

“Obedience and Joy: The Power of Relational Joy in the Formation of Seminarians”

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“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” JN: 15:9-11

Jesus himself teaches us that the model of obedience is to keep His commandments so that we will abide in His love. Abiding in Jesus’ love bears the fruit of complete joy. Joy is the effect of love that comes through relationship. If joy, as Aquinas teaches, comes from being in the presence of the beloved¹, shouldn’t those in the process of configuration to Christ be the happiest of all people?

Why then do so many seminarians and priests lack joy? Why do they get discouraged easily? Why do they choose to live a life of pseudo-joy and gravitate towards worldly relationships (real or virtual)? Have those relationships proven to be untrustworthy causing deep wounds of mistrust and fears of abandonment? Is it perhaps that they have rarely experienced authentic human joy in their relationships?

Martin recalled his own journey towards obedience. His priest friend, whom he knew cared for him, told him that “if a young man enters the seminary to be obedient, he will always be joyful”. Obedience is difficult, Martin recalled. “Sometimes I feel like I’m wasting my life away and fear that I will just disappear in someone else’s shadow. But then when I know I am cared for and loved by others, joy overcomes my fears and, in those moments, I can see so clearly that the only thing that really matters is loving God and doing His will. God is pure being, and when I submit in obedience, I can think more deeply on Him. Jesus was so happy to be a man. What freedom we have in being sons of God”.

When a man has rarely experienced authentic human joy in his relationships, being obedient in formation can seem like an imposed ideal. It can be easier and perhaps habitual to choose consciously or unconsciously to live a life of pseudo-joy. Pseudo joy is the appearance of joy

but, it is a substitute of distractions that leaves a person emptyⁱⁱ. (Pseudo-joy assessment attached).

Rob entered seminary after working in a job that encouraged late night video chats, drinking, and being in control. In order to please his friends, he compromised his own moral beliefs. His parents did not impose consequences for disobedient behaviors, so he became self-reliant early in life. As a result, Rob did not trust those in authority. Rob's first year in seminary was very challenging in his attempts to be obedient. He was bored, did not trust his superiors, and felt that he had nothing in common with the other seminarians. Most of his past relationships had been virtual and he had always been in control. He began to feel resentful towards his formator, so he gravitated towards a small group of men who often complained. They gathered together to drink, smoke, gossip, and on weekends, break curfew. Rob followed along with the group until one night he was caught breaking curfew, drinking too much and passed out. Up until that night, Rob thought that his life had been one of joy being with his buddies since for the first time he felt that he belonged. When the consequences of his behaviors caught up with him, he realized that he was living a life of distractions and a pseudo-joy that left him empty. He decided it was time to make some changes in his life yet did not know how to begin.

This paper will cover two critical areas of development that have instilled fear and mistrust in many seminarians thus affecting their inability to experience relational joy. Then the latest neuroscientific research on the brain will highlight the correlation between relational joy and obedience. Two assessment tools are provided in this paper. The first will help seminarians determine one's joy vs pseudo-joy. The second assessment tool is provided for formators to use with their men to help them determine which emotional losses may be draining their ability to be joyfully obedient. In conclusion, practical steps will be offered to help seminarians build and rebuild their joy in times of struggles.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE CURRENT CULTURE

The current culture has affected the development of its youth in many ways. In particular, the rise of fear and mistrust has increased in some youth to pathological levels. The last two

generations (millennials -1985-2000 & Generation Z-2000-present) suffer from the greatest escalation in anxiety, depression, and at worst psychopathic tendencies ⁱⁱⁱ. Two critical areas of development will be highlighted that researchers claim contributes to this escalation:

- 1) The impact technology has had on the brain's development and how an ***“Over connected”*** virtual world of social media has affected the youth's ability to form healthy relationships.
- 2) Today's youth have been left to form themselves through their peers and social media. Previous generations emphasized courtesy, self-sacrifice, life-giving relationships, and a solid work ethic. The current culture tolerates lack of civility, self-reliance, virtual relationships, and a deficiency in the value of work. This current cultural disposition has been the result of two generations of ***“Over-serving”*** the youth thus creating in some an increase in a sense of entitlement.

I. OVER-CONNECTED

• TECHNOLOGY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Generation Z is growing up in an “over-connected” world of social media and happily live in an isolated virtual world of relationships. While Millennials were the first generation to enter the over-connected world, Generation Z were born into it and are digital natives. They are habitually overconnected to technology and yet are *the most disconnected emotionally and relationally*. In 2014^{iv}, text messages surpassed voice mails and 87% of youth claim that they misinterpreted the context of the text message. The texts are so condensed, lack body language and tone of voice that they often fail to convey the sender's intended meaning, which can create division and harm in relationships. Research has confirmed that technology has negatively affected relationships among Millennials, the first generation to live in this overconnected world:

According to a Gallup poll^v:

- They have miserable relationship skills
- They have low emotional intelligence, i.e. the ability to manage their emotions (a necessary soft skill for affective maturity)
- They have difficulty developing face to face people skills –yet they desire personal interaction
- They are short on patience, listening skills, and conflict resolution

- They have an inordinate attachment to their devices and can be addicted to them psychologically and physically.

Generation Z youth, the true digital natives, put technology in the same category as “air and water” according to Pew Research Center. They believe that they need technology, rather than relationships, to survive. Their values define the world of technology they live in^{vi}:

- Pluralistic ideology – we buy into almost anything
- Addictive pathology – we can’t cope without technology
- Superficial theology – we believe in nearly everything
- Artificial methodology – we seek virtual answers from anywhere.

The lack of relational skills has perpetuated the growth of artificial maturity. The age of affective maturity has been developmentally delayed in the last two generations, thus earning them the label, “26 is the new 18”. Technology without maturity can be hazardous!

In her new book, “IGEN”, Jeanne Twinge quotes one teen of many who claim: “*My generation lost interest in socializing in person – they don’t have physical get-togethers, they just text together, and they can just stay at home.*”^{vii}. Teens are so afraid of being offline and shunned by their social media groups, that they have their friends monitor their accounts, giving out their passwords, when parents remove their devices as a form of punishment. This new phenomenon has earned a diagnosis by psychologists called FOLO (fear of leaving online) or FOMO (fear of missing out).

The world of virtual reality and social media has created a generation of young people who constantly compare themselves to others and feel that they are never good enough. Video games, which were once an indoor activity among friends, has morphed into a real time global online network that is no longer about play but about reputation and identity. As youth continue to struggle with knowing their true identity, i.e. to know who they are as God intended, a significant gap could continue to grow in the maturation process of our future seminarians knowing themselves as His beloved sons.

- TECHNOLOGY AND THE BRAIN

Technology since birth has caused a shift in learning from the left side of the brain to the right. The right brain learns through images more than words and principals. Images are the number one method of communicating in this age of technology often eliminating the true meanings of the message. Intelligence tests of candidates applying to seminary show a significant decrease in nonverbal intelligence. A weakness in nonverbal intelligence can lead to distortions of visual perception and organization. In other words, youth tend to filter out anything they do not need to know in the moment, missing valuable environmental cues and observable behaviors in self and others. This rewiring of the brain has caused a significant deficit that can affect the ability to be empathic to others.

Sam, a first year Theologian, recalled playing with other children in the park as a young boy. He vividly remembered the hurt and sad look in the eyes of another child when he called him a name. That hurt helped him become sensitive to the pain of others. Sam noted that social media does not allow one to see the face or look into the eyes of another person when critical or hurtful words are said. He admitted that due to his own social media use for so many years, there are times as an adult when he is insensitive to the pain and hurt of others.

Cyber bullying and “unfriending” have become the norm in the culture causing an epidemic of anxiety, lack of empathy and lack of trust. Cyber bullying has become life threatening in some cases and left lasting harm to the mental health of others. Research indicates that brain development is affected with chronic peer victimization during adolescence, causing impacts on mental health via structural brain changes^{viii}. Some studies claim that approximately 20% of people who have been bullied experience some kind of mental health problems later in life, even at the age of 50. Being bullied is also linked to social anxiety, which often lasts into adulthood and increases the risk of developing personality disorders^{ix}. This research may partly explain the increase in the development of personality disorders found in later psychological evaluations given to men in seminary after the brain is formed. (Note: the brain becomes fully developed around age 26).

Habitual use of technology has shown to cause the brain to become addicted to any device that has streaming data. MRI scans show that with the constant streaming of information, the ability for the brain to focus is undermined with bursts of stimulation, (dopamine) which becomes addictive. Without the bursts of dopamine, the brain signals loss and craving, causing feelings of emptiness and loneliness. Emptiness leads to low creativity, isolation and boredom, which in turn makes it difficult to be present in the moment and affects learning and relationships since the brain is constantly looking for the next high. In today's culture, addictive behavior is widespread. 40 million American's over age 12, meet the criteria for addictions involving alcohol, nicotine, or other drugs like vaping^x. This study did not research addiction indicators for those using pornography.

II. OVER-SERVED

- SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT

Well-meaning parents desire to give their children the best life can offer. As a result, the last two generations of youth have been *over*-exposed to too much information without the required experience to integrate it appropriately. Some youth have traveled the world virtually and/or through the generous donations of benefactors without the experience of self-sacrifice to achieve their goals. They may expect to be given the benefits without the work. A sense of entitlement has crept into daily life, and it is not just young people. Perks that would have been luxuries a century ago, are now expected, and it is easy to complain when they are not received immediately. When we think that these perks (cell phones, lap top computers, international travel) are a right, we tend to lose the incentive to earn them. Entitlement pushes one to *look outward* for answers, while incentive steers one to *look inward*. "It's the difference between rights and responsibilities. When I think I'm entitled to something, I assume someone will act on my behalf. When I think I am responsible for something, I assume I must act".^{xi} Being over-served by others can result in a sense of entitlement.

Youth today tend to look outward in all their activities. They have done and seen so much as adolescents that they may no longer look forward to adulthood. They have prematurely lost their sense of innocence, wonder, and trust. Being overexposed to information too early and

underexposed to genuine experience too late has created another phenomenon called “high arrogance –low self-worth syndrome”. This syndrome can mimic the impression of entitlement. However, research shows that the impression of entitlement may be from external and internal stressors which can cause youth to feel overwhelmed and less confident in their own gifts and talents. In order to keep the illusion of self-confidence they choose strategies like self-reliance to cope. Many have discovered that getting lost in a virtual world of online fantasy, gaming, texting, etc., in order to become someone else in a virtual world can numb their feelings of emptiness and loneliness. They have lost the patience to wait for that the feeling of emptiness to pass, which can happen with time and awareness of how to apply certain behavioral and spiritual practices such as St. Ignatius’ rules for discernment. Another common strategy to cope is to become “super kid” and fall into the performance trap of perfectionism, never being satisfied even when they achieve their own goals.

Thomas, a second year Theologian and convert to the faith suffers from this phenomenon. He copes by being a “super seminarian.” In adolescence, he would choose the most extreme ways to prove he was perfect in the task he would set his mind to. After his conversion to the Catholic faith he switched his extreme behaviors to the task of evangelizing others. Externally, he appears to have excelled in his efforts and be the perfect evangelizer for his diocese. Behaviorally, there are outward signs of a man who appears angry all the time and mistrusts all help. He has grown quite thin with his rigid diet and fasting, he has admitted to not getting more than a few hours of sleep a night, and does not demonstrate much desire for leisure. While formators are aware of his tendencies, Thomas continues to overcompensate with his extreme behaviors in order to mask any lack of self-confidence. Thomas is coping by trying to be perfect and even exceed his own goals.

High-arrogance, low self-worth syndrome can lead to disordered personality traits if not a full-blown disorder. In 2016 the American Counseling Association reported a “rising tide of personality disorders among millennials”. In addition, a study from 1975 to 2006 found a measurable climb in narcissistic tendencies among American students, and a growing number who have Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Narcissism is a shame-based fear of being ordinary which cannot be cured by more shame. It arises from a desperate fear of being worthless. Only

by serving others who are less special can they begin to make progress in feeling better about themselves in order to counteract the shame. Diagnosing and treating this disorder as early as possible (before age 24) can bring hope that a full-blown personality disorder may not develop. It is now recommended by some Bishops and seminaries that a second psychological evaluation be given to candidates in first or second Theology, or when the seminarian reaches the age of 25-26. It can be a crucial tool (if administered and interpreted correctly) to discover traits/features of a disordered personality that may have taken root. If personality disorders go undetected or ignored by formation, history demonstrates that these men present a higher risk of harmful behaviors to themselves and their bride the church.

Seminarians who are not overserved or protected from grappling with difficult tasks develop what psychologists call “mastery experiences.” This well-earned sense of mastery leads to more optimistic and decisive adults. Hands on learning through experience teaches children that they can overcome adversity and achieve goals. Seminarians who have never tested their abilities as children may grow into emotionally brittle young adults who are more vulnerable to anxiety, depression and fear of commitment. Overserving the youth has not helped them mature affectively or develop into mentally stable adults. To prove this point, we can compare the youth born before the technology age. Sixty years ago, 18-year old’s stormed the beaches of Normandy to almost certain death, while some 18 years old’s in 2016 required a safe place on campus to go when their feelings were hurt.

There is developing an even newer standard for creating a sense entitlement in middle schools. A Florida teacher was recently fired for refusing to comply with the school’s “No Zero” policy. This means, the school administration has created a rule that even if a student fails to turn any assignment in, he or she still cannot receive a “0” for the assignment. They will get a 50% grade. In short, they get half credit for doing nothing. The administrators fear facing angry parents since parents confront teachers for acting harshly with their child. This new normal has parents constantly advocating for their misbehaving children, including doing their homework, and accompanying their adult children on their initial job interviews. Raising children today is certainly a challenge and a recent quote seems to sum it up brilliantly: *“If you raise your*

children, you can spoil your grandchildren. But if you spoil your children, you'll have to raise your grandchildren^{xii}”.

- **LOSS OF EMPATHY**

As a man was drowning in a local pond, a group of teens videotaped the tragedy with their cell phones as they watched. They found it entertaining. Instead of taking action to help save the man, the teens took videos.

- ***Empathy is the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within the other person's frame of reference.***

When you examine the data, there are distinct parallels between the introduction of social media and the decline in empathy or compassion. 72 research studies over 30 years found among 14,000 students that empathy has been declining steadily since 2000. The University of Michigan first reported a 40 percent drop in empathy among college students a decade ago, about the same year social media took over student's lives. The screens we look at through technology distances us from reality. When differences of opinion or criticism takes place on social media like Twitter and Facebook the loss of empathy divides families and friends rather than unite them. YouTube presents violent and catastrophic endings to shows and viewing multiple violent images and tragedies on the screen numbs us to the reality of pain. Our mind no longer knows the difference between an imagined experience and a real experience.

Michael Bader, writes, “When the environment is inattentive and not empathetic, a child's stress response system, embedded in the architecture of a child's developing nervous system (*mediators in this system include oxytocin, opiate and dopamine receptors, cortisol levels and parasympathetic nerve pathways*), becomes overwhelmed, and many types of psychopathology result. Higher cognitive functions, including language, can suffer as the brain instinctively relies on more primitive regions to deal with an unresponsive environment.”^{xiii}

Empathy can be the antidote to a sense of entitlement and lead to joy! Without empathy people cannot truly experience authentic joy. People send verbal and nonverbal messages to each other when face to face, and these messages contain some subtext. Facial expressions often relay emotions. Body language communicates disposition. Learning to lead with empathy in

relationships is a necessary quality for any healthy relationship and most importantly for those in the service of others.

Lt. Colonel Christopher Hughes was a commander of the 2nd battalion, 327th infantry regimen in Iraq (2003). When the battalion received a shipment of food and supplies for the Iraqi people, Hughes decided the best place to distribute it was at the local mosque. So, he and his troops marched toward the house of the local cleric, the Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, to ask if he'd like to oversee the distribution. As the soldiers marched, locals assumed they were going to kidnap the cleric or bomb the mosque, so a crowd gathered to stop the soldier's w/sticks and rocks ready for a fight. Two started throwing rocks at the soldiers, it was a tense moment. Hughes led with intelligence and cognitive & emotional empathy. He instructed his armed soldiers to stop, drop down on one knee, point their guns toward the ground and to look up into the eyes of the local Iraqis and smile. One by one, the locals began dropping their rocks, and eventually they smiled right back. The conflict was avoided.

JESUS BROUGHT JOY TO THE WORLD

“and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth....In a loud voice she exclaimed for behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy.”

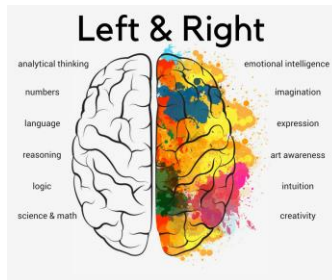
LK1:40,44

Joy is the earliest response of the soul recorded in scripture (NT). The babe in the womb leaped for joy at the presence of our Lord (LK1:41). Because joy springs forth from a relationship, the intensity of joy is amplified between people. The mothers would have smiled with delight at the babe leaping for joy. This dynamic exchange of joy is the healthiest exercise known to science for building strong brains, bonds, identities and relationships. Joy builds the identity regions and structures of the brain and develops the capacity for resilience. In much the way we exercise our muscles, joy exercises the nerves of the brain. The brain remains joyful and relational so long as the level of distress and suffering in one's life does not exceed their greatest joys.

Seminarians who continue to live in an isolated world of self-love and entitlement need to be formed in a caring environment of relational joy. A joyful relationship can help build joy so that the man can feel safe in his own vulnerability and trust his formator and be obedient. When obedience becomes only about rules rather than through a spirit of care and love, seminarians

will take it as a criticism and threat. They will only obey out of compliance and will not find freedom.

RESEARCH IN NEUROSCIENCE



• JOY AND THE BRAIN

The human brain is a complex organ with 86 billion neurons. At rest the brain uses just a small fraction of its capacity; about 20% of the body's energy^{xiv}. Joy stimulates the growth of the brain systems involved in character formation, identity consolidation, and moral behavior. Joy is a dynamic state of relational experience amplified between two minds that are “glad to be together” at that moment^{xv}. Character change is best developed and maintained in highly joyful relationships. High joy is found in smiles, play, and love, i.e. in being joyfully present to each other. Low joy is found in isolation, depression, aggression, and shame. The signature of joy is that we are sharing the moment with someone in person who is glad we are there. Joy makes eyes sparkle and bonds form. The “over-connected” world of technology has created an environment of isolation from others. This isolation has stripped the youth of relational joy, creating an environment of mistrust that others are not glad we are there. When one feels that they are not loved for who they are they lack confidence in their own ability to see themselves through the eyes of the Father, i.e. that they are beloved sons.

Recent studies in neuroscience demonstrate a working harmony between the right and left structures of the brain when we are relational. Learning how to remain relational in times of difficulty, allows our whole brain to continue working in joyful harmony; a benchmark of *affective maturity*. A person who is affectively mature can persevere joyfully in relationships and solve problems in ways that protect relationships. When relational joy is missing the left side of the brain will go “rogue” and begin to solve problems so that I “win”; measuring success by getting what I want. When all control is given to the left-brain, narcissism begins to dominate, and power can turn into victimization of those in the environment around them. Individual values and relationships suffer, and people can be neglected or even abused.

- JOY AND OBEDIENCE

Relational joy hinges on a single point, do we feel alone? Many seminarians first discover supernatural joy at the moment of their conversion. However, all joy, whether supernatural or natural, is hard to describe, precisely because joy is more than a feeling. Joy is the profound connection that being found has on the soul. One is not alone but loved and enjoyed. Joy is conversely lost whenever we begin to feel alone in prayer or in life. Simple thoughts such as “It is all up to me now,” or “I guess no one cares,” rapidly drain our joy. It is hard for the mind to capture sufficiently how deeply our joy is tied to the loving presence of another. In fact, our brains are wired to search for and detect joy. This is because the brain has a fast track devoted to relational joy (or the lack of joy). The brain sweeps through our current experience six times per second to determine how alone or connected to others I am in the present moment. When we anticipate danger, disapproval, disregard, disappointment, or discouragement from others, our joy levels begin to plummet. When our joy levels are low, it can make it difficult to be obedient. It is during these times of low joy that vocational calls and commitments can begin to be questioned. There is hope, however, that our feelings of isolation and discouragement will not last forever. Joy can be nurtured when renewed (six times per second) in the brain by something other than our direct conscious thoughts^{xvi}. It is through the relationships that we cultivate that will determine the level of joy we can sustain.

When fears of being vulnerable occur in seminarians, especially in relationships with formators, it can be because they fear exposing their weaknesses. Not being accepted for who they are, or perceptions that those in authority don't “really care about them”, can escalate their fears. In the spirit of accompaniment, formators and Bishops might appropriately witness to their men their own weaknesses. In this context, a joyful environment of safe vulnerability can be welcoming. If seminarians are uncertain about what their weaknesses are (spiritually and relationally) a catalog of weaknesses can be explored together with the formator when done in the context of a caring and trusting relationship.

Joy creates attachment bonds and love bonds create joy. People of all ages mirror whoever is glad to be with them in their thinking and behaviors. This can lead to either unhealthy or healthy attachments, i.e. unhealthy attachments to those we fear (abusive relationship) or healthy

attachments to those we love. Attachment bonds to God and our neighbor, including formators, become as weak or as strong as the level of joy in those relationships. The strength of joy will set the depth of the seminarians love that can move his desire to live a life of obedience.

Obedience means poised to listen intently. St. John the Beloved resting on the heart of Jesus demonstrates this. He witnesses to us that when we have a trusting relationship with the Lord first, our hearts can be prepared to have a trusting relationship with others. This helped John be deeply obedient out of love. *“The spirit you received is not the spirit of slaves bringing fear into your lives again; it is the spirit of sons, and it makes us cry out ‘Abba, Father!’”* (Romans 8:14-15). Within the soul is created a filial reverence for God, that encourages a substantial love toward Him, and an affectionate obedience that wants to obey because it loves the one who commands^{xvii}.

Fr. Jeffrey is known to be a very joyful priest. His love of faith and belief that holiness is “for all of us” has become a great witness of joy to others. He learned through prayer and years of seminary formation that his “purpose and fulfillment in life comes in the act of loving my brothers and sisters.” In order to give love, he admits, he must first “receive it.” Like Mother Teresa, whom he credits with influencing his vocation, he says it is “Christ’s abiding love and friendship” that brings the greatest happiness, and that “whatever God asks is doable” and, “in time, joy-filled.” “Through obedience with Jesus, I can love as he loves me, and in the act of loving to all is found my greatest happiness, my purpose and my fulfillment in life.”

In summary, Joy is the effect of love that comes through relationships. It is in the very act of self-surrender to God’s loving relationship that fills us with joy. A seminarian’s character can be transformed, developed and maintained through highly joyful relationships. When human relational joy is present, fears of mistrust and abandonment can dissolve, and obedience can come from love. By joyfully loving God with our whole heart and our neighbor as our self, we can abide in Jesus’ love that His joy may be in us and that our joy may be complete.

ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR JOY VS. PSUEDO-JOY

ASSESSMENT OF JOY

I regularly make myself smile remembering things and people I like.

Never 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Constantly*

I really look forward to seeing the people I see each day.

I avoid them 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *I really like everyone*

I express my appreciation frequently.

Never 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Constantly*

After people talk with me about problems they feel hopeful and creative.

We get depressed 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Everyone thanks me*

How joyful am i?

I never feel joy 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *I constantly feel joy*

How joyful is my family?

Never joyful 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Always joyful*

I find it easy to be content.

Impossible 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *No effort at all*

How many enjoyable meals do you share with others each week?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10+

Children usually like me.

I make children cry 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Children flock to me*

My family believes in me.

Not at all 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Every one of them*

10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Total your score here. _____

COMPARE YOUR SCORES OF JOY VS PSUEDO-

ASSESSMENT OF PSUEDO-JOY

I try to keep my mistakes a secret.

No secrets 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Always*

My diet is too high in comfort foods.

Great diet 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *eat for comfort*

I often keep doing things in secret that make me feel ashamed.

Never 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Constantly*

I spend/shop too much.

No debts 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *huge problem*

I can't let go of a past relationship.

I can move on 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *I keep holding on*

I try to keep certain behaviors secret.

Never 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Huge problem*

This past week, I craved things that are not good for me _____ times.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 +

I think that I binge or abuse power.

Never 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Huge problem*

Relationships feel very confusing to me.

Not at all 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Constantly*

I am close to _____ people who abuse prescriptions, drugs, alcohol, vaping, smoking.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 +

10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Total your scores here. _____

JOY REGULARLY AS YOU WORK ON BUILDING JOY

TO DETERMINE THE TYPE OF EMOTIONAL LOSS WE ARE EXPERIENCING

1. **Fear** - is a threat from which we need to escape. If we can identify the threat, we can pray with God how to escape from that threat.
2. **Anger** - is a threat that we must stop. The brain's sympathetic response is either to fight (anger) or flight (fear). Identify the threat we must stop and ask God's guidance and help in stopping that threat. Often our methods of fighting make the situation worse, so it is better to pause and assess how to stop the threat.
3. **Sadness** - occurs when we have lost something or someone who is important to us. When we grieve our loss in the company of God and the saints, and/or those whom we trust, we quickly realize we are not alone.
4. **Shame** - informs us we are not bringing joy to others. We ask how God can help us to change so we can again bring joy to others. Shame can be healthy when we remember who we are meant to be and take responsibility for our own actions. The enemy wants us to believe that our wrong behaviors are our true self, and God reminds us that what we do wrong is not our true self.
5. **Disgust** - is a reaction to things that are not life-giving. We reject what is not good for us. Like all emotions, this reaction can be misguided when we do not know what is truly life-giving. The goal is to restore what is life-giving.
6. **Hopelessness** - occurs when I can no longer do something because of limitations in time and energy. Being overly driven to control situations on our own leads to unnecessary hopelessness. Hopeless feelings can remind us of how small we are, and that God is indeed in control of our lives. Partnership with God allows us to boast in our littleness and see what God can do. Humility comes from realizing that our hopelessness can be turned into dependence – with a faith in God and His plan to help restore us to joy.
7. **Attachment pain** - is the pain of a relational loss whether momentary or permanent. Attachment pain amplifies any or all the six unpleasant emotions. Permanent losses include divorce, loss of a child, death of a spouse, abuse by a trusted person, or being physically or emotionally abandoned by a parent. Temporary losses could be produced by a crisis in the Church or family, losing control through anger, being shunned, no communication with a friend, being unfriended in social media, cyber bullying, receiving insults, and loneliness. Even from the cross, Jesus comforted His mother through her pain by giving her to the disciple John (JN19:26-27). We can experience divine and human comfort if we include God and our neighbor during experiences of attachment pain.

STEPS FOR BUILDING AND RESTORING JOY: learn and to practice relational skills.

Step 1: Quieting myself at the moment when joy is lost can help me calm my body, thoughts, and emotions. Deep breathing techniques have long been a staple in counseling for those who are anxious, distraught, and fearful. Whether it be the fear of making the wrong decision or losing something of value (e.g. giving up one's current lifestyle), quieting oneself can allow the brain and emotions to catch up with reason. Reason can then direct the need to be with someone who "delights in me for who I am." That relationship will restore me to my joy.

Step 2: Move from isolation to connection. Begin by connecting with the Lord and include Him in the process of moving from "I" to "we." Pay attention to the tendency to turn inward and ask for the grace to turn toward another (outward).

Step 3: Connect with another person I trust (spiritual director, best friend, mentor). Another way to connect is to find a place to volunteer in service. Volunteering allows us to move away from the "poor me" stance to serving those less fortunate. Service can instill gratitude in our life.

Step 4: Remember a time in the past when I struggled with one of the "big six emotions" below or with attachment pain. How did God help me move through the struggle to connection and peace?

Step 5: Ask myself if there is any ***unforgiveness in my heart*** that needs to be healed. Pray for God's mercy and grace to help me move towards *forgiveness* from my heart. Let us realize that the healing we experience in the sacrament of confession is itself ordered to union with Jesus Christ and the Holy Eucharist which is our greatest experience of joy.

ⁱ Summa Theologica, II, 28, 1,

ⁱⁱ Joystartshere.com Assessment tool for joy vs pseudo-joy.

ⁱⁱⁱ 280+ mass shootings in the US of mostly young millennials

^{iv} Why Millennials Text More Than They Call Juliette Fairley June 2, 2014

^v A 2014 Gallup poll

^{vi} 2017, Elmore, Tim. Marching off the Map, Poet Gardner Publishing, Atlanta, GA. P. 38.

^{vii} IGen, Twinge, Jeanne, p.69, 2017

^{viii} How bullying affects the brain by Robin Bisson, King's College London 12/12/18

^{ix} How bullying affects the brain -8/8/18 Medical Xpress <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-12-bullying-affects-brain.html>

^x Elmore, Tim: Marching off the Map, p. 39 – Columbia University study.

^{xi} Elmore, Tim: The Connection Between Incentive and Entitlement, 6/25/2019 Growing Leaders

^{xii} Elmore, Tim: Six Ways to Begin the New Year Intentionally – 1/6/2020 Growing Leaders

^{xiii} Elmore, Tim, How Screens Diminish Our Empathy, 2019 Growing Leaders

^{xiv} Johns Hopkins neurologist Barry Gordon

^{xv} Conversations 12.2, Joy Changes Everything, Wilder, Jim. Fall/ Winter 2014

^{xvi} Wilder, James, RARE Leadership

^{xvii} Catholic Dictionary on the definition of the Gift of Piety.