

The Power of Joy, Part 1

Proverbs 13:22; 15:13; 17:22; 1 Thessalonians 1:6

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This new series of message is titled, “The Power of Joy.” We are going to learn what it is; what it means; and most important, its power.

If you’ve ever watched any Super Bowl games, you know that there are commercials prepared specifically to be released during the game.

During one game a few years back, there was one commercial that caught my attention, but my attention was not drawn to the product being sold by the sponsor of the commercial.

Listen to what the commercial shared: *“What if we were wrong this whole time? Wrong in thinking that joy only happens at the end. After the sacrifice; after the commitment; after the win. What if happiness had always been there, fueling the run towards greatness? It’s not a distraction, but instead something more vital. What if joy is the whole game and not just the end game? So, ask yourself, are you happy because you win, or do you win because you’re happy?”*

This commercial was spot on, from a Scriptural viewpoint, as it related to joy. I just wished they’d used the word “joy” the whole time versus happiness, but they didn’t ask my opinion.

While this commercial was talking about sports, I want to translate it to life itself. Let me rephrase this commercial:

“What if we were right this whole time? Right in thinking that joy exists all the time, not just at the end. During the sacrifice; during the commitment; during the win. That joy has always been there, fueling the run towards victory? It’s never a distraction, but something more vital. That joy is the whole game and not the end game? Joy is not determined by our circumstances but because of our relationship with

Christ. So, ask yourself, do you have joy because you're victorious, or are you victorious because you have joy?"

For a child of God, joy isn't the end game, it's the whole game. We're victorious in life because we have joy through Christ regardless of the circumstances we face at any given time!

I want to share something with you that Nehemiah said to his people. At that moment in Israel's history, the law, long forgotten and long broken by the captives was now to be re-established for the children of Israel.

Naturally, as the people remembered the many sins in their past history, they shed tears mingled with thankfulness as they were reminded that they were a nation that belonged to God and He hadn't forgotten them.

Nehemiah also knew that the spirit of his people could not handle failure again.

Think about it, how many times can you fail before you start believing that you can ever succeed?

Understanding this, the following was recorded in Nehemiah 8:10, *"Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*

Did you catch at that last phrase, *"the joy of the LORD is your strength?"* As a child of God, the joy of the Lord is our strength.

A person who's not a Christian can also have joy because the word "joy" in the Hebrew simply means "gladness."

So, anybody can have gladness WHEN their emotions experience something good, like a job promotion or an unexpected gift.

Human joy is interwoven with human emotions. Yet the Bible says the joy, the gladness that we receive from the Lord, has nothing to do with what's going on with us emotionally.

The joy that comes from God is His joy, and His joy is based on Who He is, not on what's going on in our lives.

In other words, we can have supernatural joy in the midst of the most difficult circumstances because our Father freely gives it to us. In fact, joy also has an impact on our lives.

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It's a known fact that a person's mental state, especially as it relates to joy, can have an impact on their recovery and survival when they're dealing with a serious illness.

No observant person would deny that there's an intimate connection between a soul that's sorrowful and is always sick; or that cheerfulness of spirit tends to support physical health.

This is why a physician tries to keep his patient in "good spirits" by giving them a reason to have hope for a better outcome. Hope fuels joy and vice-versa.

Solomon said in Proverbs 17:22, *"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones"*

When a person has good health, their cheerful disposition will tend to help keep them healthy.

Likewise, when someone is experiencing a depressed condition of mind it opens them up to being more susceptible to other diseases.

Therefore, what Solomon said nearly 4000 years ago is proven medically today. We know that a cheerful, contented disposition enables us to resist the attacks of diseases within our bodies.

Solomon also said in Proverbs 15:13, *“A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.”*

On the surface it looks like these two verses are saying the same thing, but when you examine them more closely you see subtle differences.

Proverbs 17:22 speaks of what a lack of joy does to the body physically – dries up the bones, which includes breaking down the body physically, but it’s also a reference to constant disappointment and prolonged periods of confusion.

A broken spirit may even play a role in the onset of dementia or Alzheimer’s.

A study published in the May 2012 issue of the *“Archives of General Psychiatry”* found that people who became depressed late in life had a 70% increased risk of dementia, and those who'd been depressed since middle age were at 80% greater risk.

Researchers have long known that depression and dementia go hand in hand. Well, Solomon knew this, too!

Proverbs 15:13 also tells us what joy looks like. When someone doesn’t have joy, it shows physically on their body.

Even though they may be smiling, you know something’s just not right. Something’s a little bit off in their demeanor.

A merry heart can't be hidden. It is easily seen when a person is free because they easily smile. However, when someone is sorrowful and weighed down by life's struggles, there's no life behind their smile.

Their eyes don't sparkle or shine. The outer man is, to a large extent, a reflection of the inner life.

The joy of the heart is made visible upon the countenance for all to see and likewise sorrow of the heart is also made visible for all to see. We can't hide what's within our hearts.

This is also accentuated in Luke 6:45a when Jesus said, "*A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart.*"

To experience God's continual joy within us, we must walk with Him and understand His Word, His promises, and His commandments.

Choosing joy during challenging life circumstances is never easy, especially when we're tempted to ignore God's wisdom and follow our own ways.

However, David said in Psalm 19:8, "*The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.*"

Do you understand what David was saying when he wrote, "*giving joy to the heart?*"

When we read God's word and begin to obtain a clearer and increasing knowledge of His will for our lives, we begin to understand all His promises truly are for us today.

We begin to discover the depth of God's love and grace towards sinful men. We begin to see evidence of the mercies that He continually bestows upon us.

This understanding brings joy to our hearts when we reflect on the fact that we're never alone.

When we discover the depth of God's love, we understand that we have someone Who's promised to always be there for us in our time of need and when things are going well.

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This is why true joy can only come from God. It's not just an emotional response when something happens to us.

The same Greek root word for joy comes from the same Greek word that means grace.

Grace comes from God and so does joy. Because of that, when we choose to trust God with our future, it brings us both joy and peace.

Why? Because the things we would be so consumed with worry over we've turned over to God knowing He'll work it out.

I know it seems strange to find joy by trusting in someone else – especially when you're used to only trusting in your own capabilities, but my greatest joy came when I learned to just be still before God and trust that He's figuring everything out for my good.

Remember what was written in Proverbs 3:5-6? It says, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”*

When we truly place our trust in God, joy follows. Why? When you release something from your heart something else replaces it.

So, when we release the worry and sorrow that's occupying space in our hearts, our hearts now have room to receive the joy that God's trying to get through to us.

God's joy is always there for and with us – we just need to find a way to let it in so we can give it out.

Proverbs 16:20 says, *“Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD.”*

Also, Psalm 28:7, *“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.”*

When we truly trust in the Lord our hearts learn to rejoice regardless of the situations we're facing. Joy comes from trusting in the Lord.

Most of us have felt the sorrow of someone's passing. If you haven't had someone die who was close to you, then you might not fully understand what I am about to say.

I've had a lot of people with whom I was close to leave this world to be in God's presence. I grieved, yes, but I trusted in God, knowing my loved ones knew Him as best as they could.

They had been looking forward to the day when they would stand in His presence. So, I took God at His word.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 says, *“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to*

meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

I believe God’s word. I can see my family members with Him and I know I’ll get to see them again.

With this understanding my grieving passed, and I could say what David said in Psalm 30:11, *“You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.”*

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Romans 15:13 gives us the relationship between trusting God and joy.

Romans 15:13, *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

In this passage, my attention was drawn to two phrases: *“God of hope”* and *“all joy and peace.”* The word *“of”* in *“God of hope”* reminds me that true hope comes from God. He’s the only source of true hope.

When we have *“God’s hope,”* the negative things and battles we faced in the past don’t have to be the negative things and battles we face in the future.

That’s a reason to hope – what we experience tomorrow can be better than what we experienced today.

The second phrase, *“all joy and peace,”* is the result of having Godly hope operating in our lives.

When we know that our tomorrow doesn’t have to resemble today, then we open the door for Godly joy and peace to come into our lives. And it’s not just joy and peace – it’s ALL JOY AND ALL PEACE.

When we allow Godly hope to be the beacon that shines before us, guiding our way, the Bible says we can have “*all joy and all peace.*” Wouldn’t you love to live in a state of constant joy and peace?

The Bible tells us that when our eyes are on the “*God of hope,*” our lives can be one of ongoing joy and peace.

I don’t know about you, but that encourages me, especially as our nation continues to experience the impact of COVID-19.

Remember what I shared earlier about the differences between joy and happiness? Divine joy isn’t on the same low level as happiness.

Happiness is based on circumstantial pleasure, merriment or excitement that causes one to feel hopeful or to be in high spirits.

These fleeting emotions of happiness, although very pleasurable at the moment, usually go away just as quickly as they came.

Think about it, all it takes is one piece of bad news, or an angry word from your spouse, or a bill that was not expected and our emotions of happiness disappear right before our eyes to be replaced with emotions of anger, fear, or worry depending on the situation.

But joy, God’s joy, is unaffected by outward circumstances. In fact, it usually thrives best when times are tough – sort of like God’s supernatural response to the devil’s attack.

In 1 Thessalonians 6-7, Paul tells the Thessalonians, “*You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.*”

When Paul wrote this, the Thessalonians were under great stress due to persecutions; yet in the midst of it all, they continued to experience great joy.

In fact, the Greek strongly implies that their supernatural joy was due to the Holy Spirit working inside them. Paul even called it the *“joy given by the Holy Spirit.”*

The best that this world can offer us are fleeting moments of happiness that change when our circumstances change. We can be happy one moment and mad the next based on something said to us.

We can be happy when we arrive on our jobs and frustrated as soon as we turn on our computer and see the list of emails needing responses.

Happiness isn't guaranteed; it's not permanent; and because it's enjoyable for only a moment many people spend a lifetime seeking it only to die realizing that life, here on earth, contains so much more than mere happiness.

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Conclusion

I want to leave you with this: when the seed of God has been placed inside our human spirit, that divine seed produces a “joy” that isn't based on outward events or circumstances.

In fact, when times are extremely frustrating and tiresome, if we allow it, the supernatural life of God will rise up inside us to defy that devilish pressure.

Supernatural “joy” will sustain us in our hardest times. If you’re feeling weak, tired, or depressed, or you’re losing hope because of your situation, don’t rely on your own strength because *“the joy of the Lord is your strength.”*