

We live in turbulent times in 2021 — just turning on the news is disheartening from another “Karen” event, to people acting out violently against flight attendants or food service workers. There is significant discord among political parties, racial conflicts and class struggles.

Oh yeah, we have spent almost two years in a pandemic where we have been isolated from each other and the community interactions that sustain us. Each of us also have personal trials and tribulations in our lives. Have you struggled with anger, anxiety and sadness? I know I have.

And yet, I Thessalonians 5:16 says “Always be joyful.”

How do you remain joyful? Or how do you recover and get back to joyfulness during or after hard times? Being joyful is a state of mind and a matter of the heart, and this can lead us to greater community with each other and with Christ.

*Gratitude is a powerful catalyst for happiness. It's the spark that lights a fire of joy in your soul.*

*Amy Collette*

My mother was diagnosed with dementia several years ago, and even as the disease has progressed and robbed her of her memories and cognitive skills, she still has her sweet spirit. We recently moved Mom to a Memory Care unit, and during the first week, I was taking her into the Common Room for lunch. As we reached the table she said, “No one is smiling!” One of the ladies sitting at the table immediately started grinning. This woman is non-verbal so she could not communicate other than that big grin. My Mom can still bring joy because that is her nature.

Here are some suggestions to find and maintain a heart of joy and gratitude:

- Be kind to everyone you interact with in-person or virtually.
- Prioritize spending time with God every day, whether it is five minutes or an hour.
- Pray about it.
- Take a break from social media.
- Take a break from the news.
- Have a heart of gratitude.
- Be intentional about spending time with family and friends. If that is still not possible for you, then reach out to them by Zoom or with an old-fashioned phone call.
- Get outside and enjoy a walk or a bike ride.
- Spend time on a favorite hobby.
- Spend time with kids and run around with them.
- What other suggestions do you have?

With a heart and soul of JOY, we can have an impact on those around us — no matter the circumstances.