comfortable position as you need, relaxed, open.

Don't worry about anyone else in the room. Let this be a space just between you and God right now.

Now, just turn your right hand upwards, fingers open, palm exposed, just resting gently on your lap. And I want you to imagine in that hand, something that is bringing you genuine joy right now, in life. Despite everything else that's going on, what is lifting your heart, making you smile, bringing you comfort and hope and delight. Maybe it's a person, a relationship, a gift, an experience, something you've witnessed or something you've been a part of. Where is joy these days? Imagine it all wrapped up in a ball of light just resting in your hand. Feel the weight of it. Its vibrant electric warmth. Let yourself feel the joy, without guilt, without worry, just pure simple joy.

[allow 10 seconds]

Now keep that hand open. Don't put 'the joy' down, but turn your attention to your other hand.

And now open that one up too, in the same kind of position. And in that hand, imagine the things that are causing sorrow, or pain right now. Maybe it's grief, disappointment, fear, a frustration or a wounding, anger or loss. Maybe it's what's going on in the world, maybe it's just what's going on inside your own head. Our instinct with pain is to want to look away from it, to stuff it, self-medicate it away or pretend it isn't there... fling it across the room. But there it is. Just hold the pain for a moment, in God's presence.

[allow 10 seconds]

Now we're going to bring both hands together over and place them on our heart. The joy, the sorrow, the gratitude, the grief. Let your soul know it's ok that they exist, and it's to feel them all.

Now, just imagine God placing his own hand completely over both of your hands, and over your heart.

[allow 10 seconds]

Father we trust you to hold our joy, and hold our pain, and hold us together, in the midst of them both.

Lastly, just go ahead and release your hands, and let it all go, take a breath as you let your arms come to rest loosely open at your sides. Let it all go. Entrust all of those pieces, and the moments they represent, to God.

Notice that as we do that, at the same time our hands and our arms become open and free to receive whatever God wants to do and bring next. That's a good position to be in.

[END WITH A SHORT PRAYER]