

CHAPTER 22

Joy

KEY IDEA

Despite my circumstances, I feel inner contentment and understand my purpose in life.

KEY VERSE

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. – John 15:11

BEGIN BY RECITING THE KEY VERSE AND THE KEY IDEA TOGETHER AS A GROUP.

LESSON

Before going through this lesson, give a definition of the word "joy."

Before going through this lesson, give a definition of the word "joy" that the world may have.

Before going through this lesson, give a definition of the word "joy" that a Christian may have.

INTRODUCTION:

Look again at our key verse...

>Joy is the birthright of the child of God. Every child of God ought to have a conscious, conspicuous, continuous, and contagious joy.

>If you are not living a life of joy, you are living beneath your privileges as a Christian.

All of life is affected by how we relate joy, happiness, and pleasure to discipleship and to our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

>While we're trying to make our lives happen, things seem to get in the way.

Some are big things; others are usual problems of life that go from mole hills to mountains when we let them control our thoughts.

<Medical problems, job losses, relationship issues and family quarrels are some of the things that threaten our dreams and rock our stability.

^ We must be joy finders in life, especially when the trials of life tend to threaten our joy.

} James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Joy is something we all long for but that often seems difficult to attain. Experiencing joy should be a part of every Christian's life. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, produced only by God's work in us.

FROM A CHRISTIANITY TODAY EDITORIAL/ December 7, 2009

When believers do a little self-reflection, not many of us point to joylessness as the thing that needs attention. Mostly we flagellate (RELIGIOUS SELF-FLOGGING) ourselves for our undisciplined discipleship. We issue calls to repent of our consumerism, sign ecumenical concords to heal our divisions, and issue manifestos to care for the poor and the planet. No one has yet issued a joint ecumenical statement on the need for Christians to be more joyful.



KEY QUESTION: WHAT GIVES US TRUE HAPPINESS AND CONTENTMENT IN LIFE?

First we need to identify the difference between joy and happiness.

- > Joy is not the same as happiness.
 - < Happiness comes and goes. It is circumstantial and fleeting.
 - < It isn't something you can cling to when you've lost a loved one or are facing bankruptcy.
 - < Joy can stay with you for the long haul.
 - < Why? Because real joy is from God.
 - ^ Even when the darkest days of sadness, grief, and loss threaten, God's joy is there.
 - < Joy is a "heart posture".
 - ^ It is a gift of God as well as a response to the gifts of God.
- > Joy comes when we are aware of God's grace and favor.

What does a joyful person look like? How do you distinguish a joyful person from a happy person, or a giddy person, or a foolish person?

- > You can be happy your team won, you can be giddy about a great opportunity, you can act happy yet be under the influence of some substance.
- > So, what is it that makes joy different from these things?
 - < Joy is something that is unaffected by circumstances.
 - ^ It is a state of mind and an orientation of the heart.
 - ^ It is a settled state of contentment, confidence and hope.

If you have a different concept now, restate your definition of joy?

SOURCE OF JOY

God may shower us with blessings and circumstances that bring joy to our lives, but true joy is found not in those things themselves but in their source. Joy can also be fueled and found in living out God's Word and trusting in the promises God gives us in his Word.

The psalmist reminds us of the reality of joy that comes when we rest in God's presence:

Psalm 16:11

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

The joy of the Lord is enough.

> Other things can give you joy in an area of your life; but unless you have Joy in the Lord, your joy is not full.

> There is joy in seeking the Lord. He gives Joy, He is the source of Joy.

Much of our Christian joy is obtained from discovering God through His word.

Our key verse states that the joy we have as Christians is the joy of Jesus.

> Jesus literally wants to take the joy that He has and place it in us.

< There is a genuine joy in Jesus.

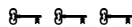
The theme of joy is not a new one. There is a great emphasis on joy in the Bible.

> Some Christians tend to focus on the price of discipleship, and little of the joy of it.

> Others are into pleasure, not pain. They see the Christian life as the gateway to all sorts of pleasures and rewards.

< The Christian life to them spells popularity, success, and prosperity. Following Christ is the way to the "good life."

< When this kind of pleasure seeking finds its pleasures in the wrong things, it creates a false and temporary joy.



Many Christians are joyless. They have yet to find the source of joy found in John 15.

John 15:1-11 (CEV)

¹Jesus said to his disciples: I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts away every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit. But he trims clean every branch that does produce fruit, so that it will produce even more fruit. ³You are already clean because of what I have said to you.

FROM THE TRANSFORMATION STUDY BIBLE

Our heavenly Father is never nearer to us than when he is pruning us. Sometimes he cuts away the dead wood that might cause trouble, but often he cuts off the living tissue that is robbing us of spiritual vigor. Pruning does not simply mean spiritual surgery that removes what is bad, it can

also mean cutting away the good and the better so that we might enjoy the best. Yes, pruning hurts, but it also helps. We may not enjoy it, but we need it.

⁴ Stay joined to me, and I will stay joined to you. Just as a branch cannot produce fruit unless it stays joined to the vine, you cannot produce fruit unless you stay joined to me. ⁵ I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit. But you cannot do anything without me. ⁶ If you don't stay joined to me, you will be thrown away. You will be like dry branches that are gathered up and burned in a fire.

⁷ Stay joined to me and let my teachings become part of you. Then you can pray for whatever you want, and your prayer will be answered. ⁸ When you become fruitful disciples of mine, my Father will be honored. ⁹ I have loved you, just as my Father has loved me. So remain faithful to my love for you. ¹⁰ If you obey me, I will keep loving you, just as my Father keeps loving me, because I have obeyed him.

¹¹ I have told you this to make you as completely happy as I am.

God's promises find their ultimate fulfillment in his Son Jesus. So when we abide in the vine of Christ through obedience to his commands, his nutrients of joy run through our spiritual veins from the inside-out and produce the ripe, juicy fruit of joy in and through our lives.

Jesus likens himself to a vine and believer to the branches of the vine. Abiding in the vine allows the branches to bear fruit.

>There are three significant things about the life of a branch:

1. A branch is absolutely dependent upon a vine.

^ The vine sustains the branch and provides everything needed. The branch never has to worry about its provisions.

^ A branch is weak and useless. It cannot produce its own life, it must draw that life from the vine.

2. The branch is not called on to do anything for God, they just abide in the vine.

^ What we do on our own has no eternal value.

3. The branch surrenders to the vine in order to be useful.

^ It is the vine that produces the fruit — in the believer, the fruit of the Spirit, which includes joy.

^ But the branch is needed in order for the fruit to be available to the one who eats it.

^ In order for there to be this dependence and restfulness, there must be total surrender. (See chapter 15 in BELIVE.)

Have you brought all of the issues of your life into one focus and said, "I have no greater ambition, desire, or responsibility than just to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ?" That is the recipe for joy in your life.

> All our attempts to find joy will be futile if we do not abide in Jesus, because we cannot make ourselves joyful in our own power.

What do people do in order to find joy in their own power?

James wrote one of the first letters in the New Testament that instructed believers regarding this new life in Christ. Followers of Jesus may not only experience joy in spite of trials but the trials themselves can be beneficial because they force us back to the true source of joy — God.

James 1:2-17 (CEV)

² My friends, be glad, even if you have a lot of trouble. ³ You know that you learn to endure by having your faith tested. ⁴ But you must learn to endure everything, so that you will be completely mature and not lacking in anything.

⁵ If any of you need wisdom, you should ask God, and it will be given to you. God is generous and won't correct you for asking. ⁶ But when you ask for something, you must have faith and not doubt. Anyone who doubts is like an ocean wave tossed around in a storm. ⁷⁻⁸ If you are that kind of person, you can't make up your mind, and you surely can't be trusted. So don't expect the Lord to give you anything at all.

⁹ Any of God's people who are poor should be glad that he thinks so highly of them. ¹⁰ But any who are rich should be glad when God makes them humble. Rich people will disappear like wild flowers ¹¹ scorched by the burning heat of the sun. The flowers lose their blossoms, and their beauty is destroyed. That is how the rich will disappear, as they go about their business.

¹² God will bless you, if you don't give up when your faith is being tested. He will reward you with a glorious life, just as he rewards everyone who loves him.

¹³ Don't blame God when you are tempted! God cannot be tempted by evil, and he doesn't use evil to tempt others. ¹⁴ We are tempted by our own desires that drag us off and trap us. ¹⁵ Our desires make us sin, and when sin is finished with us, it leaves us dead.

¹⁶ Don't be fooled, my dear friends. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father who created all the lights in the heavens. He is always the same and never makes dark shadows by changing.

Many Christians think once they've made that decision for Christ that everything will fall into place and life will be easy and peaceful. Then when trials and tough times come upon them or continue, they begin to question, "why?" Wondering how they could possibly endure horrible circumstances and consider it joy.

> The truth is, trials make us stronger in our faith.

< James clearly states that the testing of our faith produces perseverance.

How can we find joy in the midst of all the hardships, and painful circumstances?

> First, we need to remember that joy is not the same as happiness. (See page 2.)

> Second, we need to understand that God's joy cannot be taken away.

< As believers, we are promised the constant presence of the Holy Spirit. We are promised His joy.

^ Just as our salvation is assured through Jesus' one-time sacrifice for all. Jesus' words in our key verse assure us of his joy.

> Third, we need to stop focusing on our circumstances with whining and complaining and grab onto God's joy.

< Just like salvation, joy is a free and perfect gift from Him, but we must reach out and accept it.

< We need to choose joy over bitterness, anger, and sorrow.

<Make a decision to choose joy every day. No matter what.

<Look at these great examples in Scripture:

^ *“Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability”* (2 Corinthians 8:2-3).

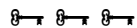
^ *“You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit”* (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

^ *“Be joyful always”* (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

^ *“You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions”* (Hebrews 10:34).

^ *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 12:2).

All through Scripture we see the persecution of the church, the trials and hardships that believers have faced. The challenge then is to truly learn how to consider each trial joy.



JOYFUL CELEBRATIONS

In the Old Testament people often responded to God’s blessings with joyful celebrations. Coming together intentionally to remember God stimulated joy in the hearts of the people. The annual Festival of Tabernacles especially provided an opportunity for the Israelites to celebrate God’s goodness, since the focus was the blessing of God on their harvest and the work of their hands. Moses instructed the Israelites to make this festival an occasion to express their joy.

Deuteronomy 16:13-15 (CEV)

Moses said to Israel:¹³⁻¹⁵ After you have finished the grain harvest and the grape harvest, take your sons and daughters and all your servants to the place where the LORD chooses to be worshiped. Celebrate the Festival of Shelters for seven days. Also invite the poor, including Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. The LORD will give you big harvests and make you successful in everything you do. You will be completely happy, so celebrate this festival in honor of the LORD your God.

God’s instructions for celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles can be found in Leviticus 23.

The Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Booths and *Sukkot*, is the seventh and last feast that the Lord commanded Israel to observe and one of the three feasts that Jews were to observe each year by going to *“appear before the Lord your God in the place which He shall choose”* (Deuteronomy 16:16).

>The importance of the Feast of Tabernacles can be seen in how many places it is mentioned in Scripture. In the Bible we see many important events that took place at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.

>The feast begins five days after the Day of Atonement and at the time the fall harvest had just been completed.

>It was a time of joyous celebration as the Israelites celebrated God's continued provision for them in the current harvest and remembered His provision and protection during the 40 years in the wilderness.

We certainly can tie this into the vine and branches analogy. As long as the people would abide in God, they would experience the joy that God's love, protection and comfort could bring. Away from God, the joy was gone.

Another joyful celebration recorded in the Old Testament occurred when David retrieved the ark of the covenant from the Philistines. David understood the power of God's presence in the center of Israelite life and community. After he built a tent to store the ark he wrote a song to celebrate God for who he is and what he had consistently done for Israel.

Summary of the story:

The Philistines and the Israelites went to war and the Philistines seemed to be winning. So Israelite's leaders met together and said, "Why did the Lord let the Philistines win? Let us bring the ark of the Covenant from Shiloh, so that he will save us from our enemies." They seemed to think that the Ark was a magical box that had God in it.

When the Philistines learned that the ark of God was in the camp, they were afraid and became determined in their fight to have the victory. So the Philistines fought hard and won again.

After the victory, the Philistines took the Ark of the Covenant to the city of Ashdod and put it in the temple of their god Dagon. They thought they had captured it because Dagon was stronger than the Lord. But they were soon to find out differently. The next morning when they came to Dagon's temple they found the statue of Dagon had fallen on the floor in front of the ark like it was bowing down before God. So they set it up right again. But the next morning, it had fallen down again, and this time its head and both arms had broken off. The people in the town began to develop body sores, and they were infested with mice. They sent the ark off to another Philistine city, Gath, in order to relieve themselves of the pestilence. When the ark came to Gath, the people experienced the same thing with body sores and mice. Next they sent the ark to Ekron. But the people there started protesting. For seven months the ark stayed in the land of the Philistines and the sores and mice spread through the whole land.

Finally the Philistines decided to send it back to the Israelites. They made gold images of the sores and mice that had troubled them, as an offering to God. Then they put the ark and the gold images in a wagon and had two milk cows pull it. Instead of returning to the shed where their calves were, the cows started down the road toward the land of Israel, and did not stop until they came to Beth Shemesh. When the Israelites at Beth Shemesh saw the ark, they celebrated. They used the wagon for firewood and offered the cows as a sacrifice to God in thanksgiving. We find David's psalm of praise in 1 Chronicles 16.

FROM 1 Chronicles 16:7-36 (CEV)

⁷ That same day, David instructed Asaph and his relatives for the first time to sing these praises to the LORD:⁸ Praise the LORD and pray in his name! Tell everyone what he has done.⁹ Sing praises to the LORD! Tell about his miracles.¹⁰ Celebrate and worship his holy name with all your heart.¹¹ Trust the LORD and his mighty power. Worship him always.

²⁴ Tell every nation on earth, "The LORD is wonderful and does marvelous things!"²⁵ The LORD is great and deserves our greatest praise! He is the only God worthy of our worship.

³¹ Tell the heavens and the earth to be glad and celebrate! And announce to the nations, "The LORD is King!"³⁵ ...Let us celebrate and shout in praise of your holy name.³⁶ LORD God of Israel, you deserve to be praised forever and ever."



KEY IDEA: DESPITE MY CIRCUMSTANCES, I FEEL INNER CONTENTMENT AND UNDERSTAND MY PURPOSE IN LIFE.

FROM ENAM: ACE, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS by Randy Frazee

Joy has more to do with remaining in the presence of Jesus than with avoiding problems and struggles in our lives. Markening back to John 15, we know that joy is always available to us when we remain in Christ, through whatever life brings. Let these statements guide you to see how true joy differs from mere happiness.

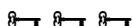
- *Happiness is a state of mind, while joy is a mind-set.*
- *Happiness comes and goes, while joy can be constant.*
- *Happiness is dependent, while joy is independent.*
- *Happiness is conditional, while joy is unconditional*

The end result of choosing joy is being mature and complete in Christ (James 1:2-4).

> Joy becomes the fuel for the believer for this journey to maturity.

> Only Jesus can make our lives flourish in the midst of trouble.

< In Jesus, joy is strengthened when life becomes challenging.



JOY DESPITE OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

Prior to the exile and return of the southern kingdom of Judah was a dark season. The people were led, almost without interruption, by a succession of evil kings. Habakkuk was a prophet trying desperately to get the people back on track. He asked God how long he was going to let injustice and wickedness go on before he disciplined the nation. God informed the prophet that he was going to use the Babylonians to deal with Judah’s persistent disobedience. Habakkuk struggled with this idea at first but in the end found resolve. Even though God’s people were going to go through a difficult season Habakkuk knew they could retain their joy based on what God had done for them in the past and his promises for the future.

Habakkuk 3 is a prayer psalm. The prophet was now able to pray to the Lord and quit arguing with Him.

> Seeing the vision of God and hearing His voice made a difference in Habakkuk’s life.

< He finally understood the significance of God’s assurances.

< He quit being a worrier and a watcher to being a worshiper.

REGARDING VERSES 16-19 FROM THE TRANSFORMATION STUDY BIBLE

This is one of the greatest confessions of faith found anywhere in Scripture. Habakkuk had faced the lightening fact that his nation would be invaded by a merciless enemy. The prophet knew that many of the people would go into exile and many would be killed. The land would be ruined, and Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed. Yet he told God that he would trust him no matter what were to happen. Habakkuk’s

basic outlook was, "I will rejoice in the Lord." .. Because of his faith in the Lord, he was able to stand and be sure-footed. This is one reason why the Lord permits us to go through trials, they can draw us nearer to him and lift us above the circumstances so that we walk on the heights with him.

God doesn't always change the circumstances, but he can change us to meet and go through the circumstances. This is what allows us to experience His Joy—no matter what.

Habakkuk 3:16-19 (CEV)

HABAKKUK'S RESPONSE TO GOD'S MESSAGE

¹⁶ When I heard this message, I felt weak from fear, and my lips quivered. My bones seemed to melt, and I stumbled around. But I will patiently wait. Someday those vicious enemies will be struck by disaster.

TRUST IN A TIME OF TROUBLE

¹⁷ Fig trees may no longer bloom, or vineyards produce grapes; olive trees may be fruitless, and harvest time a failure; sheep pens may be empty, and cattle stalls vacant—¹⁸ but I will still celebrate because the LORD God saves me. ¹⁹ The LORD gives me strength. He makes my feet as sure as those of a deer, and he helps me stand on the mountains.

Like God's people found joy and strength in God's promises amid dark times during Habakkuk's day, Jesus and his promises were a source of comfort and strength for his disciples as they prepared for his death. A few hours before he was crucified Jesus sat with them and reassured them that their grief would be short-lived; three days to be exact. After that time something was going to happen to secure their joy in any and all circumstances.

John 16:20-24

²⁰ Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. ²¹ A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. ²² So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. ²³ In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

God brings joy to our lives, not by substitution, but by transformation.

> Jesus' illustration of the woman giving birth makes this clear.

< The same baby that caused the pain would also cause the joy.

> In our Christian life God takes seemingly impossible situations, adds the miracle of his grace, and transforms trial into triumph and sorrow into joy.

Jesus gives His confused disciples three elements that would replace their sorrow with joy.

> First, He gives them a principle to hold on to: The object of your present pain will produce eventual great joy.

< He produces joy with the very thing that once caused pain.

> Second, Jesus gives His disciples a power to transform their sorrow into joy: Prayer.

> Third, Jesus gave His disciples a name to conform to: His name.

< When we transform, we begin to conform to the character of Christ.

^ As we conform to the character of Christ, we become more like Him, we understand His Joy!

Can you relate a time when the joy of the Lord helped you to overcome a difficult circumstance?

Paul, later wrote a joyful treatise of sorts while under house arrest and chained to a Roman guard. In a passionate letter to the church at Philippi, Paul fervently expressed his joy in Christ. Half of the lessons on increasing our joy are “taught” explicitly by Paul. Half of the lessons are “caught” implicitly by observing how Paul found joy despite his circumstance. At the letter’s opening, notice how he found joy in the people God had placed in his life. Then we learn that Paul even saw his imprisonment as a blessing, for it helped bring attention to the gospel message.

FROM THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Christian Joy is something that should be unaffected by circumstances. It needs to be a state of mind and a natural characteristic of the heart.

>Joy goes deep. It is a settled state of contentment, confidence and hope.

Let’s look at some characteristics of Christian joy.

IT IS A SHARED JOY

> Following his greeting to the people of Philippi, Paul tells the Philippians that he has been praying for them. (Philippians 1:3-5, 7-8 ³*I thank my God every time I remember you.*⁴*In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy*⁵*because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,* ⁷*It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me.*⁸*God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*)

> Notice, he doesn't just pray, he prays with joy. And his joy comes because of their partnership in the gospel.

<Paul's joy is a shared joy. This partnership is more than just spending time together . . . there is a unity, a joy, a purpose that is held in common.

^ We share a common grace. There are many things that divide us: politics, ethics, gender differences, personal tastes and interests. But when we come to Christ there is a bond with other believers that transcends differences. That bond is God's grace.

^ We share a common burden. Jesus has called us all to do the same thing: glorify Him in our living and testify of Him to our world. We may disagree on many issues, but we can agree that there is only one way for people to get to Heaven.

} We agree that there is only one hope for modern society. And that one way and one hope is Jesus.

} We are people working together to get the message out.

} We work together in this privileged and joyful task.

- ^ We share a common hope. We are all looking forward to meeting and being with Jesus.
 - } This hope will enable us to have joy in the midst of trials.
 - } This hope makes us content in whatever circumstance we find ourselves in.
 - } This hope is what helps us find joy even in sorrow and grief.

IT IS A CONFIDENT JOY

Paul's next statement is one of the greatest reasons for joy we have, "*being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* [Philippians 1:6]

> There are three things Paul affirms here:

>*First, it was God who began the work of salvation.*

^ God is the one responsible for our salvation. Our salvation is not based on our goodness but on His grace. (John 6:63-66)

>*Second, God continues the work of salvation.* We are told that He "began" the work. Salvation is a process. We do not become perfect believers at the moment of our conversion.

^ As in life, we are born spiritual infants and we need time to grow. We are people "in the process" of salvation.

^ We can tend to lose our joy because we are frustrated by our own failures.

>*Third, God will finish what He starts.* This truth is the basis of our confidence, our peace, our joy. God will finish what He has started in us. (Romans 8:31-39; John 10:28, 29)

IT IS AN INCREASING JOY

Paul prays that the believers would continue to grow. "*And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.* [Phil. 1:9-11]

> Not only are they certain of their destiny, they should also be progressing in the faith.

<We miss out if we stop progressing. The initial stages of the faith are enjoyable but they are nothing compared with what God has in store for us as we live our lives with and for Him.

PEACE AND JOY IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Philippians 4:4-9

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Paul repeats a major theme of the letter: Rejoice! Despite the circumstance from which it was written (in prison), joy is all through the letter to the Philippians. (See Philippians 1:4, 1:18, 1:25, 2:2, 2:16, 2:17, 2:18, 2:28, 3:1, 3:3, and 4:1.)

>As a cure for disagreements, Paul said, 'Rejoice in the Lord always.'

"People who are very happy, especially those who are very happy in the Lord, are not apt either to give offense or to take offense. Their minds are so sweetly occupied with higher things, that they are not easily distracted by the little troubles which naturally arise among such imperfect creatures as we are. Joy in the Lord is the cure for all discord." -- CHARLES SPURKON

>Paul's joy wasn't based in a sunny optimism or positive mental attitude, it was the confidence that God was in control.

"What a gracious God we serve, who makes delight to be a duty, and who commands us to rejoice! Should we not at once be obedient to such a command as this? It is intended that we should be happy." -- CHARLESSPURKON

> Paul said to be anxious for nothing (verse 6):

<This is a command, not an option.

"Undue care is an intrusion into an arena that belongs to God alone. It makes us the father of the household instead of being a child." -- unknown

¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Paul comments on the generous giving of the Philippians, but assures them that he has learned contentment.

>This was *how* Paul could say that his thankfulness was not based upon his own need. Even though Paul was in need, he was content where he was at - even in his Roman imprisonment.

<Paul had to *learn* contentment; it isn't natural to mankind.

< Paul was assured that he could do "*all things through Christ who strengthens*" him.

^ Paul's ability to be content came through the strength of Christ.

< See also John 15:5: With Jesus we can do all things, without Him we can't do anything.

Like Paul, the apostle Peter also taught through his letters to the Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor that believers are in a position to experience joy in spite of and because of their difficult circumstances. The same is true for followers of Jesus today.

1 Peter 1:3-9

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an

inexpressible and glorious joy,⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

All of God’s plans and actions in our earthly lives are preparation for what He has in store for us in eternity.

> We do not know what life in heaven will be like. But we do know that our life now is our preparation for eternity.

1 Peter 4:12-16

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Our suffering means fellowship with Christ. To suffer with Christ should be treated as an honor and a privilege – a gift from God.

> “ Not every believer grows to the point where God can trust him or her with this kind of experience (suffering as Peter spoke of),so we ought to rejoice when the privilege comes to us.

1 Peter 5:6-11

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

God’s grace will establish, settle and strengthen us as long as we learn the lessons he has for us.



KEY APPLICATION: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THIS MAKE IN THE WAY I LIVE?

FROM *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee

The joy of Christ will replace or reduce stress.

Joy becomes a filter through which we view life. We’re not talking about rose-colored glasses, but about actually having brand-new eyes! Joy can change our perspective and our perception of negative circumstances. We aren’t simply in denial, sticking our head in the sand, but rather we choose to rise above the circumstances and adopt an eternal mind-set. Stress can come from many different factors today. We can worry and fret because we feel

we're not in control. Joy is an ongoing reminder that God is in control — that he is in charge of the outcome. Joy comes from trusting the controller of all things.

The joy of Christ will become contagious through us.

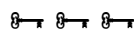
Joy lifts others up, just as despair brings them down. If you choose joy on a regular basis, you will not only be a far more approachable and relatable person, but your attitude will rub off on others and make a big impact on all the environments you are in.

The joy of Christ will draw others to Christ.

A person exuding a joy and vigor about life is going to raise the question, "What makes him [her] so different?" When those around us can look at us and see that we choose to express joy, no matter whether life is good or bad at the moment — therein lies the strongest testimony we can offer, even without words.

Notice the path we have taken here — from an inward focus of ending personal stress to an internal transformation to an outward attraction of people to Christ. As joy grows in the heart and mind of the believer, it infiltrates the soul and then moves outward to impact others. Loving God and loving neighbor.

We all will have good and bad days. We will all experience life's ups and downs. But has life robbed you of your joy, or are you growing in this virtue? What do you reflect to others? What does your attitude communicate about your faith? Happiness will be all too fleeting, but the joy of Jesus is available to your soul right now. When trials arise, choose to lean on him, and you will find his joy.



A quote from Alfred d' Sousa says, "For a long time, it had seemed to me that life was about to begin, real life, but there was always an obstacle in the way, something to be gotten over first. Unfinished business, time still to be served, a debt to be paid, then life will begin. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life."

This revelation can shine some light on life for us all. How many times have we said that when the kids grow up, when I get out of debt, when I get the perfect job or this situation leaves, then life will be better.

Although these things may be true we have to learn how to be stable in difficult times and not allow the joys in life to pass us by, regardless of our circumstances.

Jesus told us in Matthew 16:33, "*In the world you have tribulation ... be of good cheer ... I have overcome the world.*" Jesus extended joy, a fruit of the Spirit, to help us stabilize our emotions and choices in the challenging situations of life. God knew we would face troubling times in this world and gave us means to cope. Joy brings stability to our souls in times of difficulty.

Finding the joy isn't always easy, and sometimes we look in the wrong places. Simple joy is found in finding some way to help another. It is found by being strengthened through prayer, in believing in something better, looking for a bright spot in each day, and pondering good things that God has done rather than focusing continually on our problems.

The apostle James instructed us to consider the trials of life pure joy because they can cause us to use our faith. The early Christians suffered many hardships in life and could have had a different outlook, but they were encouraged to be joy finders.

As joy finders, we can persevere and trust God to handle anything that comes our way as we maintain the joy of living.

