



Series: **When the Heart Ripens**
—and life becomes spacious

Today's Episode:

When Joy Has Learned Sorrow

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Some joy arrives before sorrow has darkened the path. Another joy comes later, quieter and deeper. It may take root when the hidden and wounded places of the heart have been carried before God over time. This is the gladness that has learned sorrow: not innocent, not evasive, not triumphant – but gentle, spacious, and able to keep a small lamp burning even where grief is still real. Enjoy the story, Reflectikon, Discernment Box and Practice Box in this episode.

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Previous Episodes in this Series

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— This Series traces witness-attested qualities of the spiritual heart when it has “ripened” – by divine grace and lived experience. Please read the Introduction online if you are new to the Series.

— Group A. Rootedness in the Real. Episodes A1–A3 traced how the ripened heart becomes grounded in ordinary life as it is. Attention settles, imagination softens, and the drive to secure meaning through achievement eases. What emerges is a stable presence able to receive reality without needing to escape or embellish it.

— Group B. The Spacious Heart. Episodes B1–B4 explored the inner widening through which love and attention become less anxious and less possessive. The heart learns to hold others, uncertainty, and time itself with greater ease. Relationship deepens as control, performance, and premature interpretation lose their grip.

— Group C. The Inner Surrender. Episodes C1–C5 turned toward the relinquishing of subtle inner compulsions – image, the need to win, wilful striving, resistance to limits, and fear of failure. The ripened heart learns to consent to reality without needing to prevail, justify itself, or remain invulnerable.

— Group D. Meeting the Shadow and its Gifts. This group explores what happens when the ripened heart stops evading its own darkness – what this costs, and what it quietly opens. Episode D1 explored shadow faced and integrated. D2 turned to vulnerability no longer hidden or defended against. D3 explored compassion widened by suffering. Today's episode, D4, now turns to the gentle joy that may take root when sorrow has been carried before God over time.



Story

– The Picnic by the Limestone Path

Mara nearly turned back when she saw the picnic cloth.

It was spread beneath a carob tree beside the old limestone path, weighted at the corners with four pale stones. Someone had brought a basket of bread, small tomatoes, olives, gbe-jniet wrapped in waxed paper, and a bowl of apricots. A flask stood upright in the dust. Two paper cups had blown against the wall and lodged there like small, defeated birds.

It was too cheerful, she thought. Too arranged. Too much like the kind of kindness that expected gratitude before it had earned the right to speak.

She had come because Anna had asked her twice, and because refusing a picnic with six elderly parish people and one retired teacher and their families felt more dramatic than attending. The morning prayer had already been enough. Too many soft voices. Too much talk of resurrection before anyone had properly named what dying cost.

Three months had passed since her mother's funeral. That was long enough, apparently, for people to begin saying she was doing well.

Elias saw her before she could retreat.

"There you are," he said, lifting one hand from where he sat on the boulder. "You have arrived in time to save us from eating all the tomatoes."

He was seventy-eight, maybe older. Mara knew only fragments about him: retired literature teacher, widower, parish activist, a man who had once walked everywhere and now rose carefully from chairs. He had white hair brushed back from a lined forehead, smile lines near his eyes, and a left hand that trembled slightly when he reached for his cup. People liked him. That made Mara cautious.

"I brought biscuits," she said.

"Excellent. A picnic without unnecessary biscuits lacks theological balance."

She looked at him, not sure whether to smile.

He accepted the packet from her and placed it beside the bread as though it were a liturgical object.

Anna was helping Miriam pour tea. Two men from the group were arguing gently about whether the path beyond the chapel led to the valley or to someone's private field. A little further off, a boy in a red T-shirt was trying to persuade a nervous dog to fetch a stick. The dog preferred to sniff the fennel.

Mara sat at the edge of the cloth, not quite on it.

Elias noticed, but did not invite her closer. She was grateful for that.

For a few minutes nothing was asked of her. Bread was passed. Someone complained about the heat. Someone else said it was not heat yet, not real heat, not like August. The dog barked once at an invisible mystery in the bushes and then looked embarrassed. Do dogs feel embarrassment?

Mara found herself watching Elias's hands as he cut an apricot with a small folding knife. He cut slowly, because of the tremor. The fruit slid once, and a crescent of juice ran along his thumb.

"Ah," he said softly, as if the apricot had made a point worth considering.

"What?" Mara asked before she could stop herself.

"Look at the colour near the stone." He turned the apricot slightly towards her. "It keeps the sun differently there."

She almost laughed, and not kindly. "Does it?"

"It does. The outside is for the market stall. The inside is for those who stay long enough."

"That sounds like something from a retreat leaflet."

He looked up, amused. "Then forgive the apricot. It meant well."

The answer disarmed her for half a second. Then she remembered herself.

She took a piece of bread and broke it too sharply. Crumbs scattered across the cloth.



Immediately three ants appeared from nowhere, as if the whole hillside had been waiting for her to make a mistake.

Elias leaned forward.

"Ah, now the true guests arrive."

"They can have mine," Mara said.

"One crumb is a banquet if you are built close enough to the ground."

"You do make sermons out of insects."

"Only when they preach first."

This time she did smile, unwillingly.

The others had drifted into their own talk. Anna was telling Miriam about a nephew in Australia. The two men had abandoned geography and moved on to doctors. The boy with the dog had given up the stick and was now lying flat on his back, looking into the tree as if waiting for inspiration.

Mara watched an ant try to lift a crumb too large for it. It backed away, returned, shifted angle, failed again, then found a smaller piece and carried that instead.

"There," Elias said. "Discernment."

She should not have found it funny. She did.

The laughter came out briefly and then stopped. It startled her. For a moment she felt exposed, as though she had been caught neglecting her grief. Her mother had been dead three months. Surely laughter still had to pass through some office of permission.

Elias did not look at her when the laughter faded. He was busy rescuing another ant from the rim of his cup with the corner of a paper napkin.

"My wife used to say," he said, "that if I paid as much attention to human beings as I paid to ants, I might become a saint by accident."

Mara heard the word wife and felt herself tighten.

"When did she die?" she asked.

"Eleven years ago last February."

The answer was plain. No lowering of the voice, no preparation of the atmosphere.

"I'm sorry."

"So am I," he said.

That was all. He placed the rescued ant beside a blade of dry grass and watched it collect itself.

Mara waited for the sentence that usually followed: she is in a better place, or grief changes but love remains, or God gives strength. He said none of these.

Instead he reached for a tomato.

"For two years," he said, "I disliked cheerful people."

Mara turned towards him.

"Especially the holy cheerful ones," he added.

A small current of recognition moved through her before she could defend against it.

"I still do," she said.

"That may be wise. Some cheerfulness has never stood near a grave."

She looked at him quickly. There was no bitterness in his face. That made the sentence feel less like a judgement and more like a fact he had paid for.

The wind shifted through the carob leaves. Dry pods knocked softly together above them. Somewhere beyond the wall a dove



began its low, repetitive call. The dog had found a lizard and was being outwitted by it.

"My mother died in March," Mara said.

"I know."

"People keep telling me I'm strong."

"Yes. That can be a lonely compliment."

She looked down at the bread in her hand.

"She had dementia at the end. I keep remembering things I don't want to remember. Not the holy parts. Not the good daughter parts. The irritated parts. The days I wished it would all be over. And then it was over."

The words had come out more cleanly than she expected. She hated him a little for being safe enough to receive them.

Elias sat very still. His stillness had no smoothness in it. It did not feel trained. It felt habitual.

After a while he said, "There are sorrows that come with guilt attached, even when guilt is not the deepest truth."

Mara felt her eyes sting and looked away towards the path.

"I don't want anyone to make it beautiful," she said.

"No."

"I don't want it turned into a lesson."

"No."

"I don't want to be told I'll come out better."

"That would be a heavy burden," he said, "being improved by force."

She gave a short breath that was almost laughter.

The boy in the red T-shirt shouted because the lizard had vanished into the wall. The dog stood with its nose pressed to the stones, deeply offended by mystery.

Elias nodded towards it. "That lizard has more theology than I do today. It knows when to stay still and when to disappear."

Mara wiped one eye with the side of her finger, hoping no one else had noticed.

"Are you always like this?" she asked.

"Like what?"

"Light."

He looked at her then, and the humour left his face without the warmth leaving it.

"No," he said. "I was heavy for a long time."

She waited.

He did not seem to be deciding whether to tell her. More as if he were listening for how much the moment had room for.

"When Ruth died," he said, "I became very devout in a way that made everyone tired. I quoted resurrection as though it were my job to defend God from grief. I said true things too quickly. People were kind enough not to believe me."

Mara stared at him.

"What changed?"

"God outwaited me."

The words rested there, almost too simple.

He poured tea into the second cup. His hand shook; a little spilled onto the dust and darkened it.

"I had to discover that joy is not the reward for tidying sorrow. It is more like..." He paused, looking around as if the hillside might assist. "Like finding that the house still



has one lamp burning, even though some rooms will always be dark.”

Mara said nothing.

“The lamp is not an argument with the dark,” he added. “It is only light.”

A bumblebee moved through the fennel flowers. The men had begun laughing about a doctor who spoke too fast. Anna was cutting cheese with unnecessary concentration. The carob leaves flashed dull silver when the wind turned them.

Mara expected the words to irritate her. They did not. Perhaps because he had not told her where the lamp was in her own house. Perhaps because he had admitted there were rooms that stayed dark.

Elias handed her the cup.

“Careful. It is stronger than it looks.”

“The tea?”

“Everything.”

She took it. The cup was warm and slightly dented.

For a while they ate without speaking. The silence did not feel empty. It had bread in it,

insects, leaves, someone’s laughter, the small clink of a knife against a jar. Her grief was still there. It had not been lifted, softened, explained, or made useful. But for the first time in weeks, it was not the only thing sitting beside her.

A young girl from the group came over carrying a crushed flower in both hands.

“Mr Elias, what is this?”

He leaned forward as though receiving an ambassador.

“That,” he said, “is a very brave flower that has had a difficult morning.”

The child considered this. “Is it dead?”

“Not yet. But even if it were, it would have been yellow first.”

The girl seemed satisfied and ran back with the flower.

Mara looked at him.

“You can’t help yourself, can you?”

“No,” he said. “I have reached an age where resisting wonder would be poor manners.”

She laughed again. This time it stayed a little longer.

Above them, the sky was beginning to gather the faint haze that came before evening. The picnic had loosened. Someone was wrapping leftover bread. The dog slept with its chin on the boy’s shoe. An ant crossed the edge of Mara’s sandal and vanished into a crack in the earth.

When she rose to help fold the cloth, Elias handed her one of the corner stones.

“Keep that there a moment,” he said. “The wind is ambitious.”

She held the stone down while he shook crumbs gently towards the grass.

“Do you ever stop missing her?” Mara asked.

“No.”

The answer came without drama.

“Does that make you sad?”

“Yes.”

He folded one side of the cloth over the other.

“And joyful?” she asked, surprising herself.

He looked at the cloth, then at the carob tree, then at her.

“Sometimes,” he said. “Not because she is gone. Because love was not taken back.”

Mara held the stone in her palm. It was warm from the sun, rough in places, ordinary and exact.

On the walk back along the limestone path, Anna talked beside her about someone’s cataract operation, and Mara answered in the right places. The sea was not visible from there, but the air had a salt edge. Behind them, Elias was walking slowly with the boy and the dog, stopping every few yards to inspect something the dog considered urgent.

Mara did not feel comforted in the way she had feared. Nothing had been explained. Her mother’s last months remained what they were. The guilt had not dissolved. The sorrow had not politely stepped aside.

But it had sat for an hour under a carob tree beside bread, apricots, ants, a trembling hand, and a man who could say his wife was dead and still notice the colour near the stone of the fruit.

That evening, when Mara took off her sandals, the small picnic stone fell from her handbag. She did not remember putting it there.

She held it for a moment before placing it on the kitchen windowsill.

It was only a stone.

Still, it kept the day’s warmth longer than she expected.

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Reflection

– The Joy That Has Learned Sorrow

You may know the kind of kindness that feels too arranged. A picnic cloth spread too neatly. A voice made bright too soon. A religious phrase offered before sorrow has had room to breathe.

There are times when joy-talk feels almost like

an intrusion. Someone means well, but the words arrive before the grief has been allowed its proper weight. “She is in a better place.” “Everything happens for a reason.” “You have to stay positive.” “At least you had those years.” These phrases may contain fragments of truth, but truth spoken too quickly can become a kind of injury. It asks the wounded heart to become manageable before it is ready.

So if you feel suspicion when people speak of joy after suffering, that suspicion may contain wisdom. Some cheerfulness has never stood near a grave. Some bright religion has not yet learned the difference between hope and hurry.

This episode is not asking you to become cheerful. It is not asking you to look on the bright side, to call pain a blessing, or to turn your wound into a lesson. The joy being considered here is quieter, older, and more chastened than that. It is the joy that has learned sorrow.

Some joy arrives easily. It comes with morning light, good news, affection returned, a child’s laughter, a table laid after strain, or the first ordinary pleasure after a difficult season. Such joy is real and good. It belongs to creation. A Christian vision of life should not despise it. The world is made, sustained, and loved by God; therefore ordinary delight has its own dignity.

But there is another joy that does not come before sorrow. It comes, if it comes, after sorrow has entered deeply enough to change the heart’s shape. It has less sparkle. It does not need to an-



nounce itself. Sometimes it is almost hidden, like warmth still held in a stone after the sun has gone.

You may have met this joy in someone who has suffered without becoming cold. They do not speak as though everything is fine. They do not hurry to reassure you. They may carry grief plainly. Yet there is room around them. Their presence does not require you to be cheerful, and it does not make sorrow heavier than it already is. You can breathe near them. Their pain has not made them brittle. Their joy has not made them false.

That is a rare kind of ripeness.

It is important to move carefully here. Suffering

itself does not automatically ripen the soul. Pain can narrow the heart. It can make a person defensive, suspicious, punitive, exhausted, or afraid of tenderness. Some suffering traumatises before the mind can understand it or the spirit can pray with it. Some wounds need protection, treatment, careful accompaniment, silence, distance, and long time. It would be cruel to suggest that suffering ought to make anyone joyful. It would be spiritually careless to hurry a wounded person towards gratitude.

Nor does sorrow become holy simply because it is intense. There can be self-pity in sorrow, drama in sorrow, possessiveness in sorrow, identity built around sorrow. There can also be honest lament, moral injury, real trauma, and

grief too deep for language. These must not be confused. The Christian tradition at its best does not flatten suffering into one meaning. It lets lament speak. It lets Job protest. It lets the psalms cry out. It lets Christ weep.

So the question is not, “Have you become joyful enough after suffering?” That would be another burden.

The question is more delicate: what can happen when sorrow is carried truthfully before God over time?

There may come a point when sorrow is still sorrow, but it no longer occupies the whole inner landscape. It remains part of the truth, yet no longer becomes the only truth. You may still re-

member. You may still ache. The old grief may still return at anniversaries, in dreams, in the body, in a familiar smell, in a piece of music, in the small ordinary object that suddenly becomes unbearable. Yet alongside it, or beneath it, there may be another movement: a quiet gladness that you are still held, still able to love, still able to receive beauty without betraying what was lost.

Joy is not the reward for tidying sorrow.

That line matters. Many people secretly imagine that joy will come once grief has been made orderly, once the wound has been understood, once the story can be told calmly, once faith has found the correct interpretation. But deep joy does not wait for all the rooms of the house to be lit. It may appear while some rooms remain dark.

The lamp is not an argument with the dark. It is only light.

This is close to the heart of Christian joy. Joy does not disprove sorrow. It does not explain why the suffering happened. It does not show that the loss was secretly good. It does not cancel grief by force of doctrine. It is more like a lamp left burning in the house of the soul. You may still know where the dark rooms are. You may still avoid some of them. You may still enter others only with fear. Yet the lamp remains. It does not solve the darkness. It keeps you from believing that darkness is all there is.

Paul's phrase "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing"

belongs here. He does not pretend that sorrow has gone. He does not claim a spiritual state floating above trouble. His letters know imprisonment, conflict, weakness, danger, and anguish. Yet joy keeps appearing, especially in Philippians, written from captivity. This joy is not generated by Paul's temperament. It rests in participation in Christ, in a belonging deeper than circumstance.

This is why Christian joy cannot be reduced to resilience, optimism, or meaning-making, though it may include elements that psychology can recognise. The centre is grace. The heart slowly re-centres away from the small self and towards God. The small self wants control, explanation, protection, and sometimes vindication. It wants suffering either to make sense or to stop hurting. Grace works more quietly. Sometimes God does not remove sorrow quickly. Sometimes God outwaits us.

That phrase carries a great deal. God outwaits the false consolations. God outwaits the spiritual performance. God outwaits the anxious need to explain. God outwaits the hard shell that forms around injury. Not by indifference, but by fidelity. The God who seems slow may be the God who refuses to force the heart open before it can bear the opening.

The risen Christ gives the quiet background to this whole theme. In John's Gospel, the disciples rejoice when they see the Lord. But this joy comes after fear, abandonment, death, and wounds. The risen Christ does not bring joy by

pretending there has been no crucifixion. He comes among frightened disciples with wounds still visible. Luke gives that extraordinary phrase: the disciples were "disbelieving for joy". Their joy is not simple. It carries shock, grief, fear, and wonder together.

Resurrection joy enters a wounded room.

This matters for your own heart. Much spiritual confusion comes from imagining that sorrow and joy must take turns. First grief, then healing, then joy. Sometimes life moves that way, and you may be grateful when it does. But the deeper life of the soul is often less tidy. Joy and sorrow may share the same room. You may weep and still be grateful. You may feel a wound and still know that God is near. You may laugh honestly without having finished grieving.

Mature joy does not ask sorrow to leave the room. It asks sorrow to stop ruling the house.

Even that must be said gently. Sorrow cannot be commanded into its proper place by willpower. You cannot force grief to become proportionate. You cannot scold trauma into balance. The movement described here belongs to grace and years. It comes through repeated small acts of truthfulness: allowing the ache to be real, refusing bitterness when bitterness feels justified, receiving love when you would rather disappear, returning to prayer without demanding that prayer make the wound useful.

Over time, the heart may discover that it is being held by more than its own capacity. The joy be-



ing described is therefore not generated by oneself. It is received. It may come after lament, after purification, after forgiveness, after long service, after silence, after the failure of every manageable explanation. It may come not as triumph, but as availability.

Perhaps that is one way to recognise it. You become available again.

Available to the next small mercy. Available to bread, sunlight, the voice of a friend, the awkward affection of family, the persistence of prayer, the movement of leaves, the child who asks a strange question, the small creature going about its tiny business in the dust. These things do not

explain suffering. They do not compensate for loss. They do not prove that everything was worth it. They simply arrive as gifts. The softened heart receives them without making them carry more meaning than they can bear.

That receiving is already a form of joy.

This is where the lookalikes must be named. Forced cheerfulness keeps pain away. Mature joy lets pain be present without handing it the whole room. Spiritual bypassing uses holy words to hurry grief. Mature joy speaks of God without closing the conversation too soon. Stoic endurance bears pain with discipline, but may keep the heart armoured. Mature joy has

warmth in it. Nostalgia may turn wounds into a beautiful story. Mature joy does not need suffering to look poetic. It can remember truthfully and still receive light.

You may also recognise this joy by its humility. It knows too much to become loud. It has seen how quickly pain can distort a person. It has probably seen this not only in others, but in oneself. The person marked by such joy may have fewer sharp edges because life has already broken some of their need to be sharp. They may not need to win every argument. They may not need to correct every misunderstanding. They may be able to let a small irritation pass, not be-

cause they are passive, but because their soul is no longer organised around injury.

Such joy often carries humour. Not mockery, not cleverness used as defence, but a softened humour that lets air into a heavy moment. You may know someone who can mention a hard thing without turning the room dark. They do not trivialise it. They simply refuse to make pain the only possible atmosphere. A gentle remark, a smile, a shared cup of tea, a sudden noticing of something small and alive – these can become signs of a heart that has suffered enough to stop using sorrow as its throne.

The witnesses help us trust that this is not sentimental spirituality. St Seraphim of Sarov's greeting, "My joy", can sound sweet until you remember the life from which it came: solitude, bodily hardship, ascetic struggle, prayer, and pastoral tenderness. His joy had passed through fire. Paul's "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" names joy in union with Christ, not comfort in favourable conditions. Corrie ten Boom's joy after Ravensbrück cannot be mistaken for easy optimism; it is linked to forgiveness received from Christ where human resources failed. Evelyn Underhill helps distinguish spiritual consolation from the deeper surrendered joy that may follow purification. Viktor Frankl, from outside Christian theology, offers serious corroborating testimony that meaning beyond the self can change one's relation to suffering, while Christian faith names the deeper ground as God.

These witnesses do not make suffering attractive.

They keep joy from becoming naïve. The joy they point towards has weight. It has been chastened by reality. It does not float above the human condition; it has been lowered into it.

You may wonder whether you have ever known this joy. Perhaps the answer is only partly. That is enough. The ripened heart is not a performance you must reproduce. You may recognise this joy only in glimpses: a moment when you did not harden where once you would have hardened; a day when beauty reached you without guilt; a conversation in which grief was allowed to be named and still did not become the whole truth; a small laugh that did not betray the dead, the wounded, or the unfinished.

This is why the story's picnic matters. Not because it solves grief. Not because a wise older person explains suffering. Nothing of the sort happens. The grief remains. The guilt remains. The dark rooms remain. Yet for an hour under a carob tree, sorrow sits beside bread, apricots, ants, a trembling hand, and a man who can say his wife is dead and still notice the colour near the stone of the fruit.

That is not a cure. It is a sign.

At the end of this Shadow-related group of episodes, it is worth noticing the sequence. D1 looked at shadow faced and integrated: the heart becoming more truthful about what it had hidden. D2 looked at vulnerability: the heart no longer needing to hide weakness in

order to remain trustworthy. D3 looked at compassion widened by suffering: the heart becoming more merciful because it has known pain from within. The present episode D4 now names another gift of shadow-work, and perhaps its most surprising one: when what was hidden, feared, grieved, or resisted has been carried before God over time, the heart may become available to a joy that is no longer innocent, brittle, or evasive. It is joy chastened into gentleness.

The gift of shadow is not darkness itself. Darkness is still darkness. Harm is still harm. Suffering remains suffering. But when the heart has carried shadow before God long enough, without denial and without self-glorification, something may become possible that could not be manufactured earlier. A quieter joy may take root. It may not announce itself. It may not feel triumphant. It may simply be there.

Perhaps this is all you can recognise for now: not joy as brightness, not joy as recovery, not joy as the answer to grief, but a small warmth that remains after the direct sun has gone. You do not have to call it much. You do not have to build a theology around it. You may only hold it for a moment, as Mara held the stone, and notice that sorrow is still real, but no longer entirely alone.

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Meet the Witnesses

St Seraphim of Sarov (1754–1833)

St Seraphim of Sarov was a Russian Orthodox monk, hermit, elder, and spiritual father, remembered as one of the great witnesses to Paschal joy in the Eastern Christian tradition. He is remembered as greeting people with “My joy!” and, in some accounts, “Christ is risen, my joy!” This phrase should not be heard as a merely charming religious mannerism. It belongs to a life marked by solitude, ascetic struggle, bodily hardship, attack and injury, prayer, and pastoral tenderness. Seraphim is relevant to today’s episode because his joy was not youthful brightness or easy optimism. It was resurrection joy, chastened by suffering and made hospitable. He helps us see that the joy which has learned sorrow may become a way of receiving another person with reverence, warmth, and spiritual welcome.

Paul the Apostle (c. 4 BCE–c. 62–64 CE)

Paul the Apostle was a Jewish Pharisee, missionary, theologian, and one of the earliest formative witnesses of Christian faith after Jesus. His life after conversion included danger, conflict, imprisonment, beatings, rejection, shipwreck, and bodily weakness. Yet his letters speak repeatedly of joy in Christ. The central textual anchor for today’s episode is his phrase “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” in 2 Corinthians 6:10. *“as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”* [NRSVACE] This is not a denial of sorrow, nor a claim to emotional cheerfulness. Paul’s joy coexists with affliction because it is rooted in belonging to Christ. He helps today’s episode remain explicitly Christian and cruciform: joy is not generated by temperament, self-improvement, or favourable circumstance. It is a grace of participation in Christ, present even where suffering has not been resolved.

Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983)

Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch Christian watchmaker, rescuer of Jews and resistance workers during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, and later a writer and speaker. She was arrested in 1944 and eventually imprisoned in Ravensbrück concentration camp, where her sister Betsie died. A central textual anchor is her account of meeting a former Ravensbrück guard after the war. Unable to forgive him from her own resources, she prayed: *“Jesus, I*

cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.” Corrie is relevant to today’s episode because her later freedom and joy cannot be mistaken for innocence, optimism, or forgetfulness. She had seen cruelty and grief directly. Yet her witness shows that the heart need not remain enclosed by hatred or by the worst thing that happened. Her joy is inseparable from grace received where human warmth had failed.

Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941)

Evelyn Underhill was an English Anglo-Catholic writer, retreat leader, spiritual director, and one of the most influential modern interpreters of Christian mysticism. Her relevance to today’s episode lies in her understanding of spiritual purification: the movement from early spiritual attraction or consolation towards surrendered life in God. A useful textual anchor from her prayer material is: “If you will that we be in light, be blessed; if You will that we be in darkness, be blessed.” This does not make darkness desirable, nor does it deny pain. It is a prayer of consent before God when light and darkness cannot be managed by the self. Underhill helps today’s episode distinguish mature joy from religious excitement, spiritual pleasure, or the pursuit of consoling experiences. The joy that has learned sorrow is closer to surrendered participation in God than to any mood the soul can produce for itself.

Viktor Frankl (1905–1997)

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian Jewish neurologist, psychiatrist, Holocaust survivor, and founder of

logotherapy, a school of psychotherapy centred on the human search for meaning. He is not a Christian witness in the theological sense, and should not be made to carry the Christian centre of today's episode. Yet his testimony is a serious corroborating witness from human experience after extreme suffering. A suitable textual anchor is his well-known statement from *Man's Search for Meaning*: "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." Frankl is relevant here because he refuses to glorify suffering while also refusing to reduce the sufferer to what has happened. For today's episode, he helps clarify that suffering does not automatically ennoble, and that chasing happiness is not the way into depth. Christian faith receives this insight while naming a deeper source: the joy of the ripened heart is not merely chosen attitude, but grace received as the self is re-centred in God.

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Reference notes

Seraphim's remembered greeting "My joy" / "Christ is risen, my joy" is recorded in Orthodox sources, including the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese and Orthodox Christianity. Paul's dates and apostolic role are supported by Britannica, and the quotation is from 2 Corinthians 6:10. Corrie ten Boom's Holocaust background is supported by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the forgiveness quotation is reproduced by Renovaré from her account. Underhill's dates and role are supported by the Evelyn Underhill Association, and the prayer quotation is reproduced by Renovaré. Frankl's dates and logotherapy are supported by Britannica, and the "last of the human freedoms" quotation is widely attributed

to *Man's Search for Meaning* and reproduced in a medically reviewed overview of logotherapy

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Discernment Box

– When Joy Has Learned Sorrow, and When Something Else Is Wearing Its Clothes

Deep joy after suffering is easily misunderstood. It can be confused with cheerfulness, emotional recovery, spiritual discipline, nostalgia, or the wish to appear healed. The following distinctions are not tests. They are gentle ways of noticing how joy is functioning in us over time.

In a matured or ripened spiritual heart, this joy may feel less like a passing emotion and more like a foundational undercurrent of grace. It does not float above suffering, and it does not erase what has happened. It remains quietly

present with sorrow, because the heart has learned, over time, to carry both before God.

Forced cheerfulness

Sometimes a person keeps things bright because sorrow feels too dangerous to let into the room. They smile quickly, change the subject, quote something uplifting, or reassure others before anyone has had time to feel what is true.

There may be kindness in this. There may also be fear. Forced cheerfulness often makes grief feel unwelcome. The joy that has learned sorrow can smile, laugh, and give thanks, but it does not need sadness to disappear before it can remain present.

A useful question: does this gladness make space for sorrow, or does it hurry sorrow away?

Spiritual bypassing

Religious language can be true and still be used too soon. Words about resurrection, providence, forgiveness, surrender, or gratitude can become a way of stepping around pain rather than carrying it before God.

The joy explored in this Episode does not use faith to escape sorrow. It allows faith to hold sorrow. It may speak of God quietly, even gratefully, but it does not use God-talk to tidy up what is still raw, complex, or unresolved.

A useful question: does this spiritual language deepen truthfulness, or does it smooth over what has not yet been faced?

Emotional recovery mistaken for mature joy

After a hard season, there may come relief: sleep returns, energy improves, the body softens, ordinary pleasures become possible again. This is good and worthy of gratitude. But relief is not always the same as the deeper joy being described here.

Mature joy is less dependent on circumstances improving. It may still be present, faintly but truly, when tears return, when the anniversary comes round, when the old ache wakes unexpectedly. It is closer to a foundational undercurrent than to a passing emotional state.

A useful question: is this joy present only because things are easier, or does something quieter remain even when difficulty returns?

Bittersweet nostalgia

Sometimes sorrow becomes beautiful in memory. We speak tenderly of what happened, or of who we used to be, and the telling carries a soft glow. There can be real healing in this. Yet nostalgia may also place suffering at a safe distance, turning pain into a story we can admire.

The joy that has learned sorrow does not need suffering to look poetic. It can remember tenderly without decorating the wound. It can honour the past without polishing it into something more graceful than it was.

A useful question: am I remembering truthfully, or am I making the wound beautiful so that I do not have to feel its unfinished edge?

Stoic endurance

Some people carry pain with discipline and little complaint. They remain steady, useful, and composed. This can be admirable, and at times necessary. But steadiness alone is not the same as ripened joy.

Stoic endurance can harden the heart while keeping behaviour respectable. The joy of a ripened heart has warmth in it. It may be quiet, but it is not shut down. It remains capable of tenderness, gratitude, humour, and receiving care.

A useful question: is my steadiness making me more available to love, or simply better defended?

Recovery as identity

After suffering, it is natural to speak of survival, healing, resilience, or recovery. Such language can help us honour what has been endured. Yet even recovery can become a new self-image: the healed one, the strong one, the wise one, the one who has come through.

Gentle joy loosens this identity; it does not build a new self-image around pain, victimhood, or even recovery. Self-images have likely faded in the ripened heart. The person no longer needs suffering to prove depth, nor recovery to prove worth.

A useful question: has my story become a freer place to live, or a new role I feel I must maintain?

Optimistic temperament

Some people are naturally buoyant. They look for light quickly, recover hope easily, and bring brightness into rooms. This may be a genuine gift. But natural optimism and mature joy are not always the same.

The joy that has learned sorrow has been chastened. It has lost some innocence and gained mercy. It does not rush to the bright side. It can sit in half-light without panic. Its gladness has room for silence.

A useful question: is this joy able to stay near suffering without becoming impatient with it?

Aestheticizing sorrow

Poetry, music, images, and spiritual language can help the heart hold sorrow and joy together. They can also make suffering feel meaningful too quickly. A beautiful phrase may soothe us before the truth has been fully allowed to speak.

The poetic practice suggested in this Episode is meant to deepen attention, not decorate pain. A line of poetry may become prayer, but it should not become a veil. The wound is not an ornament. The sorrow is not material for spiritual elegance.

A useful question: is beauty helping me remain truthful, or helping me avoid what still hurts?

A quiet sign

The joy that has learned sorrow usually leaves more room around it. Other people do not feel

instructed to be happy, hurried into healing, or corrected for grieving. They feel a little more free to be real.

Such joy may laugh, but it does not mock pain. It may give thanks, but it does not demand gratitude. It may speak of God, but without using God to close the conversation too soon.

Over time, this joy tends to make a person humbler, warmer, less brittle, less dramatic, and more able to let sorrow and gladness sit together before God.

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Practice Box

– Sitting with Sorrow and Joy Before God

This practice will not, by itself, ripen the heart. Ripening is the fruit of grace, lived truthfulness,

and the slow work of years. The purpose of this Practice Box is more modest: to help you notice how sorrow and joy are actually being carried in you, and whether some lookalike state is quietly masquerading as deep inner joy.

This practice uses poetry because poetry can sometimes hold what explanation closes too quickly. A poem may allow sorrow and joy to sit together without forcing either one to win.

Choose one text

Choose one poem, psalm, hymn verse, or short spiritual passage that holds sorrow and joy together. It need not be long. It should do three things gently:

- honour sorrow without minimising it
- suggest that sorrow may deepen the heart's capacity for joy
- point, for a Christian reader, towards God or Christ as the place where sorrow and joy can be held together

Read the chosen text once, slowly. Then read it again, with less effort to understand and more willingness to receive.

Let one image choose you

Do not analyse the whole poem. Notice one image, phrase, or movement that stays with you.

It may be an image of a hollowed cup, a deepened heart, light entering after grief, a guest

arriving, a wound carried without bitterness, or joy and sorrow standing together before God.

Let that single image remain in your awareness for a minute or two.

Notice what happens in your body. There may be softening, resistance, warmth, tears, fatigue, irritation, or nothing much at all. Any of these may be enough.

Ask what kind of joy is present

Without forcing an answer, ask gently:

Is there any quiet gladness here that does not require my sorrow to disappear?

Or:

Is what I am calling joy actually relief, cheerfulness, nostalgia, toughness, or the wish to appear healed?

Do not turn this into self-examination under pressure. Simply notice. The aim is not to decide whether your joy is mature. The aim is to become a little more truthful about what is present.

Let the image become prayer

If prayer feels available, address God from within the image.

You might pray in words such as:

- Hold my sorrow and joy together in You.
- Teach me the joy that does not deny grief.
- Let me receive what I cannot manufacture.

- Keep my heart from using gladness to escape truth.
- Use your own words if they come. Or use no words at all.

Allow the words to fall away

After a few moments, let the poem, the image, and the prayer loosen.

You do not need to repeat a phrase as a mantra. Simply allow its meaning-sense to remain for a little while, without grasping it.

Rest in the presence of God, as you are. Let thoughts and emotions come and go. If you practise Centering Prayer, you may gently return to your sacred word when you notice yourself becoming caught in a thought, feeling, or memory. The word is not used to suppress anything, but as a simple aid to surrendering your attention back to God.

Sit for a few minutes, or longer if this is already part of your practice.

Close with gratitude

End with a simple thank-you.

You may be grateful for a felt consolation, if one came. You may be grateful only for having stayed with the paradox for a few minutes. You may be grateful that sorrow and joy do not have to be solved before they can be brought before God.

If nothing felt clear, that too can be received. The practice has still done its quiet work of attention.

For group use

Invite people to bring, or choose together, a short poem, psalm, or hymn verse that holds sorrow and joy in the same space. After slow reading, allow a few minutes of silence. Then invite brief sharing around one question only:

What image or phrase stayed with you?

There is no need to explain personal suffering, and no one should be pressed to speak. The point is not disclosure, but shared recognition.

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Poem Box
– Texts for a Ripening Heart

These are suggested kinds of texts for the first part of the practice. Choose one or two. Let them become familiar over time, almost like psalms of the heart.

Kahlil Gibran – “On Joy and Sorrow”

Useful for its clear image of sorrow carving a deeper capacity for joy. This is especially helpful when the reader needs a non-confessional, interfaith-friendly doorway into the theme.

A psalm of lament that turns towards trust

Choose a psalm where grief, danger, or dryness is honestly named, but where the speaker still turns towards God. Psalm 63 is one possibility, especially for its wilderness setting and its sense of the soul finding satisfaction in God.

A Christian hymn or lyric of joy in sorrow

Choose – or even better, create! – a short hymn verse or Christian lyric that does not deny pain, but holds trouble, stillness, and gladness together before Christ. The text should have a quiet centre rather than a triumphant tone.

A short meditation on joy and sorrow in Christ

A suitable piece may imagine joy and sorrow meeting in Christ: the crucified one who knows sorrow, and the risen one in whom joy is not erased by wounds. This can help Christian readers hold both cross and resurrection without separating them too neatly.

A contemporary poem that honours emotional complexity

A compact modern poem may help readers who need language closer to ordinary experience. The best choices will acknowledge sorrow plainly while still making room for grace, gratitude, or quiet gladness.

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