

The Joy of Spiritual Freedom is the first of a trilogy that leads and inspires the reader to enter into a joy filled relationship with a loving God. It is grounded in Biblical wisdom revealing how to remove debilitating doubt and fear. It draws from inspirational letters and case studies that illustrate the Gospel path toward freedom.

The Joy of Spiritual Freedom: No More Doubt No More Fear

Abbot Oscar Joseph, O.C.C.O., and Kathleen P. Rivest, Ph.D., D.D.

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The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

No More Doubt | No More Fear

Abbot Oscar Joseph, O.C.C.O., Kathleen P. Rivest, Ph.D., D.D.

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Abbot Oscar Joseph has been a Christian Counselor and Spiritual Director to hundreds over the past thirty-five years. He has also conducted healing services throughout the East Coast of the United States. He was the founder and principal counselor at the St. Matthew's Institute from 1987 to 2019.

Abbot Oscar Joseph has an extensive background as an educator. He taught psychology, sociology, Old and New Testament, English and ethics at several local community colleges. He is the Founder/President of St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary, which provides a scholarly and classically Anglo/Catholic educational experience.

Retired from his counseling practice in 2019, Abbot Oscar Joseph is currently focused on his duties as leader of the Cistercian Order, providing spiritual direction, conducting seminars and healing services.

The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

Abbot has published a number of books including *Listen with the Ear of Your Heart*, *A Pilgrimage Toward Your Intimacy with God*, *Memoirs of a Christian Healer* and *The Joy of Spiritual Freedom*.

Abbot Oscar Joseph, O.C.C.O. is a vowed Cistercian monk. It is customary to use a religious name. He also is known as The Most Rev. Michael W. Rivest, Ph.D., D.S.T. the honored husband of Kathleen.

If you are interested in having Abbot Oscar Joseph O.C.C.O. conduct seminars, healing services or wish information on the Cistercian Order, he may be contacted at Abbot@bellsouth.net.

More information can be found at Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross (CistercianMonks.org) and St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary (StephenHarding.College).

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She was able to guide many to Jesus Christ who gave them healing to suffering hearts and minds.

Dr. Kathleen held small group workshops with women who were interested in learning about the woman God chose to bear His Son and how Mary contributed to God's plan of salvation.

Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1 - Odyssey Of Developing Joy	3
Three Letters	3
Can You Lose Your Healing Once You Have Received It?.....	9
CHAPTER 2 - Listening To God.....	13
CHAPTER 3 - Why Do We Doubt?.....	19
CHAPTER 4 - Confusion About Suffering.....	23
Sin	26
Satan	29
Persecution	31
CHAPTER 5 - Jesus Wants Us Joyful.....	33
The Church	38
Individuals	43
CHAPTER 6 - How Much Faith Is Enough?.....	47
CHAPTER 7 - Why Some People Are Not Healed.....	53
Some Examples	57
CHAPTER 8 - Together We Pray	59
Guiding Principles	59
Values	60
Whenever Possible Pray As a Team.....	60
Practices.....	62
CHAPTER 9 - Interactive Body, Soul, And Spirit	65

The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

CHAPTER 10 - Spiritual Laws Regarding Relationships	75
CHAPTER 11 - The Law And The Will of God	77
CHAPTER 12 - No Fear In The Law Of God	85
Old Testament Names For God	87
Facts About God_.....	88
Facts About The Father	88
These Are Important Scriptures To Remember	89
CHAPTER 13 - God’s Way To Joy	93
CHAPTER 14 - Evil, The Gate To Captivity	99
CHAPTER 15 - The Gate Keeper Sins Of Codependency	103
CHAPTER 16 - Mary Models Love Without Fear	107
CHAPTER 17 - Mary Teaches How To Choose Freedom	111
CHAPTER 18 - The Road To The Joy Of Spiritual Freedom.....	115
Jesus Comes for the Sinner	116
Love Each Other	117
CHAPTER 19 - Getting Help.....	119
CHAPTER 20 - Pressing Forward.....	121
CHAPTER 21 - Conclusion	125
BIBLIOGRAPHY	127

CHAPTER 1

Odyssey Of Developing Joy

THREE LETTERS

I cannot imagine Jesus. I have no image but that of the effeminate, pasty-faced Caucasian, which I reject. No image or illustration of Him has ever been satisfactory to represent Him for me, so how do I imagine what I cannot image? Nor can I image this imageless person as loving, or experience with Scriptures correlating love with demands for perfection and extremes, no middle ground. But then I have never known the welding of love. Growth does not come through harsh demands and expectations, but rather through the complete and uncritical acceptance of which I have never known. I believe that the Lord created me with one talent: to hurt. He has allowed me insights, awareness and understandings that, in a human being with the total configurations He has either given or seen fit to allow to develop, can only cause pain. M. T.

After you told me how much God loved me, I looked into your eyes and saw Christ...Then looking down, I saw a ray of light between you and me, slightly darker on the top half and white on the bottom. It was narrowing toward me, and when it came to a point, it pierced my heart. I felt a sharp pain, and then I fell back to the floor. But with the piercing of my heart, I did not get rid of all my pains and problems, but I did get rid of all the worries. Since they were all turned over to God, I have been happy all the time. Now I never worry about

The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

anything. I just talk to and thank God and Jesus all day with praise and thanksgiving. And I seem to love the whole world and everybody in it. Thank you for the blessing, which has helped me find what I have been waiting for three and a half years. L.B.

“You have helped me find the way to the Lord’s house in my heart and also my family. I needed this help for a long time.” H.Q.

Through these letters we see three hurting people and their responses to God. M. T. insists, like Zacharias, “Whereby shall I know” (Luke 1:18).

L.B. is hit by “lightning,” somewhat like Paul, and we see something of the struggling Peter in H.G. The three share the odyssey of the Magi searching for their King, Messiah, not knowing exactly how or if they would meet Him.

M.T., who is in his mid-forties, is well educated and articulate. He lived a solitary life as a child, and is still running from the guilt, anger, feelings of abandonment and depression. He has transferred these feelings onto Christ, whom he has blocked out as he attempts to block out painful memories.

L.B. had long suffered from anxiety that manifested itself in depression and numerous physical disorders. Her anxiety, based on low self-esteem, had effectively blocked the message of the Good News. Although she regularly studied the Bible, attended church and a prayer group she had preferred to be self-destructive rather than to transform. L.B. needed, as Paul did, a bolt of lightning to remove her blindness.

Basic survival needs and the lure of the world with its lying whisper of security entrapped H.G. and his family. Despite all his efforts to obtain happiness through materialism, he knew something was missing. After a terrible struggle, H.G. was able to plead, “Search me O God and know my heart: try me and know my thought; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23–24).

Although these clients may not have been able to articulate it, Christ was, in effect, asking them to die alongside Himself so that they might live.

The removal of blocks to love is a form of death and resurrection/transformation. We speak of healing as the removal of any blocks within us that prevent God’s love from working in and through us, from giving and receiving love. Love, divine and human, is

No More Doubt No More Fear

the agent of healing. The more we are able to give and receive love the more we will be able to enjoy spiritual freedom..

God heals because He loves us. We cannot and need not earn this love. He simply loves us, and that's that. Our state of sinfulness, or lack of sinfulness, is not the criterion for God to heal or not heal. We have witnessed dramatic healings in prostitutes, drug addicts, murderers and child molesters. That is a fact.

Jesus healed everyone who came to Him without exception. He healed to say, "See how much I love you. Now, come follow me."

Healings are one way that we are called to discipleship. If we accept God's love, He will work even more mightily in us. That's also a fact.

Jesus said that illness is caused by sin and Satan. We believe this to be true. The sin explained through the Adam and Eve story was a sin against the natural order. Adam and Eve were seeking to be like God. They attempted to become more than they naturally were. This created a reversal of the natural order. Humans had placed themselves before God. This reversal continues into the twentieth century, as exemplified in the emphasis on material gain and drug dependency. Man has allowed matter to rule. The correct order established by God was first God, then man, followed by nature. It appears now, through sin, to be matter, man and lastly, God.

The above paragraph may seem confusing until we look at a specific example. One man became so interested in material gain that he found himself working at a high-pressure, high-paying job. The job created stress, which then resulted in headaches, ulcers, heart problems, with high blood pressure and so on. The sin of being out of order created physical and emotional illness. Our body and spirit are so interconnected that medical science has recognized that 80 percent of all physical illness is psychosomatic, emotionally related. Something in our lives is out of order; this affects our emotional and psychological health.

There are two kinds of sin: personal sin and corporate sin. Personal sin is what I do to myself and others, and corporate sin is what we all do together. We sin all together, for example, when we allow our government, to neglect the suffering of the poor. A company may sin when it puts agents in its food to reap a larger profit. Thus, hundreds of people suffer physical illness due to malnutrition or poisoned food.

No sin is really a private act. Your sin negatively affects me, and my sin negatively affects you. We are emotionally and socially bound.

Satan does not want us whole. He is a liar, a thief and a deceiver. His purpose is to keep things out of order and create confusion. People

The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

who are ill, physically or emotionally, are easily misled. Satan wishes us to be ill.

Some people do not believe that Satan is a personal demon with great powers. They have been deceived. That is the greatest lie. Satan would much prefer to remain anonymous. If you cannot name it, you cannot fight it.

We have battled Satan on our own and on behalf of others. We have felt the presence of evil beings. They do exist and are numberless. But as a note of encouragement, Jesus and His cross have conquered Satan once and for all. To reap this benefit, we have to give ourselves over to Jesus. He and Satan cannot coexist in the same body. We prayed with a man as he renounced Satan from his life; his hearing was restored and a lifelong skin disease was healed.

God can heal every area of our lives. He can heal our bodies through physical healing. He can heal our emotions through inner healing. He can also deliver us from evil spirits. We can have spiritual freedom free of doubt and fear.

It is our experience that God prefers to heal from the inside out. If a sin, being out of order, is the real issue, God prefers to address that first and then heal the physical ailment.

Frequently, in addition to healing prayer, professional pastoral counseling is needed to facilitate a complete inner healing, particularly in the healing of bad memories and relationships. These bad memories and relationships can prevent us from maturing into the whole person we would like to be. God can transform these memories and relationships into an opportunity for growth. Out of this experience of God's healing love, we can become thankful for the trials in our lives.

We are all in need of healing. We all have blocked God's love from working in and through us. We all have blocks to giving and receiving love. It also seems to me that as soon as one block is healed, a deeper one is revealed. This is called spiritual maturation, which continues over a lifetime.

Even the most religious person can have blocks to physical or inner healing. These blocks can come in the form of being self absorbed, self critical, defining our reality according to our definitions, and social and emotional isolation.

An elderly lady had asked for prayer that her eyesight might improve. She was currently wearing corrective lenses but was continuing to lose her peripheral vision. We prayed for a while, and nothing happened. When we asked her if she had any unconfessed sin, she began to cry. Once the sin was confessed, she immediately regained her peripheral vision, she no longer needed her glasses.

No More Doubt No More Fear

The need to forgive, to put others before ourselves, is the most frequent blockage to healing. Forgiving is an act of the will. I will to forgive someone and wish to be forgiven. Even when we will to forgive, sometimes the pain remains. Healing of memories may be useful. We may need to have someone help us discover where our pain really comes from.

Two misconceptions about healing deal with faith and worthiness. We believe that the only faith necessary to obtain a healing, any healing, is enough faith to ask. My prayer experiences for healing reflect this, and my biblical understanding supports it.

That simple faith just to ask is evident in the Gospel stories. Jesus is called Sir, Teacher, Master, Rabbi, almost anything but Savior, Redeemer, Son of God who shares equally in the Divinity of God, our eschatological hope and existential ground of our being. The point is that no one really knew who He was until after Pentecost. Peter might have known, by special grace, but even he could not grasp it for long. The faith of these biblical characters was just enough for them to ask, hoping that Jesus would mercifully respond.

In many stories Jesus healed because of the faith of the friends of the sick person, and even that faith was in the person of Jesus, not in a clear understanding of who Jesus was. (We wonder to what extent even a faith-filled twentieth century person can comprehend who Jesus was and is).

It seems to me that the faith of the person saying the prayer is more important than the faith of the recipient. Missionaries often pray for healing, as Jesus did, to demonstrate God's love to evangelize then to call to discipleship. Remember, God heals to say, "I love you. Now, come follow me." He does not heal as evidence that you have reached a specified level of faith.

It is an injustice to say, "I have said the healing prayer. God answers all prayers. Therefore you are healed if you believe that you shall receive." What effectively is being said is, "I have done my part; we can trust God to do His part, now how about you do your part? You must have enough faith." If the person is not obviously healed, he now has two problems: the illness and the guilt that his faith was not adequate. Once again we have made ourselves god.

We are not demeaning faith. Normally, the more genuine faith, the more open we are to God doing the work in us, and the more thoroughly the work can be done. Notice we are saying God doing the work and our being open to it. That is the important thing here. Remember, God is always the first to act. We are the respondent. We

The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

can do nothing without His grace. After all, faith is His gift to us in the first place.

As mentioned above, another obstacle people place between themselves and healing is an awful sense of unworthiness. It is true that we are dusty sinners, but once again, God took the initiative and sent His Son to take care of that. As Jesus was raised upon the cross, we were raised from the dust. We feel that perhaps those people who refuse to appreciate this wonderful gift and cling to their unworthiness are harboring a false sense of pride.

Another misconception about healing is the phenomenon of claiming one's healing. We see it happen in two ways. First, a healer announces that a particular unnamed person would receive a healing, and five people jump up to claim that healing for themselves. The first to claim it gets it. Abba would not tease His children in such a hurtful way. The healing will occur through God's mercy and wisdom, not on a first-come, first-served basis.

The second is claiming one's healing even though the pain remains or the symptoms persist. The suggestion is that you are healed spiritually, and all that remains is for the body to accept the healing. In time and in faith you will be well. This has not been my experience. I suggest that we pray simply, expectantly and often. Then, with patience, open our eyes and ears to witness how God chooses to answer. When and if you are healed, you will know it.

I know how hurting people become so desperate that they cling to anything hopeful, even if it is false and injurious. I spoke about this claiming phenomenon to a women's group and received quite an argument against my premise. I explained that this type of claiming was more of an act of positive mental attitude but healing is more a "letting go and letting God." They finally agreed, but as I prayed for healing, some still claimed their unmanifested healings. Claiming is hard to let go.

Letting go, giving over, is difficult particularly when we are hurting. Everything in us wants to be in control because we are afraid. This being in control can take on the semblance of witchcraft. By that I mean we perform actions with the intent of controlling God. We want God to respond to our faith, our claiming and our whatever. But God responds because He loves us, not because of what we do or fail to do.

A family had asked me to pray for their hospitalized grandfather. The doctors had predicted that he would die within hours. I prayed, the doctors medicated and by morning he was on the rebound. A week later he was discharged.

There is no contradiction between medical science and healing. God is present and working in all things. When science and prayer are used together, genuine healings are an expected result.

Some sick people refuse to see their medical doctors or take their medicines as a sign of faith that they have already received their healing. This is very dangerous. It is another example of thinking that our faith creates the healing. If you are healed, you will know it, and so will the doctor. We suggest that we first have a doctor verify the healing and then direct the medications. In that way God will be praised as we give witness to science that God works wonders.

CAN YOU LOSE YOUR HEALING ONCE YOU HAVE RECEIVED IT?

The answer is yes and no. First, understand that what God gives, He will never take away. Second, understand that we can refuse to accept a healing He wants to give. Third, understand that we can abuse a healing He has given and thereby lose it. Fourth, understand that Satan can trick us out of our healing.

Let us address these four issues separately:

What God gives He will never take away. We struggled with this a lot, particularly regarding the gifts of healing. We have learned that when God gives gifts, He knows exactly to whom He gives them including our holiness and our sinfulness. He knows how we will use or misuse them. I once thought that because of my sinfulness, God would take the gifts away. We do that to our children. We get mad at them, so we take to punish. God does not do this. He gives to say, "See how I love you; come follow me." Best of all, I know how much I am loved because I know how much I have been forgiven.

The second issue is whether to use our gifts or, in the case of healing, whether to accept or refuse the healing. This is up to us. Some people refuse the healing by not being open to the possibility that God might work in this marvelous way. They are still stuck on how they think things should go. Not to worry God will do His part to help us decide for Him, but it is up to us to say yes or no.

God allows us to misuse our healings. I had prayed for a one year-old boy who had one strong leg and one crippled and weak. He also had several learning disabilities and a deformed arm. During the three days of prayer, his shorter leg grew to match the other; his arm was strengthened and became more mobile. He also became more alert and congenial. As the months passed, he and his parents failed to continue

The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

the necessary exercises and medical assistance. Subsequently, he lost his healing.

Another example of misuse is perhaps a man who was healed of an ulcer caused by stressful working conditions he continued to maintain because he was greedy for more money. God healed the ulcer but the man continued in his sin of greed and the ulcer returned, or a new one appeared. The healing was lost because the sin was maintained. Healing is a call to spiritual freedom.

Satan does not like healing. He is a liar, a thief and a deceiver. He would love to rob us of our healing by creating doubt and fear. He tries this on me all the time, particularly when I pray with a really sick person. He tries to get me to believe that I am insufficient in this situation. "What is the use? This is even too big a job for God. Why not give up?" Pretty tricky!

Satan has great tricks in store for those who have received physical or inner healings. Let's say a woman's back was healed. Sometime after the healing, she stands and suddenly feels a twinge of pain. Immediately she says, "Oh, I must not have been healed!" There you go Satan took it away from her. It is easy to get it back. Tell Satan to leave in Jesus' name.

Most of us have some history of God working in our lives. We can recall how He has answered prayer or protected us from evil. We know that God can and is able to respond. I believe that the key to successful healing prayer is to trust God to respond now for the particular need. That is the Hebrew concept of faith: trusting God to be responsive, to do what He already said He would do. The more expectantly we can enter into prayer, the more open we become to God doing the work in us.

We are sometimes accused of asking God for too much. My response is, "We have come to understand that God wants to give us everything, His entire Kingdom; all we have to do is accept." When we pray for healing, we pray for the miracle. We pray that the Lord would take care of every need, physical and spiritual. We try to pray according to our best understanding of God's will for this person. We expect some kind of answer, either immediately or soon after. About 80 percent of the time something happens; about 20 percent of the time, the person is completely healed; about 60 percent of the time, the person's health is improved either a lot or a little. The more time spent in prayer, the higher the percentiles. About 20 percent of the time, nothing physical seems to have happened. However, the person always knows that he or she has been blessed in a powerful and significant way.

No More Doubt No More Fear

I do not like boxing God into percentiles, or anything else for that matter, but these percentiles do reflect our experience. We also believe that God is Lord over all creation and that He has a strange sense of humor.

Not everyone is healed. There is no simple answer. Perhaps no adequate human answer exists. When I return home, I will be sure to ask the Lord, "Why?" He will probably smile and say, "Don't you already know?" That would be characteristic!

Not everyone is healed, but every prayer is answered in a positive way. That is not a contradiction. Let me give you an example. Charles (Charlie) Flynn died of cancer. I loved Charlie. When I met him, he was unhealthy. He did not have a personal relationship with Jesus. When the cancer appeared, we saw the doctors. Charlie was hospitalized a number of times. Charlie allowed me to pray for and with him.

The prayers made him feel more comfortable and perhaps gave him a few more months of life, but they did not heal him. But God answers all prayers in a positive way. Let me explain. The first purpose of prayer is to create a relationship between God and those in prayer. During the years I knew Charlie, he came to know Jesus as his personal Savior and Lord. He celebrated his Baptism a week before he died.

Charlie and I grew in love for each other. I helped to sustain him, and he helped to sustain me. I will always see the twinkle in his eyes and feel his presence. Charlie is now completely healed in the heavenly Kingdom with the Father. Prayers are answered in a positive way.

Frequently, we use the phrase "in Jesus' name we pray" because the Bible promises anything asked for in His name will be granted. The problem is we often use "in Jesus' name" as a magical incantation to force God into action. That is not the biblical intent.

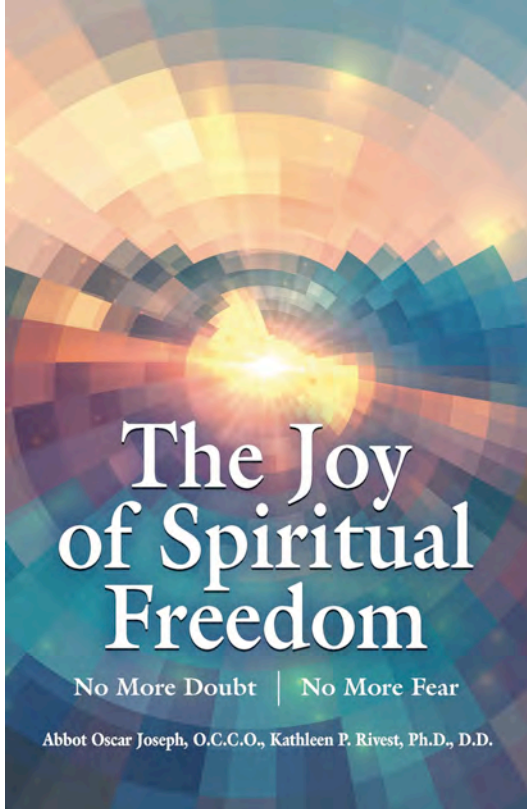
Rather, we should pray in Jesus' name because we know how Jesus would think, feel and want to respond to this situation. Therefore, we can honestly and with certainty say to the Father, "Your Son would like this to happen. We know He would ask this of you. We further know that because He is your Son, and you would grant this for Him, you will be glorified in its doing."

Before we invite anyone to prayer, we ask the Holy Spirit for permission. Usually the Spirit says yes, but not always. There have been times when I have wanted to pray for someone, but the Spirit has said no. That is hard for me, but I try to follow directions. Sometimes I get visions that describe the areas of pain or places in need of healing. At other times God just talks to me. For example, on one occasion I prayed over a broken water pump in the hope that God might repair it.

The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

The owner needed the water but could not afford a new pump. Prior to the prayer, we had several contractors try to fix it, but each was unsuccessful. As I prayed, the owner attempted to prime the pump. God's reply was very clear: "Not this way." Finally, we gave up. Unexpectedly, the next morning a stranger stopped by their home to introduce himself. He looked at the pump and said, "All you have to do is this." Wouldn't you know, the pump started right up. That was God's way!

How do we discover God's will?



The Joy of Spiritual Freedom is the first of a trilogy that leads and inspires the reader to enter into a joy filled relationship with a loving God. It is grounded in Biblical wisdom revealing how to remove debilitating doubt and fear. It draws from inspirational letters and case studies that illustrate the Gospel path toward freedom.

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