

## Joyful Expectation – Maintaining Your Joy

There are so many things that seek to rob us of our joy. Circumstances can shake our faith. People can discourage us. And things can distract us from what God wants us to enjoy. But God wants us to experience His abundant, overflowing **joy**. And that actually involves a choice on our part. I believe that one of the commodities that is missing in today's society is **joy**. An examination of most newspapers will show that there really is little 'good' news to report. Consider the weather report. Often you hear, "tomorrow will be sunny with a 20% chance of rain." Instead of; "its going to be mostly clear with an 80% chance of sunshine.'

There is so much confusion as to what **joy** really is. A lot of the time even people in God's church find it hard to express true joy. Yet, God expects us to come to know His joy. So what is joy? Joy is something that we choose to express. It's not pie in the sky; it doesn't come and go like the wind. So where does this kind of joy come from? Well, as you know, it's a matter of attitude which comes from God's Holy Spirit dwelling in us. And the belief that He is at work - that He is in full control - that He is in the midst of whatever has happened, is happening, or will happen.

What does the Bible say about joy? If there was anyone who had a reason to give into despair and claim that he was a victim of his circumstances it was the apostle Paul and yet he said, "**rejoice in the Lord.**" How then could Paul maintain such a joyful spirit? Even when he was in prison. *"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:12).

Do you see what Paul was focused on here? He writes of his circumstances as serving a greater purpose. He considers things most people would see as setbacks as progress. He was growing and learning from it. And Paul remained hopeful regardless of the uncertainties of his situation - even though he was a victim. Paul was confident of his eventual deliverance. He was confident in the prayers of the saints on his behalf. He was also encouraged because of the infilling of the Holy Spirit in his life, and in the broadest sense, Paul was confident regardless of the outcome of his circumstances. So he has every reason to expect victory and deliverance. His mind is firmly fixed on this hope. In other words, his present circumstances were not the end of the story. Everything would turn out exactly as God had promised, and he had faith in that.

Let's now take a look at four essential aspects of JOY:

(1) **Joy is fruit of the Holy Spirit. Galatians:5:22-23**, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."* There's nothing against living this kind of a life, no law against it. The Bible Knowledge Commentary states... "Joy is a deep and abiding inner rejoicing which was promised to those who abide in Christ and obey His commandments. It does not depend on circumstances because it rests in God's sovereign control of all things."

Happiness is conditioned by, and often dependent upon, what is happening to you. If people treat you good, if things are going well in you life, then you're happy. If you circumstances aren't favourable, you're unhappy. Joy, on the other hand, is shown throughout scripture as a profound quality of life that transcends the events and

disasters, which may confound God's people. Joy is not dependent on circumstances like happiness is. Joy is a divine dimension. A dimension of living that is not shackled by circumstances (as we'll see in point two).

(2) **Joy is not effected by circumstances.** Circumstances don't have to destroy our joy. You might be unhappy, but circumstances don't dictate whether or not you have joy. **Romans:8:28** is a good passage in this regard, "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*" And we know that all things work together for who? Can you see the requirements there? If you want things to work out for the best for you, you have to love God, which of course includes keeping His commandments. If you love and obey God, you can have faith and trust and confidence that in your life eventually things will work out for the best no matter what circumstances you might find yourself in.

In **James 1:2-4** we see that these trials, these things that we're up against actually "perfect" us, make us a better person. The Bible Knowledge Commentary adds... "*To persecuted believers James gave the surprising advice: Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds. Trials should be faced with an attitude of joy. Trials should not be seen as a punishment, a curse, or a calamity, but something that must prompt rejoicing, furthermore, they should produce pure joy. Literally all joy. Joy that is full or unmixed not just some joy coupled with much grief.*"

So it's supposed to be a full joy. "**Count it all joy,**" not just a little bit of joy with a whole bunch of sadness and grief. No, count it all joy, **full** joy! And so remember that circumstances don't have to destroy our joy. This leads us to number three, which, is joy involves a choice.

(3) **Joy is a choice we make.** It's how you approach life, what you have faith in, what you're expecting. To experience God's abundant, overflowing joy involves a choice. It's an attitude of mind which finds its source in the Spirit of God. Joy is a positive approach we choose to express. It's a view that stems from our confidence in God. The belief that He is at work, that He is in full control, that He is in the midst of whatever has happened, is happening or will happen. He is the creator of the universe. We must be on our guard and don't get robbed of joy because of any of life's happenings; whether it be circumstances, people, the future, or the past. The answer is to abide in God and to be obedient to his word and receive that joy from Him.

(4) **Joy is a command from God.** God's people are commanded to rejoice, so it's not an option when you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. And a missing quality in the lives of many people today is joy. It seems so hard to maintain joy when all around us there is doom and gloom. And as you look at the world around you, you can say that there's not a whole lot to have joy about. And you would think this would effect the joy of God's people as well, but Paul affirmed the source of a Christian's joy... "**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!**" Our rejoicing is in our Lord and in him lies our joy. Paul learned what every child of God needs to learn, there can be rejoicing in God even when outward circumstances are contrary to a spirit of rejoicing. And so don't forget to obey God in this commandment to rejoice.

Let's move on.... Maybe we should all ask ourselves this, "*What has happened to all my joy?*" William Barclay has said, "*...A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms and nothing in all religious history has done Christianity more harm than its connection with black clothes and long faces.*"

Christians should have a certain joy in their life even when things aren't going so well. So, to end let's take a look at three common joy busters that often give us long faces.

A. Unsatisfied expectations.

Do you ever feel like you're just going through some joyless routines in life? Just living one day after the other. If the truth were known some of us are discontent with the way our lives are progressing. Perhaps we don't have everything we want. A bigger house, a nicer car, a better job. A spirit of discontentment can rob us of our joy. Remember how Paul discovered the secret of being content with what God had given him? Philippians 4:12 says... *"I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned to be content (the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need). I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."*

B. Unresolved conflict.

Our joy can evaporate when we allow conflict between ourselves and another person to go on. When someone's offence against us occupies our mental and emotional attention until we have little time left over for God. Anger clouds the eyes of our heart and obscures our view of God draining away our joy. **Hebrews:12:14**, *"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and thereby many be defiled."* So you see you can get a root of bitterness if you're not pursuing peace and holiness with all people. If you're itemising other people's mess-up's, the fruit of joy will get squashed in your life.

C. Unrepented Sin.

Because guilt can cut your joy real fast. Sin can send joy far away, and we have to ensure on a daily basis that we are right with God. King David, understood this very well when he attempted to ignore the promptings of the Holy Spirit and he refused to repent. Take a look at Psalm 32. See how King David finally analysed this situation. **Psalm:32:1-5**, *Blessed is the one whose lawless acts are forgiven. His sins have been taken away. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord never counts against him. He doesn't want to cheat anyone. When I kept silent about my sin, my body became weak because I groaned all day long. Day and night your heavy hand punished me. I became weaker and weaker as I do in the heat of summer. Then I admitted my sin to you. I didn't cover up the wrong I had done. I said, "I will admit my lawless acts to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.* So you see there's a certain joy in life when you are right with God, when you're not avoiding to repent of sin. David was not able to rejoice and experience the joy of the Lord until he confessed his sins, until he was repentant.

The Bible gives us several ways to experience joy from God. I've got two of them which we can go through quickly:

A. Release your problems to God. One of the hallmarks of joy is that it can be experienced in the midst of intense sorrow and loss. Often we define happiness as the absence of something undesirable, such as pain, suffering or

disappoint, but true joy is the proper response to the presence of something desirable. God himself!  
Remain close to God. Of course, this is pivotal. If we want the kind of joy that is complete, lacking nothing, then we must remain close to our Father in heaven, and of course, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.