

“So many churches, so many pastors and Christians have so little joy today,” my friend observed. “These are difficult times.”

**With these words** Matthew Harrison embarks on a quest to rediscover the joy of being a Christian—the secret of living a Good News life in a bad news world. In *A Little Book on Joy*, Harrison takes the reader on a journey . . .

- from the father’s joy at the prodigal’s return, to the joy of Mary’s Magnificat.
- from the joy of the Holy Spirit and repentance, to the manifold joys of life together in community, marriage, and family.
- from the joy of forgiveness and perfect righteousness in Christ, to the joys of humor, worship, the sanctity of life, and the wonders of creation.
- from the joy of the Gospel mission throughout the world, the joy of everyday life and of a generous and faithful Lutheranism, to the joys in store for us in the life of the world to come.

**Study questions** follow each chapter making *A Little Book on Joy* the perfect guide for a Bible study or sermon series on the topic of Christian joy.

**A prayer guide** for “The Great Ninety Days of Joy after Joy: Daily Texts with Prayers to Gladden the Heart from Ash Wednesday through Pentecost (or any time),” makes this the perfect devotional guide for Lent and Easter, or any time of year.



Pastor Matthew Harrison was baptized in a small, rural parish, raised in a large, suburban church, was a missionary to native Canadians in Ontario, served as a graduate assistant at the seminary, studied in Australia, vicared in Texas, and served as pastor in rural Iowa and inner city Fort Wayne, Indiana. After co-founding a nationally recognized neighborhood renewal project in what was the poorest census tract in Indiana, he became the Executive Director of World Relief and Human Care for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and has administered nearly \$100 million of charitable giving worldwide. He writes, translates, and speaks extensively. He delights in his wife, Kathy, and two boys, Matthew and Mark. He is an avid bluegrass banjo player and luthier, and finds joy in it all.

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A Little Book on Joy

HARRISON



# A Little Book on Joy



The Secret of  
LIVING A GOOD NEWS LIFE  
in a Bad News World

MATTHEW C. HARRISON

Illustrated by Kurt D. Onken  
Study Questions by John T. Pless

What are they saying about  
A LITTLE BOOK ON JOY . . . ?

“Matthew Harrison takes the subject of joy and succinctly brings it into clear view. Something that any “dyed in the wool” Christian—even a staunch German Lutheran—can grasp and embrace. The book provides a fresh and honest look at how and why joy is an integral part of one’s life.”

CHERI FISH  
PRESIDENT—MICHIGAN DISTRICT LWML

“A singular contribution! Matt Harrison’s *A Little Book on Joy* is a big book in great need today. In his characteristically incisive manner, Matt has given today’s Christian the keys to real joy—the kind the Savior intended, and the kind he created in his life, death, and resurrection. I commend it to all as a healthy antidote to the travails of modern life. Matt continues to be one of the most interesting, topical, and important authors on today’s theological scene.”

LEO MACKAY  
VICE PRESIDENT—CORPORATE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT  
LOCKHEED MARTIN CORP.  
PAST DEPUTY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, WASHINGTON D.C.

“Let’s face it: serious Lutherans too often come across as dour sourpusses. *A Little Book on Joy* shatters that caricature. Matt Harrison leads readers on an exuberant romp through the Scriptures and the multiple facets of unbridled Christian joy.”

REV. HAROLD L. SENKBEIL, STM, DD  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DOXOLOGY: THE LUTHERAN CENTER  
FOR SPIRITUAL CARE AND COUNSEL

“Having come from a poor country in Asia and having seen people in poverty and misery my whole life, it always puzzles me to see many people in the United States who do not seem to have joy in their affluence. This book by Matthew Harrison is the answer to that mystery: true joy comes from God, and that joy of the Lord permeates our whole life. He also makes very clear that “joy” is not the same as “happiness,” which depends on happenings and our circumstances. I wish everybody would read this book and be blessed by it.”

ZAM KHAT KAHM  
MYANMAR

“Wow! With *A Little Book on Joy*, Rev Harrison touches at the heart of what is lacking in our sin-saddened world—joy at the foot of the cross for every aspect of our Christ-centered vocations. A must-read for God’s people and church workers alike. Well done!”

REV. JOHN WILLE  
PRESIDENT—SOUTH WISCONSIN DISTRICT, LCMS

“There is nothing ‘little’ about this book! With all of the theological prowess and doctrinal integrity one would expect from this colleague in ministry and friend, herein lies a manual—a workbook, if you will—on joy. For those seeking more joy in their life, or simply yearning for words to describe what they already know in their lives to be true, this very ‘large’ book looms as resource and inspiration. Thanks, Matt!”

REV. RICHARD A. NELSON  
SENIOR PASTOR—CENTRAL LUTHERAN CHURCH (ELCA)  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

“Do we need joy? Yes, indeed, we need joy as much as life, faith, and hope. . . . Matt Harrison takes us to Christ through his cross, his death, and his resurrection to show us true joy. Just as John writes, ‘We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete’ (1 John 1:4), so Matt enriches us with *A Little Book on Joy*. It takes us from where we are to where God would have us in his joy.”

CHARLES L. MANSKE,  
FOUNDING PRESIDENT—CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY IRVINE

“The poet William Wordsworth provided the verse which became the title of the writer C. S. Lewis’ memoir: ‘Surprised by joy—impatient as the wind.’ . . . Joy is so often confused with happiness, or with contentment. Joy is neither, as Matthew Harrison shows so brilliantly in his *A Little Book on Joy*. This little, powerful, three-letter word needs to be in the working vocabulary of every follower of Jesus Christ. There is no better place to find joy than here.”

TIMOTHY GOEGLEIN  
VICE PRESIDENT FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS—FOCUS ON THE FAMILY  
FORMER SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH  
AND DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE WHITE HOUSE OFFICE OF PUBLIC LIAISON

“This timely, refreshing, and much-needed ‘little book’ celebrates biblical joy, not worldly happiness. It is clear from the beginning that Rev. Matt Harrison has experienced the joy of which he writes, he understands it theologically, and he communicates in winsomely. Drawn from the foun-

tain of joy that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *A Little Book on Joy* will truly help readers understand and live ‘a good news life in a bad news world.’”

DR. JAMES I. LAMB  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR—LUTHERANS FOR LIFE

“Matthew Harrison has done what I have always longed to do. He has written a lovely little book on joy. It may be little in size. Yet it is large in its impact, since it enlarges our spirits and their all-too-limited capacity for enjoyment. He shows how joy is the mark of a Christian. It taps out the rhythm and provides the tune for the life of faith in Christ. While happiness comes and goes, joy lasts. It is eternal, a foretaste of heaven here on earth. So in Philippians 1:25, Paul speaks about faith as a journey; for as we progress in faith, we progress in joy—abounding and increasing joy in Christ. As Harrison notes, we go from joy to joy, joy over joy, more and more joy. I commend this joyful book to you for your enjoyment and delight.”

REV. DR. JOHN KLEINIG  
AUSTRALIAN LUTHERAN COLLEGE

“Somehow we have forgotten the value of a joyful countenance. For some strange reason we have lost the fun in this life of faith . . . the contagious magnet of inner happiness has grown weak. Rev. Harrison helps us regain the joy by elevating Jesus who is the ‘joy of the world.’”

THE REV. DR. BRYAN R. SALMINEN  
SENIOR PASTOR—EMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
CADILLAC, MICHIGAN

“Matthew Harrison shares with us a contagious word of Good News, just what we all need to hear, often, regularly, constantly. ‘Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,’ is what our dear Lord and Master tells us. His blessed Apostle St. Paul says, ‘Rejoice in the Lord, always, and again I say, rejoice.’ But this joy is not some whispy flight of fantasy, some elusive dream. It is real and solid, sure and certain because it is anchored in the One who loved us and gave himself up for us. He is our joy. This book explains why and how. Enjoy!”

PETER T. MCMANNIS  
PUBLICIST AND HUMANITARIAN

“After finishing *A Little Book on Joy*, the reader will have discovered yet another joy: a work that combines Christ-centered theology with a refreshing, playful style. En-joy!”

REV. TERRY CRIPE  
PRESIDENT—OHIO DISTRICT, LCMS

“Harrison has a knack for addressing pressing issues under the overall theme of joy: marriage stress, worship wars, euthanasia and abortion, intelligent design, depression in clergy, and church fellowship. A focus on joy, and not only law or ‘Bible rules,’ helps people see the beauty of life as God intends. Confessional Lutherans will benefit from God’s richer blessings of joy, with a resulting optimism for both personal and church life.”

BRYAN GERLACH  
DIRECTOR, WELS COMMISSION ON WORSHIP

“Let the rich themes of biblical theology, as delightfully presented by Pastor Harrison, put joy in your heart—not the superficial happiness of pop entertainment, but the well-founded and deeply grounded joy that comes from God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ and in his Spirit.”

DR. PAUL R. RAABE  
PROFESSOR OF EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY  
CONCORDIA SEMINARY—ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

“Joy! It was a joy to read my friend’s book. The first time I met Matthew, he started his ‘talk’ by strumming the banjo. The more he spoke, the happier the LWML ladies became. Just being around this talented man brought joy to my heart. Now I know the real secret to that joy!”

MARTHA P. BERGERON  
PAST PRESIDENT—MID-SOUTH DISTRICT LWML

“When the world is too much with us, when our spirits are depressed, when pessimism and doubt control our thoughts, when fear perforates our hearts, Pastor Harrison’s *A Little Book on Joy* helps us discover courage and purpose, peace of mind and heart, reason to rejoice—a new joy for our daily lives and service.”

REV. DR. DONALD J. FONDOW  
PRESIDENT—MINNESOTA NORTH DISTRICT, LCMS

“Pastor Harrison provides a down-to-earth and thoroughly enjoyable approach to a common dilemma faced, at one time or another, by every Christian: why don’t I always feel joyful? . . . A timely work, this book leads us to the only source of certain joy in uncertain times: the Good News of Christ and His Gospel.”

DARIN STORKSON  
ASIA DIRECTOR—LCMS WORLD RELIEF AND HUMAN CARE  
JAKARTA, INDONESIA

“To the people of our age, joy and religion just do not seem to go together. There are so many things that get in the way—cares, concerns, burdens, fears of all kinds, and not least, all the troubles around the world. There seems to be no room for joy. . . . Pastor Harrison’s book places before us

genuine joy to show us whence it comes, from whom it comes, and how it works. He sets joy before us and invites us to receive it anew. *A Little Book on Joy* is indeed an exultation of joy divine.”

REV. DR. DARIUS PETKUNAS, TH.D.  
KLAIPEDA, LITHUANIA

“Excellent biblical meditations on joy, adorned with further reflections by many great thinkers of the Church, and made further accessible by fine discussion questions.”

ROBERT BENNE  
DIRECTOR—ROANOKE COLLEGE CENTER FOR RELIGION AND SOCIETY

“Deep, contemplative, a rich diet of Gospel in this little study on joy for the joy-less soul. I thought of others who in my estimation needed this little read on joy . . . and then I realized that I needed it too.”

REV. RANDALL L. GOLTER  
PRESIDENT—ROCKY MOUNTAIN DISTRICT, LCMS

“Make no mistake, this is no wishful-thinking, ‘how-to’ book that belongs shelved in the generic ‘spirituality’ section of the bookstore. Instead, this little book comes packed with a meaty message that reminds us of what true Christian joy really is. . . . By examining the deep roots of joy—its DNA, really—Rev. Harrison helps us see clearly how the presence of Christ and his mercy is woven tightly through a joy-filled existence.”

MAGGIE KARNER  
DIRECTOR OF LIFE AND HEALTH MINISTRIES  
LCMS WORLD RELIEF AND HUMAN CARE

“‘Where Christ is, there is joy,’ says Luther. Christ Jesus is with us all the way—even in the sewer, Luther was bold to assert. . . . With self-effacing humor and keen attentiveness to the Holy Scriptures, Pastor Harrison is a wonderful tour guide to the places where the good Lord shows up bringing with him joy in the midst of sadness. Harrison demonstrates that Lutheran theology is a theology of joy unbridled and free on account of Christ. Enjoy these Christ-soaked pages!”

REVEREND JOHN PLESS  
CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

“We were taught in the Soviet Union that Christians were the saddest people on earth, hoping only for joy in the afterlife. And yet, Jesus said that he came so that his disciples may have life and have it abundantly. Somehow Rev. Matthew Harrison has gotten to the very core of Christianity in this easy-to-understand yet very instructive book.”

BISHOP VSEVOLOD LYTKIN  
SIBERIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come’ is intoned all over the world during the Christmas season by the faithful commemorating the pivoting of all time and history in Bethlehem. . . . This ‘Joy to the world’ is the central message of Rev. Harrison’s beautiful little booklet, provoking its readers to join the joyful sound of happiness, delight, and bliss praising God’s grace and mercy which is new every morning.”

REV. DR. WILHELM WEBER  
BISHOP ELECT—LUTHERAN CHURCH OF SOUTH AFRICA

“To ‘rejoice with joy’—that’s how the Baptist put it when he heard the Bridegroom’s voice. Through a wonderful association of illustrations by Kurt Onken, apt quotations and anecdotes, and simple yet profound reflections on the realities of faith and life, Matt Harrison has produced a ‘little book’ on a central gift of salvation. *A Little Book on Joy* is so well done and reads so easily. What a great book for young and old, for the catechumen, and for the more mature in faith!”

WILLIAM C. WEINRICH  
RECTOR—LUTHER ACADEMY  
RĪGA, LATVIJA

“The Gospel makes us optimists: ‘If God be for us, who can be against us?’ (Romans 8:31). Yes, life brings suffering, sin, and pain, ending in death, but God gives joy! Sometimes it is a laughing-out-loud, beyond-belief surprise; at other times he gives a quiet, sustaining joy in the face of the worst circumstance. But joy always comes in Christ, given for us. In him, God receives us, forgives us, and gives life. Matt Harrison brings out this joy in a book that’s both accessible and fun for everyone. It’s going to be a truly great book!”

REV. HERB MUELLER  
PRESIDENT—SOUTHERN ILLINOIS DISTRICT, LCMS

“Pastor Harrison writes both faithfully and merrily, having first received joy himself. He knows that joy is not something to be forced on others. Nor is it something to be feigned for others’ sake. This little book takes all the ‘don’t worry, be happy’ clichés and throws them out the window. It frees the reader to recognize genuine joy—even on bad days and even in the midst of a bad news world.”

DEACONESS ROSE E. (GILBERT) ADLE

“Pastor Harrison’s book is a most helpful antidote against the plague of utilitarianism that shapes our post-modern age and that has had a destructive impact on the Church, as can be seen in many trends of Christian spirituality and piety. The author’s inspiring, Gospel-oriented approach opens

the reader’s eyes to the multitude of divine gifts even in our fallen world (creation, family, marriage, humor) and in the realm of Christ’s Church.”

DR. ARMIN WENZ  
PASTOR—ST. JOHN’S LUTHERAN CHURCH  
OBERURSEL, GERMANY

“This little book of joy is needed. It is refreshing to rediscover that there is ‘joy in the mud.’ It was particularly uplifting to hear Luther the pastor speaking through the carefully selected quotes. It was helpful to reflect on laying down personal burdens and taking up the burdens of others in the community of joy, the Church. I found it enjoyable to read, and I commend it to you for your encouragement and enjoyment.”

DR. ANDREW PFEIFFER  
AUSTRALIAN LUTHERAN COLLEGE

“From Matt’s own life stories, true to this book’s purpose; you will discover how to find joy that is of God alone, amid the timeless biblical stories of the Trinitarian God coupled with your own stories of life. Matt teaches you how. The discovery of joy, previously unnoticed and uncelebrated, will be yours in the reading this timely little book. A good choice, too, for small faith-sharing groups!”

REV. JOHN H. DELANEY  
PASTOR—ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA CATHOLIC PARISH  
SOUTH BEND, INDIANA

“Frankly, I’ve grown weary of being lectured on joy. I’m also tired of that ‘left behind’ feeling that comes from listening to believers talk of joy in breathy tones that often don’t sound true to life. It’s one thing to speak about joy, when what I really need is Jesus. This book, with tales of the kinds of things we all experience and oozing with words from God, can help you. It brings Jesus near. Read this book. It will be rich time well spent.”

ROBERT BUGBEE  
PRESIDENT—LUTHERAN CHURCH CANADA

“This book has the makings of a devotional classic. Drawing on his keen insights into Scripture and his rich personal experiences, Rev. Harrison discloses the joy that is at the beating heart of the Christian life. Not that he minimizes the crosses, the trials, and the failures that we all know too well. Rather, he shows how we can ‘live a good news life in a bad news world’ because the Gospel of Christ transfigures everything.”

GENE EDWARD VEITH  
PROVOST—PATRICK HENRY COLLEGE  
DIRECTOR—THE CRANACH INSTITUTE

“When you preach the Gospel, people should tell from your looks that it is joyful news! Don’t you get it?!” So Professor Holsten Fagerberg shouted grimly to us candidates for the ministry, while looking as though he had just swallowed a liter of vinegar. Every page of Harrison’s book reverberates, not with a forced or put-on smile, but with the joy that God himself gives us in the kingdoms of nature and of grace. This is a useful book.”

REV. FREDRIK SIDENVALL  
PRINCIPAL—LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL  
GOTHENBURG, SWEDEN

“Matthew Harrison has ventured into the topic that is the goal of our faith, for joy is what God expected from his creation, especially in man. Harrison reveals that joy is a gift . . . This book is a real inspiration also to us in Africa, where we face so many challenges—to explore the joy we have from God, and to share it with our neighbors, i.e., the joy of the Gospel.”

BISHOP WALTER E. OBARE  
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN KENYA

“The angel brought Good News of great joy to the world (Luke 2:10) and announced the birth of Christ. This joy is for the entire world. There is no barrier of color, caste, or creed. . . . Sadly, this joy is still missing in the community and even the Church. But if we lack it, how are we going to show forth this joy, especially in countries like India, where there are such challenges to spreading the Good News of Christ? I deeply appreciate the efforts of Rev. Harrison in writing this book and hope that this ‘little book’ will brighten many hearts with great joy!”

REV. J. SAMUEL  
PRESIDENT—INDIA EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

“. . . if it is to be a life which knows true joy, it shall be a joy in perspective”—so writes Matthew Harrison and, indeed, perspective is the strength of *A Little Book on Joy*. Harrison teases out biblical moments of joy, translates them to our everyday lives, and in lively prose provides glimpses of the delights God promises. Joy abounds, and still he makes it clear that the most profound joy is when we know our need of God and know that God fulfills all his promises. This book is centered in the clear understanding that human sinfulness and God’s remarkable grace is at the heart of the story.”

JILL A. SCHUMANN  
PRESIDENT AND CEO  
LUTHERAN SERVICES IN AMERICA

“This book makes clear the mission of the Lutheran Church going forward. Through his recognition of Lutheran missionaries like Nommensen, Harrison presents a formula for the continuation of Christ’s mission on earth. Harrison sees the mission of God’s Kingdom as very relevant and open to all nations. This book calls and challenges all saints in Christ’s Church to celebrate their joy in the love of God, showing why the Lutheran Church must be an evangelical church. Harrison’s attention to and understanding of Lutheran churches around the world shows him for the true Lutheran leader that he is.”

REV. NELSON SIREGAR  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR—DEPARTMENT OF DIAKONIA  
HKBP, INDONESIA

“Our ominous times seem to confirm day after day Luther’s earthy observations about the fetid character of pusillanimity. Thus there could not be a more propitious moment for the delicacies on the rich Trinitarian menu of joy offered up by Matthew Harrison. In this wonderful narrative, he reminds us that the Greek words for joy and grace used in the Bible are etymological siblings. This is an enchanting little book that makes us smile from page to page, and is wholesome balm for souls succumbing to faintheartedness.”

UWE SIEMON-NETTO PH.D., D.LITT.,  
DIRECTOR—CENTER FOR LUTHERAN THEOLOGY & PUBLIC LIFE  
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, IRVINE

“Most Lutheran authors manage only a few sentences on joy. Matt devotes a whole book to the topic! St. Paul lists joy next to love in his account of the fruit of the Spirit. Christianity began with the message from an angel: ‘I bring you good news of great joy!’ Thus joy is one of the key elements in Christian life. Why do people so often lack it? The source of true joy is death to self and life in Christ. Obedience and joy may seem incompatible. However, the ways of inner life are often surprising. This book will inspire readers to discover joy in every part of their daily lives.”

JANIS VANAGS  
ARCHBISHOP OF RIGA, LATVIA

“I really love *A Little Book on Joy* as it is creative and well-written. This book had me captivated from beginning to the end. It is funny, insightful, educational, scriptural and devotional. It has a thought-provoking message on joy covering every aspect of human life. I commend this book to all pastors and lay people, theological educators and students who wish to understand what joy means and how to apply it in Christian living.”

RT. REV. DR. SOLOMON RAJAH  
BISHOP—EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN MALAYSIA

“In *A Little Book on Joy*, Matt Harrison speaks the Gospel to the core of the postmodern Japanese mind. People today do not look for the meaning and the purpose of life any more because they are tired of an artificial, self-manipulative, goal-driven life in a depressing world. Matt Harrison presents what we need to know—that is, the joy that is given from the outside and above and moves us from the inside like a living fountain of power.”

REV. DR. MAKITO MASAKI  
KOBE LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“Rare and precious, joy proves itself more than “fun” and cannot be confined to the category of our amusements. These days it seems hard for us to come by, we who are in such sore need of it. With his ‘little book,’ Matthew Harrison does us a big service as he defines, locates and elucidates joy, contemplating its manifold facets. This reflective work catches the reader up and carries him along with its readability and accomplished style, demonstrating its usefulness page after page. I would guess that just about everyone can find something in this book that speaks to his or her particular needs and situation in life. My recommendation for *A Little Book on Joy*? Get it, read it, and pass it on to someone who is longing for a little bit of joy—the sooner the better.”

BISHOP EM. DR. JOBST SCHÖNE  
INDEPENDENT EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN GERMANY (S.E.L.K.)

# A Little Book on JOY



The Secret of  
LIVING A GOOD NEWS LIFE  
in a Bad News World

Matthew C. Harrison

Illustrated by Kurt D. Onken  
Study Questions by John T. Pless

LUTHERAN  
LEGACY

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*To Kathy,  
Matthew, and Markie*

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## Contents

### ALSO BY THE AUTHOR

*At Home in the House of My Fathers:  
Presidential Sermons, Essays, Letters, and Addresses from  
the Missouri Synod's Great Era of Unity and Growth*  
(Lutheran Legacy, 2009)

*Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action*  
(Concordia, 2008)

Translator of  
*Meditations on Divine Mercy:  
A Classic Treasury of Devotional Prayers*  
by Johann Gerhard  
(Concordia, 2003)

... and other works available from  
Concordia Publishing House.

Prelude to This Ode to Joy, by John Nunes . . . . .	vii
Joy? . . . . .	1
1. Joy's Perspective . . . . .	6
2. The Father's Joy . . . . .	12
3. The Greeting about Jesus: Rejoice! . . . . .	19
4. The Joy of the Holy Spirit: A "Joy Set Before" . . . . .	27
5. The Joy of Repentance: A Joy without Compare . . . . .	35
6. A Just Joy . . . . .	44
7. A Community of Joy . . . . .	49
8. The Joy of Marriage . . . . .	57
9. The Joy of Family . . . . .	66
10. The Joy of Humor . . . . .	72
11. The Joy of Worship . . . . .	80
12. The Joy of Life . . . . .	89
13. The Joy of All Creation . . . . .	99
14. The Joy of a Faithful Pastor . . . . .	112
15. The Joy of Giving . . . . .	125
16. Joy in Our Weakness . . . . .	135
17. The Joy of God's Mission . . . . .	144
18. The Joy of Everyday Life . . . . .	153
19. The Joy of a Generous and Faithful Lutheranism . . . . .	162
20. Joy—Anchor to the Future . . . . .	171
Afterword by Bernie Seter . . . . .	178

## The Great Ninety Days of Joy after Joy

*Daily Texts with Prayers to Gladden the Heart  
from Ash Wednesday through Pentecost (or any time)*

Introduction . . . . .	181
Ash Wednesday . . . . .	186
Lent 1 . . . . .	188
Lent 2 . . . . .	190
Lent 3 . . . . .	192
Lent 4 . . . . .	193
Lent 5 . . . . .	195
Palm Sunday . . . . .	197
Easter Day . . . . .	199
Easter 2 . . . . .	201
Easter 3 . . . . .	202
Easter 4 . . . . .	204
Easter 5 . . . . .	206
Easter 6 . . . . .	208
Easter 7 . . . . .	210
Pentecost . . . . .	212

## A PRELUDE TO THIS ODE TO JOY By John Nunes

“To my exuberant surprise, I found joy everywhere” (page 3), Matthew C. Harrison exclaims after excavating the texts. What’s he been reading? Almost everything; he covers ancient authorities, Reformation leaders, as well as contemporary Christian commentators. On a journey from Augustine to Dostoyevsky, from Dr. Luther to C. S. Lewis, from Nairobi, Kenya to northern Canada, joy sparkles on every page. If an ode is a song, then this book is sung not to joy, but ultimately to Jesus (Hebrews 12:1–3).

With fearless snapshots of his own life, Harrison has penned a liberating look at just how seriously he takes this One who is truth, but not himself—nor anyone else who’s straitjacketed by self-important standards of pomposity or cultural severity. Both the window-breaking, BB-gun incident (chapter 9) and his wife’s forgotten birthday, leading to his faking of nausea to escape church in order to get birthday supplies (chapter 18), left me literally in tears as I reread them aloud to friends. These stories reveal a life suffused in a larger eudaemonic narrative.

Run-of-the-mill emotionalism will not do; instead, what’s here is durable and enduring—centered in Christ, born from God’s heart, revealed through Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, grounded in the Lutheran Confessions, received in the Church, perfecting in trials, practiced in marriage and community, realized now in part, with an eye turned toward what’s ultimately to come forever.

Martin Luther describes the Creator's original intent for all people: "Adam had been created in such a way that he was, so to speak, drunk with joy towards God, and rejoiced also in all other creatures" (Weimar Ausgabe 42:71). In his sobering, poetic reflection on humankind's catastrophe, the Fall into sin, Derek Walcott describes Adam's reality, post-Eden, as possessing now a "joy that was difficult, / but was, at least, his own" ["After Eden" in *Collected Poems, 1948–1984* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 300–301]. Harrison invites us into the triune Poet's gift of joy, fully recreated in Jesus' death and resurrection, the epicenter of Christian faith: joy that actually is not ours, but a gift coming from the Lord. We, who veer naturally toward the shadows of gloom, how do we access, in this life, such coruscating joy?

No joy worthy of God's name can be like hitting the "play" button on a Disney DVD whenever we need a high-definition, happy soundtrack. There "is no forcing it, no coercing it, no measuring it, no cooking it up" (page 8). The trek Harrison takes us on possesses no quick steps, no self-help remedies, no instantaneous fixes or superficial solutions. With practical, substantive, prayer suggestions, reflective questions, and ponder-worthy insights, we are offered Scripture's nurturing that grows the fruit of the Spirit. (See, most explicitly, "The Great Ninety Days of Joy after Joy" at the end of the book). Directed to the Means of Grace, the gate of heaven, the Word and Sacraments, Harrison calls us to confess Christ with intrepidity; but thankfully, he does so without a hint of rigidity: "So Lutheranism always has and always will recognize the very broad freedom in worship . . . [but] freedom bereft of love ends in self-centeredness" (page 86).

Finally, we are escorted toward that which is beyond ourselves, that which is most expansive, the unending festival of rejoicing. Tugged along eschatologically, "through trial and cross," God's purposes unfold with grace for believers as the Holy Spirit kindles faith, inviting cold, hard, and sad hearts to "join the ever-rising

crescendo of joy" (page 107) over God's new creation. That's the gift of *A Little Book on Joy*. I accept it with gratitude.

There are some modernists and others who conceive as anti-theological the relationship between traditions committed to biblical and confessional orthodoxy and the outward expression of joyfulness. Harrison represents a return to that more timeless, reconciled tradition of truth, refusing to be boxed into such false dichotomies. In an article titled, "The Orthodox Imperative" the Fordham professor and Jesuit priest, Avery Cardinal Dulles (1918–2008), nails it: "Orthodoxy would have a brilliant future if it were represented with a more cheerful face" [*First Things* 165 (August/September 2006):35].

# Joy?

At first, the prospect of writing *A Little Book on Joy* presented me with no joy at all. Yet I was offered the suggestion by a dear friend in Christ, who has been for me such a source of deep consolation, encouragement, and joy that I could not rid my mind of the topic. His friendship, good counsel, and guileless speaking of God's Word to me have so strengthened me in faith, hope, and love that I could not put his suggestion out of my mind, try as I might. Joy was troubling me. Despairing of my ability to duck his joyous advice, I heard the apostolic words reverberating ever more loudly in my mind, "*Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice*" (Philippians 4:4).

I have searched through the inspired Scriptures shaking loose every available shred of information on topics such as cross and suffering, faith and mercy, but joy? Really?! Would a serious and sober Christian really concentrate on joy? Is it a topic worthy of thought in its own right? Isn't it merely a byproduct of faith in Jesus? Isn't joy something which simply arises of its own accord out of knowing the Gospel of free forgiveness in Jesus? Shouldn't I rather concentrate on grace, faith, or justification, or baptism, or the Lord's Supper, or vocation? Would a little book on joy simply amount to something like writing on flavor instead of writing a cook book? Or perhaps on the fruit instead of the tree? Wouldn't it be like an excursus on smoke instead of a manual on barbecuing?

Isn't joy a subject more like the froth on the beer than the brew itself? And, worst of all, wouldn't it all be "suffocatingly subjective" (C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*)? I was reminded by another dear friend of the words of a respected theologian: "Some of the most depressing sermons I've ever heard have been harangues on joyfulness." And I, after all, was certainly not going to be *harangued* into joy, much less did I wish to impose joy upon any one else! Nevertheless, disarmed and hardly exuberant, I resolved to look at the Bible.

*So many churches, so many pastors and Christians have so little joy today," my friend observed. "These are difficult times.*

With the help of memory and concordances, I began inspecting the texts. Soon I was racing through the pages, Genesis to Revelation. I felt no harangue at all. It was all gift and joy over the gifts. All the while, the words of my friends bounced about my brain like a pinball. And the more texts I encountered, the longer the ball stayed in play. One part of me wished to see the happy little chrome ball slip into the pocket of despair—joy presumed, assumed, consumed, subsumed and entombed. Game over, I could simply walk away from the table, back into the world of my less joyous undisturbed prejudices.

"So many churches, so many pastors and Christians have so little joy today," my friend observed. "These are difficult times." I knew he was on to something, but I didn't know exactly what. I raced through the Psalms and found joy and rejoicing everywhere, even in the penitential psalms. I found joy in the Old Testament, in Moses, in the Prophets, in the books by Solomon. I found joy after resounding joy in Isaiah and Zephaniah. I found joy in the Gospels. I found joy on the lips of Jesus and in the lives of those

whom he touched, again and again and again. I found joy on the lips of Mary and Zechariah, in the womb of Elisabeth, on the lips of angels. I found joy at the manger. I found joy at the resurrection. I found joy over life, joy in the midst of death, joy in worship. I found joy in persecution and suffering. I found Paul's letters packed with joy and rejoicing. I found joy in references to faith and hope and love. I found joy over the simplest gifts of friends, work, family, food, children and marriage. Stranger still to me was that, as I contemplated these texts in rapid fire, one after another, I, even I, began (dare I admit it?) to rejoice. I found myself *surprised*, encouraged and even delighted by joy in Christ. And wonder of wonders, I found in the Bible reference after reference to the Lord's joy over me—"More rejoicing in heaven over one sinner [a.k.a. crusty Lutheran] who repents" of his aversion to joy.

Then I turned to Martin Luther's sermons, and to the writings of C. F. W. Walther, Augustine, and the ancient fathers. Surely I could find some stodgy Lutheran or church father to temper my joy over joy. I read Athanasius, Ambrose, and the Martyrdom of Polycarp. I turned to the old Lutheran scholars and plowed through their ponderous Latin and German, like a coon dog following a fresh scent, sure to *tree* joy at any moment. I yelped with delight, and more loudly each time I found a new text, a new twist, a joyous new take on joy. I looked to Chesterton, Elert, Sasse, Gritsch, and many other modern writers. To my exuberant surprise, I found joy everywhere. What began as a spark in my smoldering understanding now broke into a flame, stoked by each new discovery. It wasn't froth. It was a deep *dunkel* draught of delight. Over a few days of the Christmas break, the pile of old tomes and concordances, Greek dictionaries and encyclopedias, sermon books and devotionals, vellum volumes and paperbacks, grew and grew to harrowing heights, encircling my easy chair.

In disgorging this introduction I feel something like Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas morning. I've found joy, and I want to share

it with you. Neck fully extended above the mountain of books encamped around me at this very moment, a dumbfounded look of happiness on my face, eyebrows at full height, mouth pursed with a cockeyed, Grinch-like frown turned to grin, unshaven and hair disheveled, I have something to say: *“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:10-11). Rejoice!

Turns out I've had joy after joy over joy. It's time for *A Little Book on Joy* after all.

We need this joy now more than ever. The world needs it, and Christendom needs it. If ever this joyful news was necessary for the world, then [it is] in our century of great wars and mass death. But how should we, servants of the Gospel, announce this joy to the world if we ourselves do not have it? What is missing in the churches of Christendom today is the measure of joy which the old church possessed. We all stand in great danger of having the fearful seriousness of our time, the concerns in the church and in the parsonage, even the concerns about the church which are commanded to us, not allow the great joy to arise, or kill it. This is especially true of those among us who work in “dead” congregations, who perhaps must preach in empty churches, and upon whom too much work has been placed. But it is true there, too, where the congregations are rich, sometimes too rich, where the ecclesiastical life seems to bloom and the Christian faith is in no way attacked from the outside. There it is worldly joy, the secularized substitute for the true joy of the Gospel, which threatens to destroy Christ's joy.

HERMANN SASSE, *THE CHURCH'S TIME OF REJOICING*

## Joy's Perspective



you are free to be like the early summer sun flowers. You can lift up your head and rejoice because your redemption is drawing near. You are bearing fruit because you are attached to the vine that is joy.

## THE GREAT NINETY DAYS OF JOY AFTER JOY

Daily Texts with Prayers to Gladden the Heart  
From Ash Wednesday through Pentecost  
(or any time)

I've found nothing so profoundly joyous as collecting and meditating upon biblical texts having to do with joy in its various forms. There is something to be said for "cognitive association" (you are what you read!), to be sure, but such texts fill the joyless void with rejoicing because the Word of God promises not to "return void" (Isaiah 55:11). "*Their arrows are like a skilled warrior who does not return empty-handed*" (Jeremiah 50:9). The texts that follow are barely a first volley. But I offer a stern warning before you proceed. You will encounter the naked, joyful Word of God. In meditating upon these little texts and prayers—that is truly meditating—the lump of coal that is your heart (wet, cold, dank, and dark) will be subject to the blasting furnace of the Almighty God's joy in you! "*The Lord delights in you*" (Isaiah 62:4).

But take heart, others have survived it (amidst their worst trials and sorrows), and this Word of God became their greatest joy in duress. "*Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart*" (Jeremiah 15:16). Jeremiah wearied of holding in the Lord's wrathful message. How much

more do his words apply to the Good News of Jesus! Joy! “*There is in my heart as it were a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot*” (Jeremiah 20:9). Trials themselves are, as Isaiah says, “*a furnace of affliction*” (Isaiah 48:10). If you dare to find joy, step into the furnace with God’s own Word. You will find—like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—a Nebuchadnezzar asking, “*But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods*” [i.e. the Son of God!] (Daniel 3:25).

### Luther on How to Meditate on God’s Word

You may certainly use the texts and prayers below at meal times with your family or as brief prayers prayed daily. You may desire, however, to actually use them to learn to meditate on the Word of God. Martin Luther wrote a little book on prayer for his barber, Peter. In it, he lays out his simple method of praying texts. It’s brilliant. I call it “I.T.C.P”:

Instruction  
Thanksgiving  
Confession  
Prayer

The method anchors prayer in the texts of Scripture or the catechism but allows the Holy Spirit to prompt thoughts via the Word, which may be chased more freely by the mind at prayer. I recommend this method for the ninety days. It requires a time of solitude, and intentionality. It will also require a period of preparation—perhaps following a brief order for prayer like that found on pages 294–298 of *Lutheran Service Book* (Concordia, 2006) or the inside front cover of *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Concordia, 2009).

Luther gave Peter the barber some examples of how he prayed, but:

You should also know that I do not want you to recite all these words in your prayer. That would make it nothing but idle chatter and prattle, read word for word out of a book as were the rosaries by the laity and the prayers of the priests and monks. Rather do I want your heart to be stirred and guided concerning the thoughts, which ought to be comprehended in the Lord’s Prayer. These thoughts may be expressed, if your heart is rightly warmed and inclined toward prayer, in many different ways and with more words or fewer. I do not bind myself to such words or syllables, but say my prayers in one fashion today, in another tomorrow, depending upon my mood and feeling. I stay however, as nearly as I can, with the same general thoughts and ideas. It may happen occasionally that I may get lost among so many ideas in one petition that I forego the other six. If such an abundance of good thoughts comes to us we ought to disregard the other petitions, make room for such thoughts, listen in silence, and under no circumstances obstruct them. The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I have learned more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation . . . (*Luther’s Works*, 43:198).

Luther explains his method, using the Ten Commandments:

*I think of each commandment as, first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third, a confession; and fourth, a prayer. I do so in thoughts or words such as these: “I am the Lord your God, etc. You shall have no other gods*

before me,” etc. Here I earnestly consider that God expects and teaches me to trust him sincerely in all things and that it is his most earnest purpose to be my God. I must think of him in this way at the risk of losing eternal salvation. My heart must not build upon anything else or trust in any other thing, be it wealth, prestige, wisdom, might, piety, or anything else.

*Second, I give thanks* for his infinite compassion by which he has come to me in such a fatherly way and, unasked, unbidden, and unmerited, has offered to be my God, to care for me, and to be my comfort, guardian, help, and strength in every time of need. We poor mortals have sought so many gods and would have to seek them still if he did not enable us to hear him openly tell us in our own language that he intends to be our God. How could we ever—in all eternity—thank him enough!

*Third, I confess and acknowledge my great sin* and ingratitude for having so shamefully despised such sublime teachings and such a precious gift throughout my whole life, and for having fearfully provoked his wrath by countless acts of idolatry. I repent of these and ask for his grace.

*Fourth, I pray* and say: “O my God and Lord, help me by thy grace to learn and understand thy commandments more fully every day and to live by them in sincere confidence. Preserve my heart so that I shall never again become forgetful and ungrateful, that I may never seek after other gods or other consolation on earth or in any creature, but cling truly and solely to thee, my only God. Amen, dear Lord God and Father. Amen” (*Luther’s Works* 43:200).

### *A Sad Brightness, and a Bright Sadness*

“Eh, what muddleheads you peoples are! How do you keep Lent?” (Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*). We are “muddleheads,” indeed, when we fail to see that Lent is also a time of joy. I am no fan of Eastern Orthodoxy but heartily concur with Alexander Schmemmann’s description of Lent as

“Sad brightness”: the sadness of my exile, of the waste I have made of my life; the brightness of God’s presence and forgiveness, the joy of the recovered desire for God, the peace of the recovered home. Such is the climate of Lenten worship; such is its first and general impact on my soul [Schmemmann, *Great Lent* (St. Vladimir, 1974), 33].

And so, beginning with Ash Wednesday, I have added the forty days of Lent to the journey of joy. By the second century, the forty day period of preparation for baptism on Holy Saturday was well established in many places in the Church. The “fasting” of Lent did not include the Sundays which were “in” but not “of” Lent, and so I have not numbered them below. From the festival of the Resurrection to Pentecost are fifty days, long called “Fifty Days of Joy” by the Church, and also the Lutheran Church [Hermann Sasse, “Fifty Days of Joy,” *Lutheran Herald* (April 8, 1961)]. The ninety days include two distinct periods. The first, forty days of “sad brightness” (Lent). The second, fifty days of Eastertide, a “bright sadness”—that is, a life facing sin, death, and the devil, but with an unquenchable resurrection joy. Thus, Ninety Days of Joy after Joy.

For the weeks prior to Easter, I have generally ordered the texts according to a regular, recurring, daily theme (common for Lent), and connected also to the theme of the previous Sunday if possible. For the weeks after Easter, I have allowed the texts to follow the themes and order of the Small Catechism, except for the Sundays.

Sunday—Joyous theme of the week  
 Monday—Joy in the Old Testament  
 Tuesday—Joy in caring for the needy  
 Wednesday—Joy in the Gospels  
 Thursday—Joy in Epistles, amidst affliction etc.  
 Friday—Joy in God's gifts in this world  
 Saturday—Joy in repentance

Prepare to meditate. Find a quiet spot. A comfortable kneeler focuses the attention well, but you will probably find yourself at a table, a desk, or a favorite easy chair. Take a few deep, clearing breaths, and continue to breath deeply. Recite the Lord's Prayer. Clear your mind. Pray for clarity of mind and a receptive heart. Now read the text and prayer.

1. Ash Wednesday: *Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near . . . "Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. "Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things! . . . Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God . . ." (Joel 2:1, 12–13, 21, 23).*

Read it again, slowly. What words are beginning to jump at you? What words trouble you? Encourage you? Disturb you? Comfort you? *What does this text teach you?* Possibilities abound: true repentance, God's seriousness over repentance, he wants the heart. God is merciful and gracious. He acts for our benefit. We need not fear. *What do we have to be thankful for in this text?* Many of the same

things about which he instructs us, to be sure. I'm thankful that the Lord desires us to "be glad and rejoice." *What can we confess?* Thankless hearts, lack of repentance, false repentance, rejection of the Lord's steadfast love. *Now pray.*

*Instruction:* O Lord, you teach us here that you desire true repentance and sorrow over sin, and that you are merciful and slow to anger. You also desire our joy in you.

*Thanksgiving:* I thank you for your mercies, for your call to repentance, for your patience with me, for your mercy, for your steadfast love.

*Confession:* I confess my many sins, my lack of repentance, my insincerity, my failure to follow through, secret sins of weakness, and especially my great lack of joy.

*Prayer:* Righteous and Just Judge, you know the hearts of all. Help me, I pray, in this time of repentance, to acknowledge my sinfulness with true sorrow. Forgive my many failings and faults, and grant me increasing joy in your eternal mercies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

That's "I.T.C.P."—*Instruction, Thanksgiving, Confession, Prayer.* As you practice it daily, it will become second nature and a great blessing for your meditation and prayer. You may certainly read the texts with your family at the table, with your women's/men's group, or by yourself, even without using Luther's method. You can also use Luther's method as a catechetical tool with your family or others. In any case, prepare for "joy after joy."

2. Thursday: *Your [joyful] boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth* (1 Corinthians 5:6–8). Dear Jesus, only Savior, I confess my malice, lack of charity toward the needy, my cold response to your Word, my lack of love and begrudging service to my family. Grant me true repentance and deep sorrow over my sin that I may rejoice and find joy in your resurrection. Amen.

3. Friday: *Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts* (Jeremiah 15:16). Oh Lord God, you set the table, a joyful feast of your Word. May I devour it with delight and find joy in all its delicacies, through Jesus Christ, by whose name I'm named "Christian." Amen.

4. Saturday: *All who pass along the way clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem: "Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?"* (Lamentations 2:15). Lord, you are pleased to be believed upon by your Holy Church, which is nothing but the totality of dreadful sinners, often joyless dolts, who nevertheless cling to you by faith. In you we are "the perfection of beauty." Grant that we may be truly, "the joy of all the earth." Amen.

#### Week of Lent 1 (Invocavit)

Sunday: *When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. Psalm 91:15. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost"* (Luke 15:6). O Jesus, my Joy, you are my Good Shepherd, you take delight in calling me by name, finding me when lost, and celebrating my return. Grant

that I might have a heart like yours for others, and rejoice likewise. Amen.

5. Monday: *Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph! Your enemies shall come fawning to you, and you shall tread upon their backs* (Deuteronomy 33:29). Heavenly Father, in Christ we "tread upon the backs" of our enemies—sin, death and the devil. Grant unto me a restoration of happiness over your salvation; through Jesus, Amen.

6. Tuesday: *The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel* (Isaiah 29:19). Make me, O Lord, a source of fresh joy in the Lord to the meek and poor. Turn my selfish, greedy, joyless heart, and make me a "joyful giver." May the poor exult in you because of your gifts to them through me. Amen.

7. Wednesday: *Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. . . . And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God* (Luke 1:13–16). Your Law is harsh, O righteous Judge, but sweet are your mercies in Christ. Strike me with your Law, through the words of your prophet John the Baptizer, that I may ever repent and find joy in the presence of the Kingdom; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

8. Thursday: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. . . . In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials* (1 Peter 1:3–6). Jesus, my hope and crown, I thank you also for the crosses and afflictions you wisely send to me. They cause me to look forward in living hope to your resurrection, which is the guarantee of my own. Please help me to rejoice in this "little while" of trials and difficulties. Amen.