

There are so many good things about the Christmas season. What is good about Christmas season? I came up with a list of 8. Let's see if your list matches mine.

- No school
- Time with family
- Good food
- Presents
- Christmas music
- Family traditions
- Fun outings
- Special movies

These things are all great! If there is one word that I could use to summarize what is good about the Christmas season, it would be this:

JOY

There is no joy in Christmas without Jesus

We see it in the birth narratives about Jesus:

- Matthew 2:9-12
- Luke 2:8-14
- Psalm 16:11
- Philippians 4:4-8

Sing

- Joy To The World
- Joyful joyful we adore thee (play on a recorder?)
- Oh come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant

There's lots of joy in the Christmas season. Or is it happiness? Why did the Bible authors use joy instead of happiness? Are joy and happiness the same thing? What is the difference between joy and happiness? Share with someone next to you, let students share.

These are both good things, but they are not the same. In the English Standard Version of the Bible, the words "joy," "rejoice," or "joyful" appear a total of 430 times, compared with "happy" or "happiness," which appear only ten times. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, happiness is not.

So happiness is not bad, but the Bible has a lot more to say about joy than about happiness.

- Happiness is an emotion that happens to you. Joy is a choice you make.
- Happiness is on the surface. Joy is deep.
- Happiness is on the face. Joy is in the heart.
- Happiness comes and goes. Joy is a practice and a behavior.
- Happiness is neutral in the Bible. Joy is a commandment.
- We chase after happiness. We choose joy.
- Happiness lasts as long as things are good. Joy can endure through difficult times.
- Happiness is positive emotions. Joy can exist with all kinds of emotions.
- Happiness is an outward expression. Joy is an inner feeling.

Illustrations:

- Happiness is fireworks. Joy is a campfire.
- Happiness is drinking a Red Bull. Joy is drinking water. The best way to stay up all night and have sustained energy is by avoiding caffeine and sticking with water!
- Happiness is like having followers on social media. Joy is like spending time face-to-face with friends who know you, love you, and care about you.

I am not saying that happiness is a bad thing or that you should avoid it. But my goal as a youth pastor is not to make you happy. My goal is to help you experience joy. And the best way I know to bring you true joy is to help you be in a closer relationship with Jesus.

Without Jesus, Christmas would have lots of moments of happiness.

Without Jesus, Christmas would be a fun festival filled with presents, good food, and great people.

With Jesus, Christmas becomes a joyous celebration of the turning point in history, when God came to the world to save us. That's why the wise men experienced great joy. That's why this is "good news of great joy."

There is no joy in Christmas without Jesus.

Here's why Jesus' coming gives us reasons for joy:

- You are not condemned by your sins anymore.
- You can have a relationship with the God of the universe.

- You can live with the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- You can be free to live for other people and not yourself.
- You can be part of God's restoration and rescue plan for the universe.
- You can have confidence that you're never alone.
- You can have hope for what God has in store for the rest of your life on earth, and for eternity beyond that.

That, friends is true joy.

Take in all the happiness that this season has to offer! But I hope you'll also experience joy this Christmas season.

Some things you can do to experience joy:

- Bring joy to other people
- Ask God to fill you with joy
- Connect with other people
- Put your phone down
- Be honest about your feelings, allow yourself to feel all of them
- Practice gratitude
- Remember what Jesus has done, is doing, and will do for you

Whenever you feel or experience joy this Christmas season, remember that it's because of Jesus.

There is no joy in Christmas without Jesus.