

Walking in the Joy of the Lord



The Sydney lockdown is extended by further four weeks. Are you maintaining your joy?

1. How to Rejoice

- A. 1 Thess 5:16-18 – *‘Rejoice always (Be joyful always); pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.’* Pray without ceasing, and thanksgiving in everything is challenging enough. How about being joyful always? How can God say, *‘Rejoice always?’* when there is little to rejoice about? The world is more chaotic today in 2021 than before – more disorder, unfulfilled desires, extended lockdowns, etc. *‘Hope deferred makes the heart sick.’ (Prov 13:12)*
- B. Nehemiah 8:10 – *‘The joy of the Lord is your strength.’* Being serious about our faith does not mean being somber and dark. Developing the joy centre in our children is an important part of preparing them to become resilient to times of stress, rejection, and failure in life. The joy of the Lord provides strength in our journey. God has commanded three times a year for Israel to come in joyful celebration – *‘your joy shall be complete.’ (Deut. 16:15)* ‘The joy of the Lord is your strength,’ was said on the day of Israel’s national repentance as Ezra read the law on Rosh Hashana (Jewish new year). Keeping joy even in repentance is important.

If I do not feel like rejoicing at all, then where do I get that joy?

2. Joy at Creation

- A. The angels rejoiced at creation. *‘Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? When morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?’ (Job 38:7)* Creation rejoices in the praises of God: *‘All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You.’ (Ps 66:1-4)*. And there is God’s own joy in creation: *‘and God saw that it was good,’ and ‘indeed it was very good.’ (Gen 1:25, 31)* God rested on the 7th day to enjoy the beauty of the works of His hands.
- B. The sin of Adam brought curse and frustration into our world. Ever since the Fall, life on earth has been infected with pain and sorrow. Life has more trying days than happy days as Moses prayed (Ps 90:15). But however tragic was the Fall, it did not change God into a somber, bleak, dark Person. (c.f. *‘God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.’* 1 John 1:5) God has not changed one bit and there has always been continual rejoicing in God, especially in the way God looks at His people.

‘He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with His love (he will rest in his love, KJV), He will rejoice over you with singing.’ (Zeph 3:17) Why is God singing over us? Because we are His joy and His song. This is the heart of the Father. Even now there is great rejoicing in heaven over God’s redeemed people, and we must allow this joy to overflow into our lives. *‘There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place of God’s tabernacle.’ (Ps 46:4 c.f. Rev 22:2).*

3. What is Joy?

- A. The total human personality is three-fold - ‘Spirit’, ‘Soul’, ‘Body.’ (1 Thess 5:23). There are three types of satisfaction: (i) Pleasure – Body (sports, food, sexual nature); (ii) Happiness – Soul; (iii) Joy – Spirit. What is the difference between happiness and joy?

A young man is driving a brand-new car on a beautiful summer day. He has just received a promotion in the workplace and his girlfriend is sitting beside him. He is very happy.

Six months later he is sitting inside a car that is broken down on a highway on a cold winter day. He has been struggling with the new position at work and his girlfriend is upset with him? Is he happy? He is not happy because his happiness has evaporated. Why? His happiness depends on circumstances.

- B. But joy does not depend on circumstances that change with time such as finance, weather, etc. The joy depends on only one source - God. And God never changes, so our joy never needs to run dry. If we depend on our body and soul as the source of our satisfaction in life, we can know pleasure and happiness, but we can never know joy because joy has only one source – God. And it depends on a direct

personal continuing relationship with God. Because our God is a joyful God who never panics or is depressed. All source of joy is God Himself.

4. Examples of Joy in the Scriptures

- A. David – *‘Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man! ... Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? ... Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy. And on harp, I will praise You, O God, my God.’ (Ps 43)*

This was David’s prayer in times of much opposition and pain. He knew if he could just get into God’s presence and see His light and truth, he could access God’s joy and find the strength to overcome his challenges. David encouraged himself to praise God who was his highest joy. Notice that David said, *‘God my exceeding joy!’* David’s joy was not in his position or achievements, but in his God. Do you have that kind of relationship with God? When you are not experiencing happiness and pleasure in your body or circumstances, do you still have joy from your God?

‘You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased. I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.’ (Ps 4:7)

‘You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.’ (Ps 16:11)

- B. Habakkuk – *‘Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labour of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls – Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.’ (Hab 3:17)*

Habakkuk received two shocking revelations: (i) Babylonians were coming and Israel would be defeated by the cruel army. (ii) He saw the Day of the Lord (the second coming) with great shakings of the earth. What was Habakkuk’s response? He has decided to rejoice in God and exult in the God of his salvation.

- C. The Early Disciples – *‘The disciples were continually filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.’ (Acts 13:52)* These new believers in Antioch came under the fire of persecution. Their senior pastors, Paul and Barnabas, had to leave them early for the mission field. But the disciples were continually filled with the Holy Spirit, and they were filled with joy.

It is impossible to be filled with joy without the Holy Spirit. It is also impossible to be filled with the Holy Spirit without joy.

5. Joy in Three Stages (Rom 5:1–3, 11)

Apostle Paul speaks of joy in three stages (Rom 5:1–3, 11). *Joy is the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ (Gal 5:22).*

- A. ‘[We] rejoice in hope of the glory of God’ (v2). It starts with receiving new life by making peace with God (c.f. John 14:27). *‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ (1 Cor 2:9)* David prayed for God to restore the joy of salvation when he sinned and lost the joy of salvation (Ps 51:12).

- B. ‘[We] glory in tribulation’ (v3)

- i. How? Because what it does in us, producing tested proven character that manifests more of God’s love, joy, peace... *‘Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience...that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.’ (James 1:2)*
- ii. The joy set before Jesus (Heb 12:1-2) was the joy that Jesus did not have on the cross, but now He has in abundance. *‘You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.’ (Heb 1:9)* How do we do this? By fixing our eyes on Jesus and follow in His footsteps.
- iii. One of the major by-products of rejoicing in God during the time of adversity is humility. Mother Teresa said, *‘When you can smile during times of humiliation and adversity, it means humility has worked its way into your character.’* Sometimes we take ourselves too seriously. Having the joy of the Lord helps us maintain a healthy sense of proportion, especially for intercessors.

- iv. David spoke of going into the 'altar of God' to find God his exceeding joy (Ps 43:4). The altar is the place where we '*offer the sacrifices of praise to God.*' It is a sacrifice when I do not feel like praising Him. We worship God by bringing ourselves as a living sacrifice. On the altar, we come to the end of ourselves and hand over to God all our 'bargaining chips.' If You do this, then I will do this. Why isn't life treating me better? Unrealistic expectations bring us continual pain. In worship we surrender ourselves to God and offer our lives without bargaining, trusting Him completely. And we enter into God's joy.
- C. '*We also rejoice in God*' (v11) – The ultimate destination of joy is in God Himself. This kind of joy can never be taken away. This is one of the true marks of Christian maturity. That is to find joy in God Himself, not in circumstances, provision, blessing - though wonderful they are. '*O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance.*' (Ps 16:5-6)
- D. In Rev 22:1-2 the river of joy that flows in the city of God refreshes and feeds the trees of life, and they yield their fruit in every season. Their leaves are given for the healing of the nations. This is the picture of the believer's inner spiritual condition who walks with God. (c.f. Ps 46:4).
- 'But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.'* (John 4:14)
- 'These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full.'* (John 15:11)