

You Can Have Joy

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If we Christians are not careful, we can become so troubled over world conditions in addition to our personal problems that we lose our joy. *This is not right.*

Romans 14:17 sounds a keynote: "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Here is a three-fold cord that is secure in any situation!

Let's look at the simple yet divine logic of the kingdom of God. God is love. This means that God's purpose in everything is the highest good. The highest good is ultimately defined in terms of well-being and happiness—God's and ours. And joy is acute happiness.

Joy, therefore, is the everlasting good. It is God's ultimate objective in both creation and redemption. C. S. Lewis called joy the serious business of heaven. It broke through from heaven with the startling announcement: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10). The good news is that the Savior has come to save us from our sins. *This brings great joy.*

The Joy Of Jesus Christ.

Years ago it was often said that Jesus never smiled. I hope that misconception about our Lord has been laid to rest. Little children loved to be near the Savior, and youngsters avoid people who do not smile.

Let's read what Jesus said to His disciples: "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). If Jesus had not lived a life of great joy and had not expressed that joy around His disciples, those words would have had no meaning or value to them. Their attitude would have been: "Thanks, but no thanks." But they had been with Jesus through the years of His earthly ministry and had witnessed the high level of His joy. So His words must have aroused in them a sense of anticipation. The Master is going to bring them full joy—joy just like His!

In His high-priestly prayer for us our Savior said to the Father: "These things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13). *Jesus wants our joy to be no less than His own.*

Even at Calvary it was "for the joy that was set before Him" that He "endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2).

Yes, Jesus was—and still is—a joyful person.

The Joy Of Salvation.

God's great redemptive acts in Christ Jesus resulted in immediate joy.

We noted the great joy that accompanied the *Incarnation* and its drama at Bethlehem. There was joy also at the *Resurrection*. The women "departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word" (Matthew 28:8). Likewise there was joy at the *Ascension*. The disciples who witnessed Christ's ascension "worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:52).

When Philip preached Jesus Christ in Samaria with power and miracles, "there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:8).

The Thessalonians experienced the same joy. They "received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

No wonder Isaiah prophesied: "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3).

Salvation brings genuine joy.

The Joy Of Knowing God.

The Lord is our joy when we truly know Him. The psalmist testified: "I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy" (Psalm 43:4). "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:10).

In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter quoted from the Septuagint version of this same psalm: "You will make me full of joy in Your presence" (Acts 2:28).

We who know Christ "rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). He came to give us "the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:3).

How do we get this joy? The Holy Spirit brings it into our lives. Joy comes next right after love in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). The way to be filled with joy is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:52 records that "the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." The correlation is dynamic.

Joy depends on the commitment of our will. Though we cannot choose our feelings *directly*, we can do so *indirectly* by choosing our frame of mind—that is, what we are thinking about. In that way *we can choose joy*. God has given it to us, and it is ours if we make up our mind for it. We can believe. Faith in God is a voluntary choice that produces joy.

So then, joy results from living by Biblical principles, particularly the principles of faith and obedience.

Faith produces joy. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

Also, we must not neglect the Bible. Jeremiah said to God, "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jeremiah 15:16). 1 John 1:4 says that what is written in God's word is there so that our joy may be full. There is tremendous joy in that Book!

God gave us pastors and other ministers to be "joy cultivators." Paul assured the Corinthian believers: "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand" (2 Corinthians 1:24). This joy is reciprocated. That is, the joy givers are also joy receivers. Paul goes on to say: "I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all" (2:3). He said to the Thessalonian believers: "You are our glory and joy" (1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20). He called the Philippian believers "my joy and crown" (Philippians 4:1). The apostle John wrote: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4).

There is joy in answered prayer. Jesus said, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24). The limit of our asking is the limit of our joy. So let us ask largely in faith, that our joy may be full.

We receive great joy in ministering to others and in winning people to Christ. The "seventy" Jesus sent out to preach the gospel and heal the sick "returned with joy" (Luke 10:17). In Psalm 126:5 we have this guarantee: "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy." When Paul and Barnabas spread the news that the Gentiles were being converted, "they caused great joy to all the brethren" (Acts 15:3).

Abundant love brings abundant joy. If we love God supremely and others as ourselves, we are happy when they are happy. Their joy becomes our joy. Jesus was an example of this to His disciples and to others. The joy He gave to others must have brought great joy to Himself.

Joy That Lasts.

Jesus assured His disciples that after His resurrection, "your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" (John 16:22). Our joy is something that lasts. Fun is temporary, but joy is forever.

"No one will take it from you," Jesus said. People did not and cannot give us this joy, and people cannot take it from us. If we are not presently experiencing this joy, we cannot blame someone else. People and circumstances do not interrupt our joy. We interrupt it ourselves by how we react to people and circumstances.

James 1:2 says: "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials." We can handle various testings by one simple and effective method: count it all joy. That's the remedy for despondency.

Paul himself used this remedy. He testified: "I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation" (2 Corinthians 7:4).

He wrote that the churches of Macedonia: "In a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality" (2 Corinthians 8:1, 2). Love makes believers "richly generous" with joy, and much more so when their liberality comes out of deep poverty. This reminds us of the widow's two mites (Matthew 12:42).

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews said to the persecuted Hebrew believers: [you] "joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven" (Hebrews 10:34).

Peter instructs us: "But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:13).

In fact, Jesus instructed us to "leap for joy" when we suffer persecution (Luke 6:23). Only people who have their values correct, their priorities straight and their hope anchored in Christ can do that.

The joy of the Lord is not static. It is dynamic. It grows with our spiritual growth. "The humble also shall increase their joy in the LORD" (Isaiah 29:19).

Our joy in Christ is everlasting. God gave this promise through the prophet Isaiah: "For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody" (Isaiah 51:3). Verse 11 says: "So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

"For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace" (Isaiah 55:12). Remember, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

We express the joy of the Lord in our singing. "Behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart" (Isaiah 65:14). The mournful wails of the devotees of man-made religions are a depressing contrast to the majestic anthems and joyful songs of the Lord's redeemed.

Beginning with Psalm 5:11 and on through the psalms we are urged to sing for joy. In some places we are encouraged to shout for joy. For example, Psalm 100:1 says: "make a joyful noise [shout] to the LORD, all you lands."

My fellow believer, don't lose your shout. Let everything be done "decently and in order," but let your service of worship be the dynamic order of Scripture, not the repressing regimens of cold tradition and rote ritual.

Whatever your temperament or personality might be, let yourself experience joy in the Holy Spirit! You will be surprised at your worship-potential. You will discover your strength. Nehemiah 8:10 says so: "The joy of the LORD is your strength." So then, the level of our strength depends largely on the level of our joy. Jesus wants our joy to be *full*. Full joy—full strength. Have you allowed something to weaken you by suppressing your joy? Re-energize your joy in the Lord, experience new strength and be done with defeat.

If you have never experienced the joy of salvation, it is part of the gift of God that comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In the words of an old song: "If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy, let Jesus come into your heart." Jesus said that there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7, 10). Will you be next to add to the celebration?

If you had the joy of the Lord at one time but lost it, do what David did. He humbled himself before God and prayed earnestly: "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your generous Spirit" (Psalm 51:12). God answered that sincere prayer for David and He will do the same for you. Remember, in Jesus' parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son (Luke 15) the restoration of the lost resulted in great joy.

Finish strong. The apostle Paul said that he was determined to finish his race with joy (Acts 20:24).

Trust your Savior. He "is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).