

JOY

Despite All Circumstances

by Betty Marschner

*Count it all joy my brothers [and sisters]
when you meet trials of various kinds,
for you know that the testing of your faith
produces steadfastness (James 1:2–3 ESV).*



There sure isn't much to be joyful about," I found myself thinking some years back. My health suffered, and my thought patterns were constantly negative in tone. More important, my spiritual life began a downward slide, and the joy of my salvation was almost non-existent. The uncertainties of lingering health issues for two of my children were depressing. Our daughter needed hip replacement surgeries sooner than she'd expected. Our son had survived a rare, childhood leukemia, but other serious issues were becoming apparent. I had just lost my 69-year-old mother, who was also my dear friend, to cancer, and our youngest had just left home. It was a difficult time in my life, and I began to measure my happiness on circumstances instead of the joy I could find in serving the Lord through them. Though I attended church, it wasn't a place of joy and hope. My faith was not real to me in my everyday life. I was equating joy with happiness, and I was not happy. Hearing the Word and partaking in the Sacrament for me were just ritualistic.

Then a health care professional introduced me to antidepressants. Not knowing what the drug would do, I tried them hoping for some relief from my depression.

The drugs did not work as I had hoped, so I began monthly visits to my psychiatrist to see what new cocktail of medication might work. At one point I was on three antidepressants, an anti-anxiety drug, and also an antipsychotic. I had hallucinations and heard voices that were not there. The pain of a depressed mood is almost unbearable, and the need to escape is ever real. My psychiatrist and counselor became my saviors. Though they had little to offer other than more medication and a listening ear, I felt at peace with them. How much better it would have been to lean

on the only Savior Who truly does care and Who does not need to be capped.

Eventually I walked away from a demanding job and had my malfunctioning parathyroid gland removed. A subtle mood improvement took place. It was about this time a neighbor invited me to a women's Bible study. That simple invitation made all the difference. Being with others was so much better than being isolated from them. Slowly I began studying the Scriptures and, as I read God's Word, my mood improved. Scripture became my peace and joy. The Holy Spirit moved my faith to grow again. I slowly dropped the meds and had little to say with my counselor, so I quit going. I told my psychiatrist the change was largely because of Jesus Christ. That was my last visit.

I began to memorize portions of Scripture. I especially love Paul's words in Philippians 4:6–7 (ESV): *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.* When my trust in God grew, my heart became less anxious. I began to see God's means of grace in Word and Sacrament as the way my faith was growing again. God's forgiveness and love were ever present, even in my unhappy life. This joy became alive in a life that had seemed dead and meaningless for so long.

Joy is the long-lived unshaken knowledge that we are safe in Christ regardless of circumstances. We may not always be happy, but we still have the everlasting joy that can only come in knowing Jesus. Resting in the shadow of His cross we have everlasting life through His death and resurrection. To Him be all glory. **Q**

Betty is a fourth generation North Dakotan, where she has lived on farms and ranches since a child. With her husband, Betty has raised three children, two of whom were considered as having special needs. Betty often draws from her experiences, the trials, rewards, and especially God's grace in getting her through difficult times in her life. Betty enjoys caring for her grandchild as well as gardening, bird watching, and spending time with her beloved Morgan horses. She especially loves serving her Lord by being active in her rural church and the LWML.