

THE JOY OF LAUGHTER

Proverbs 17:22, “A happy heart is good medicine” (Amp).

We all need to laugh more – we need to have a “happy heart.” Throughout the Bible we are encouraged to “rejoice,” to “be joyful,” and to “be glad;” and you will find over 50 direct references to **happiness**. Being happy has great benefits. Not only does it strengthen you, it can completely change your attitude and outlook on life. Someone once said, “*What everyone wants from life is continuous and genuine happiness.*”

The truth is... If you're happy, you will know it. And if you know it you will show it! Research has shown that laughter actually releases tension, anxiety, anger, fear, shame and guilt. Laughter also increases antibodies and is believed to have a protective capacity against viruses, bacteria and other micro-organisms. Both science and the Bible agree that laughter is like a medicine. Studies have shown that laughter releases endorphins into the body. These substances help relieve pain and create a sense of well-being within us. They also reduce stress, enhance circulation, boost the immune system, and strengthen the heart. Like a good massage, a hearty belly laugh can stimulate all the major organs in your body. Some say it's like an internal aerobic exercise!

Did you know that the average man or woman laughs 4 to 8 times a day, whereas the average child laughs about 150 times a day? No wonder the Bible says we should cultivate the attitudes and outlook of little children.

Children are genuinely much happier than adults! To be honest with you - we probably all need to lighten up. We would be so much better off if we could stop being so serious about ourselves. One of the dynamics causing adults much trouble is we take our personal faults too seriously. We spend too much time in opposition to ourselves – being our own worst enemy!

Someone once said, “*Blessed are those who can laugh at themselves, for they shall never cease to be amused.*” So why not give yourself a break? Take time off from judging yourself harshly. God called you into a meaningful relationship with Himself even though He had prior knowledge of every flaw and weakness you would have (and every mistake you would make). Nothing about you is a surprise to God. The Bible teaches us that God has foreseen everything you will ever do or say. He has always had complete knowledge about you. This truth should set you free to ‘lighten up’ and enjoy being whom God made you to be. So remember, it's OK to have a laugh at your own expense! This is a sign of maturity. You need to develop a childlike heart in all matters of life, but you also need to have enough maturity to be light-hearted about yourself.

Choosing to be happy – to laugh and be joyful – will make you more than just a pleasant person. **Nehemiah 8:10** says, “***The joy of the Lord is your strength.***” Many times when the devil comes against you he is simply trying to steal your joy. He wants you to have a negative outlook on life so that you can remain weak and discouraged. Therefore, in order to stay strong, you must stay **joyful**. Mark Twain said, “*The human race has one really effective weapon, and that is laughter.*”

I believe Twain is right in the fact that laughter is a weapon. Laughter is a primary aspect of joy – true joy will often express itself in heart-felt laughter. We see this demonstrated by Jesus when the seventy came back from their first mission. **Luke 10:21**, ***“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit...”*** The word translated “rejoice” is made up of two words, ‘aga’ and ‘yailaio’, and is literally “to laugh uncontrollably” or “hilariously.” The Lord laughed uncontrollably in the Spirit!

Many of you think you cannot enjoy life because you have problems. You feel that you must constantly be doing something to fix the problem. But this is a trap! In fact, you can positively effect the outcome by staying strong and rejoicing *in spite of your situation*. Start by smiling a lot. Smiling is a way to energise the joy that is within you. And it’s an effective weapon against all problems. An unknown author once wrote, *“A smile costs nothing but gives much. It enriches those who receive without making poorer those who give. It takes but a moment, but the memory of it sometimes lasts forever. None is so rich or mighty that he cannot get along without it and none is so poor that he cannot be made rich by it. Yet a smile cannot be bought, borrowed, or stolen, for it is something that is of no value to anyone until it is given away. Some people are too tired to give you a smile. Give them one of yours, as none needs a smile so much as he who has no more to give.”*

Most of the time, if you simply begin to smile and find your joy, you will overcome the obstacles that confront you and be better equipped to handle the issues at hand. This is why in **Philippians 4:4** the apostle Paul said, ***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice.”***

Paul knew that joy brings strength. Switch off joy and you will not have the energy to carry on! No matter how far down you think you are, there is enough *strength* in joy to lift you back up. But notice, this joy must be “in the Lord” and nothing else.

It’s often so easy to be joyful when ‘in the presence of God’, however, the acid test of true character is whether you can be joyful in suffering, heartbreak or misfortune. To rejoice ‘in the Lord always’ is to “*show great joy*” or “*be exceedingly joyful*” no matter what the circumstances. But how is this possible? Because, ***“in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28)***. In fact, you *live* in the joy of the Lord and the joy of the Lord *lives* in you. You *move* in the joy of the Lord and the joy of the Lord *moves* in you. You have your very *being* positioned in the joy of the Lord - and the joy of the Lord manifests in your very *being!* Joy is as natural to you as breathing.

Proverbs 10:28 says, ***“The prospect (or ‘hope’) of the righteous is joy.”*** And in the New Testament this prospect is referred to as ***“inexpressible joy” (1 Peter 1:8)***. Joy, in one form or another is mentioned over 230 times in the Bible, confirming that your hope for a secure future (*the prospect of the righteous*) is simply **joy!** And notice, this special kind of joy is *inexpressible* or *unspeakable* because it is not your own joy but the joy which abides in Jesus Himself. It is the joy in which you live, and move and have your being!

Being joyful is your antidote against worry, stress, and grief. And it effectively and sufficiently equips you with enough strength to act as an impregnable fortress in times of trouble.

Christ's joy is totally fulfilled in His followers. **John 17:13**, ***"But now I come to you and these things I speak to you in the world, that they (My followers) may have My joy fulfilled in themselves."*** Here, Jesus is explaining why He was praying this way - in the presence of His disciples. It was as if He was saying to them, *"These are intercessions which I shall never cease to make in heaven before My Father. But for your sakes I make them here and now, in the world, in your hearing, so you may distinctly understand how very concerned I am about your welfare and well-being. Even more so, that you may learn to increase in character and become absolute partakers of My divine joy - My divine nature and strength."*

We need to remind ourselves that Jesus didn't die so that we could just scrape through another day. Remember, in **John 10:10** the Lord said He had come that *we might have and enjoy life*, and have a life that's out of the ordinary – a better life than we've ever dreamed of! Jesus declared that He wants His joy to be made full in you and me. This is the desire of His heart! Therefore, let the Lord's joy be *complete* in you today. Make a decision to start enjoying life. Smile, sing, be positive and light-hearted – and by all means LAUGH! All of us can carry laughter with us wherever we go. Laughter is lighter than burdens!

"I live by this rule: Have a little laugh at life and look around you for happiness instead of sadness. Laughter has always brought me out of unhappy situations. Even in your darkest moment, you usually can find something to laugh about if you try hard enough." (Red Skeleton)