

Joyous Family

Dominic Tong- Vice Chair

PART 1: JOY

The concept of joy is one that I have seen portrayed in different ways throughout my life. I have seen people who misunderstood joy leave the church when they encounter hardships. I have seen a lack of joy end lives. I have seen people who are filled with joy stand firm through trial after trial. It is something that I have strived to see more of in my own life. Needless to say, Joy is something that is close to my heart.

It is important to note, however, that joy is more than just happiness. Joy persists in both the good times and the bad (Philippians 4:4). Joy is the fruit borne from understanding and living by God's promises and love, and grows from having a personal, meaningful, nurturing relationship with God (Galatians 5:22). It is not obtainable by our own actions, but is a gift from God (Romans 15:13).

Being a Christian, especially in university, is not easy. God does not promise us an easy life free of troubles, but instead asks us to suffer for the sake of the gospel (Philippians 1:29-30). There will be times where it seems like all the forces of the world are conspiring to take us down, but Joy is what allows us to trust in God's faithfulness. It replaces all the doubt and worry in our lives, and pushes us to live a life of humility. Joy empowers us to encourage one another, build relationships, and grow as a family (Philippians 2:2).

PART 2: FAMILY

Family has always been one of the most important aspects of my life. My family consists of people that I would always make time for, that understand me the best, and that I could talk to about anything. In the same way, family is an important aspect of the church. People stay when they feel like they are part of the family, and leave when they don't. This idea of family has also been discussed many times throughout the past year. For example, family was the theme of our winter retreat, during which CCF was challenged to see the body of Christ as more than just good friends, but a family as real and loving as our families at home. We are all children in the family of God, for as Jesus says in Matthew 12:50, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven in my brother and sister and mother". This means that every person in CCF is a brother or sister, and that we are called to support them through the ups and downs just as we would our blood families.

However, it is not easy to build meaningful relationships. It takes time, effort, dedication, and sacrifice, and even then it may not bear fruit for months or years. But, we have the perfect example of a loving relationship in Christ's relationship with us: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters (1 John 3:16)". His love for us has set the bar for all of our relationships with others.

We are not only called to encourage and support those already in the family, but to grow it. The family of God is not a closed system, but one that works to invite others in. In the Great Commission, Jesus calls us to “go and make disciples of all nations”. Making a disciple is much more than preaching the Gospel. It includes the journey alongside them, encouraging, nurturing, and mentoring them. In essence, we are called to extend the same relationships both to people within and outside of our family.

PART 3: INTERSECTION

Joy is a lifelong pursuit, one that even the Apostle Paul feels he had not fully obtained yet (Philippians 3:12). There will be times when it is hard to see what God is doing in our lives, when we feel empty, and when doubt and worry creep in. It is in these times that we need the support and prayer of our family in Christ, the mentorship of older brothers and sisters that can speak truth into our lives.

Likewise, the building and extending of God’s family is also a lifelong pursuit. We are called to disciple younger brothers and sisters, as well as to share all good things with those who mentored us (Galatians 6:6). However, humans are fallible, and there will be times where our earthly relationships become damaged, or cause us pain. It is in these times that we trust in the joy of the Lord, and hold onto His promises.

I believe that this is the direction that God has been leading our fellowship. Let us continue to build on it, striving to live as a joyous family, that we may “become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then [we] will shine among them like stars in the sky, as [we] hold firmly to the world of life” (Philippians 2:15-16a).

PART 4: APPLICATION

Over the past year of being an IG leader, I was blessed with an amazing group that impressed on me the idea that the IG is the family unit of the fellowship. It is within the IGs that we share what God is doing in our lives, deeply explore God’s word, and grow together as disciple-making Christians. As a result of this, I am eager to look into ways that we can continue to push the bounds of IGs, dig even deeper into His word, and build more meaningful relationships.

Another area that I would like to continue to expand is our relationships with other fellowships. It is easy to focus on CCF and forget that other fellowships around campus or Toronto are our family as well. I would like to explore ways that we could support and grow with those fellowships as well.