

# JOYFULNESS vs. SELF-PITY

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*THE BRIGHT SPIRIT AND RADIANT COUNTENANCE WHICH COME BY BEING IN FULL FELLOWSHIP WITH THE LORD.*

*“In Thy presence is fullness of joy; and at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” (Psalm 16:11)*

## DEFINITION OF JOYFULNESS

A primary Hebrew word for *joy* is *simchah*. It comes from the root word *samach*, which means “to brighten up, to make glad, to be merry.” Related Biblical words are *rejoice* (Philippians 4:4), *exceeding glad* (Matthew 5:12), *delight* (Psalm 37:4), and *blessed*, which means to be happy and spiritually prosperous.

## HOW CAN JOY AND SORROW EXIST TOGETHER?

Paul stated that he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart for those who refused to believe in the Lord, but at the same time, he had continuous joy for those who responded to the Gospel. (See Romans 9:2 and Philippians 4:4.) He also testified of both joy and sorrow in the following passage: “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing (II Corinthians 6:10). It is possible to have joy and sorrow at the same time, because joy is an expression of the spirit, and sorrow is an expression of the soul. Joy or sorrow can affect our hearts so that we will have either a joyful heart or a sorrowful heart.

## THE REWARDS OF JOY

There are physical, psychological, and spiritual rewards of joy, both in the life of the one who is joyful and in the lives of those who are around a joyful person, as joy tends to be contagious. Joy releases hormones that strengthen the immune system. Thus . . .

1. **Joy is our strength**—“For the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).
2. **Joy is our health**—“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine” (Proverbs 17:22).
3. **Joy is our brightness**—“A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance” (Proverbs 15:13).

## WHAT PRODUCES JOY?

### 1. Our eternal salvation

Our greatest source of joy is eternal salvation. Jesus emphasized this point to His disciples when He said, “Rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20). Unfortunately, the joy from our salvation can be diminished or lost if we allow sin in our lives. Therefore David prayed, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit” (Psalm 51:12).

### 2. A clear conscience

Because joy comes from fellowship with the Lord, anything hindering that fellowship will diminish our joy. Unconfessed sin and iniquity will damage that fellowship, because evil deeds are of darkness and usually done in darkness. God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (I John 1:7). Based on this truth, Paul wrote: “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience” (II Corinthians 1:12).

### 3. The statutes of God’s Word

A statute is a practical application of the Law of God. When David and his six hundred men pursued and overcame the Amalekites who had captured their families and possessions, they returned with all they had lost plus an additional bounty of riches. Some of David’s men decided that the two hundred men who were too weak to continue the chase should receive only their own possessions and none of the spoil that was taken in the battle. David replied that those who “stayed by the stuff” would share equally with those who went out to battle. This became a statute forever in Israel. (See I Samuel 30:24–25). A statute rings with truth and thus causes our hearts to rejoice: “The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart” (Psalm 19:8).

#### **4. The commands of the Lord**

The whole Law is fulfilled in the commandments to love God and love one another. Jesus, in the Gospel of John, reminds us of the joy that comes by keeping this commandment: “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:9–13). “The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:8).

#### **5. The *rhemas* of Scripture**

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for personal application. Because of this, the Holy Spirit will guide each believer to passages that have specific direction for a particular situation. As these *rhemas* are engrafted into our souls and made a living part of our lives, they produce special joy. “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jeremiah 15:16). John confirms the joy that comes from *rhemas*. “If ye abide in me, and my words [*rhemas*] abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit . . . These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:7–11).

#### **6. The giving of a wise answer**

Words have power for good or for evil—“Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21). When we speak words that hurt others or do not effectively communicate truth, we experience sorrow and regret. However, when we give a wise and helpful answer, we have joy. “Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer” (Proverbs 24:26). “A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!” (Proverbs 15:23). Wise answers do not come naturally. “The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips” (Proverbs 16:23).

#### **7. The tests of persecution**

The very trials that most people fear and react to are designed by God to be sources of joy. Jesus said, “Blessed [a condition of joy] are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad [joyful], for great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:11–12). James gives further witness to this truth: “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (James 1:2–3). Peter also explains how suffering produces joy: When you suffer, “rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (I Peter 4:13).

#### **8. The spiritual growth of our disciples**

Our goal in life should be to bring as many people as we can to the Lord Jesus Christ and to help them grow to spiritual maturity (see Colossians 1:28–29 and Matthew 28:19–20). This requires great effort. However, the reward is great joy: “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy” (Psalm 126:5). Paul stated to those whom he won to Christ, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” (I Thessalonians 2:19). John stated, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (III John 4).

#### **9. The power of the Holy Spirit**

When we respond to “infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses” by thanking God, rejoicing, and when necessary, crying out, God will reward us with the power of the Holy Spirit (see II Corinthians 12:8–9). “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you . . .” (I Peter 4:14). The power of the Holy Spirit begins with love and joy (see Galatians 5:22).

## **10. The confidence of a job well done**

With the power of the Holy Spirit, God will be able to accomplish “great and mighty things” that will bring joy to us (Jeremiah 33:3). “But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another” (Galatians 6:4). The ultimate joy for every believer is to meet the Lord at the end of his life and to hear Him say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21).

### **WHAT ARE THE STEPS TO EXPERIENCE JOY?**

Scripture contains a significant list of nine commands that, if followed, will cause our hearts to rejoice. This list may be found in I Chronicles 16:8–11 as well as in Psalm 105:1–4.

#### **1. “Give thanks unto the LORD.”**

Our first response to every situation should be to thank God, because doing so is God’s will for every believer. (See I Thessalonians 5:18.) We can thank God because:

- ≪≪ All things come from the hand of God. (See Job 1:21 and Matthew 10:29.)
- ≪≪ Everything that happens to us is ultimately for our good, which is to build the character of Christ in us. (See Romans 8:28-29.)
- ≪≪ Difficulties and afflictions can teach us God’s ways. (See Psalm 119:71.)

By understanding these truths and developing a thankful spirit, we have the foundation for true joy.

#### **2. “Call upon his name.”**

Sorrow and discouragement are often the result of trying to live the Christian life in our own energy. Joy is knowing that only God can work in us and give us the desire and power to do His will. (See Philippians 2:13.) Our natural tendency is to depend on our own strength and forget that we need the Lord. Therefore God continually puts us in situations that are beyond our human ability to deal with so that we will cry out to Him and experience His super-natural power in and through us. Paul discovered that when he acknowledged his weakness, he became strong. “For when I am weak, then am I strong” (II Corinthians 12:10). The best way to express our weakness and dependence on God is to cry out to Him. This is what God invites us to do: “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm 50:15). This is further affirmed in Jeremiah 33:3: “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”

#### **3. “Make known his deeds among the people.”**

The moment we cry out to God in an attitude of “unconditional surrender” to His will and total dependence on His power and provision, He will respond to us. It is then our responsibility to make known the great and mighty things He has done in response to our cries. Our rejoicing in His power and provision glorifies Him and strengthens the faith of others.

#### **4. “Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him.”**

A psalm is a personal, musical expression of important events that happen to us. When God responds to our cries through mighty deeds, we can demonstrate our joy and gratefulness by composing a musical tribute to Him. This was David’s practice, and we are instructed to follow it: “Be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:18–19). A joyful person is one who sings.

#### **5. “Talk ye of all his wondrous works.”**

Our conversation will usually center around the people and events about which we are most excited. When we see the Lord doing mighty things in and through us, it is a joy to tell about them to all those whom we meet.

## **6. “Glory ye in his holy name.”**

God has many names. Each one represents an aspect of life. When we call upon Him, we should use the name that identifies a specific area of need. Jesus promised, “If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14). God’s names also define His character. He is the Great Physician, Tireless Provider, and the Strong Protector. He is holy, just, and merciful.

## **7. “Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD”**

The trials and tribulations in life are designed by God to turn our affections away from temporal things. These trials and tribulations should motivate us to seek the Lord, in whose “presence is fullness of joy” (Psalm 16:11). The first requirement to seek the Lord is that we do it with a whole heart. “Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). When God has our whole hearts, He fills them with joy, because “no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11).

## **8. “Seek the LORD and his strength.”**

The most important times to seek the Lord are during trials and difficulties. We can ask Him for wisdom to discern the benefits for allowing these things to happen, so we can then thank Him for them. The resulting joy strengthens us, because “the joy of the LORD is. . .[our] strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

## **9. “Seek his face continually.”**

Seeking the face of the Lord can be done only when there are no sins or transgressions that would cause Him to hide His face from us (Isaiah 59:2) or cause us to not want to look up at His face. As His face shines upon us, our faces also shine and brighten the lives of others. This is the very essence of joy, which means “to brighten up.” David prayed, “God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause [Your] face to shine upon us; That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations” (Psalm 67:1–2).

## **HOW JOYFUL ARE YOU?**

- Do people see a bright countenance when they look at you?
- Do you cry out to God whenever you are faced with a difficult situation?
- Do you cry out to God and experience His working in response to your crying out?
- Do you joyfully share these experiences with everyone you can?
- Do you know which names of God to use when crying out?
- Do you enjoy times of rich, wholehearted fellowship with the Lord?
- Do you memorize *rhemas* from Scripture?
- Do you thank God for every trial you experience?
- Are you discipling others in their spiritual growth?
- Do you put your whole heart and mind into the jobs you are given?