



3 - JOY



The other day my husband asked me what my favorite book of the Bible was. It's hard to pick a favorite one really, but I do love the symbolism found in Leviticus. Oh, and the joy-filled encouragement of Philippians! Whenever I need a little faith-lift, I know I can turn to Philippians for some uplifting truth.

I got to wondering how many times Paul used the word "joy" in his letter to the Philippian church, so I started counting last night. I found six of them, but I also noticed nine times that he used the word "rejoice." That's quite a few for a small book of only four chapters.

Do you know what I find really interesting in all this? Paul wrote that letter from prison, and by the middle of the first chapter, he's already rejoicing. Most people would be discouraged if they were locked up for sharing their faith, but Paul saw his imprisonment as a means to further the gospel. And in that he rejoiced. You see, Paul had a secret, but I guess it's not so much a secret since he told us what it was in verse 21:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21, KJV)

The source of his joy was Christ. Paul was in the world, but he wasn't invested in this world the way that most people are. Certainly, he was invested in preaching the gospel, but His hope was in Christ. Instead of holding on to this world, he held on to the prize set before him.

As long as we're holding on to this world, we're left disappointed time and again. People come and go, fortunes are won and lost, everything fades including our health, and when they go they take our happiness with them.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

Joy is good for your health. The Bible tells us that laughter is the best medicine, but God's not the only one saying that. Even doctors will tell you that laughter reduces stress, boosts your immune system, and increases blood flow to the heart.

The Bible tells us that joy is a fruit of the Spirit. In other words, our joy comes from within, not without. When joy stems from within, it's not dependent on our circumstances, it's dependent on our relationship with the Lord. It's not here today and gone tomorrow. It's not fleeting

the way that happiness is. Remember, when the roots are deep, the tree is strong. So, if we're rooted and grounded in Christ the way that we should be, like Paul, we'll experience joy.

We find similar faith-focused joy throughout scripture, in fact, perhaps the best example is found in Hebrews,

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2, KJV)

That's one of those scriptures I've read many times, but hadn't really stopped to notice the word "joy" until recently. What I see here is that He traded one joy for another. Rather than settling for the temporal high this world has to offer, He chose the joy set before Him. He chose to reach for the prize ahead instead of the earthly one at His side.

I'm reminded of a song we used to sing in church by Darrell Evans. The chorus went like this:

*I'm trading my sorrows I'm trading my shame
I'm laying them down for the joy of the Lord
I'm trading my sickness I'm trading my pain
I'm laying them down for the joy of the Lord*

When I think of the prize ahead, I'm reminded of my dad. Barely five-foot tall, he was small, but he held on to God and stood firm in his faith. I always say he taught me how to live, but more importantly, he taught me how to find joy in the midst of a trial. With joyful hope and incomparable peace, he walked through the last years of his life. Barely 86-pounds, his body riddled with cancer, hands held high in adoration to God, his life was a constant reminder of what it means to stand firm in your faith. And that it is indeed possible to find joy and peace in a storm.

So how do we do that? How is it possible to find joy when our lives are turned upside down? By turning our eyes to the joy set before us.

Jesus says, "I am going away to prepare a place for you..." Those are the words I hold on to. Those are the words that remind me that this world isn't my home. This is the hope that I cling to when everything feels like it's slipping away.

Let's face it, everyone's happy when things are coming together and everything's going their way. It's not so easy on the days when our plans fall apart and things aren't coming together the way that we expected them to. On days

Joy Comes From Within

like that I'm not counting my blessings too quickly, because I'm too busy counting my wants, my needs, and my problems.

Happiness isn't dependant on the world around you, it's a result of the way you are processing it. In other words, happiness is an inside job. The only question is, what lens are we viewing our world through?

Take a photo with the wrong lens, and you could end up with all kinds of issues such as distorted images, blurred subjects, and dull colors. That's why it's important to have just the right lens.

Optimists have a knack for seeing things from a different perspective. They can be put in the exact same situation as a pessimist, and while one sees a dark cloud, the other sees the beauty of a silver lining.

As believers, we're given the opportunity to look at our lives from a different perspective. We have the ability to process this world through the lens of God's Word. Viewing life through a hope of salvation gives us a reason to smile and 10,000 reasons to trust in His wisdom and power.

Optimism doesn't mean that we ignore the problems around us, or that we fail to see them. It simply means that we look for the best, we hope for the best, and we trust God with the rest.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

If you're extraordinarily happy, you might describe what you're feeling as "beatitude." The noun beatitude refers to a state of great joy. Being blessed, or at least feeling blessed, is often linked to beatitude... Beatitude inherited its blessedness from the Latin word *beatus*, meaning both "happy" and "blessed." (Vocabulary.com)

Whenever I'm in the zone of self-centered desire and pride, I hear a voice that beckons me without fail to let go of my selfish behavior. I'm offered a choice. I can either be thankful to God in the moment or I can hang on to my anger and make everyone around me miserable too. Thankfully I'm learning that the moment I let go of my anger and humble myself before God, I find joy and peace that I would otherwise miss.

If you're having trouble trading your sorrow for joy, maybe one of these suggestions might help:

1. Start your day with prayer and scripture.
2. Be intentional about smiling and spreading joy to others.
3. Put down electronics that are distracting you. It's easy to become overwhelmed with social media. Draw boundaries that offer a healthy balance—and stick to them. Walk away from the computer and engage in person-to person face time.
4. Start a gratitude journal. Count your blessings and write them down daily. It's amazing how many we have when we sit down and start counting them.

Faith in God doesn't mean that we simply believe in who He is and who He was. Even Satan knows that. It means that we trust in His plan of salvation, and trust His choices in lieu of our own. We see life on the surface, but there's so much more going on behind the scenes that we'll never even begin to understand. He is righteous, loving, and full of grace.

We can't comprehend all of His ways. Most of us can't even grasp how a computer works, yet we expect to understand the way that Our God is orchestrating this planet. Every single detail is held in the palm of His hand.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

Joy is contagious. According to a study by the British Medical Journal, "happiness extends up to three degrees of separation (for example, to the friends of one's friends' friends). People who are surrounded by many happy people and those who are central in the network are more likely to become happy in the future." (bmj.com)

We're told in scripture that all things work out together for good to them who are in Christ Jesus. While good to us usually comes with immediate and temporal satisfaction, His plan is eternal.

Life here on earth is moving so fast. It's over before we even know it because it's merely one breath in a billion. And so, the key to discovering joy is to take our eyes off of this world. To remind ourselves that everything in it is fading away. And rest our eyes on the eternal promise ahead.

In closing, I want to share this quote with you about the famous theologian, Jonathan Edwards who was fired from his church in 1750. The main concern at the time was a dispute regarding communion in which Jonathan Edwards believed that only those in relationship with Christ should partake at the table. With a vote of more than 200 to 23, Edwards was erroneously removed from the pulpit. In the biographical account of his life, we find this quote:

I never saw the least symptoms of displeasure in his countenance the whole week but he appeared like a man of God, whose happiness was out of the reach of his enemies and whose treasure was not only a future but a present good, overbalancing all imaginable ills of life, even to the astonishment of many who could not be at rest without his dismissal. (Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography, 327)

What stood out to me in all of this was his disposition at the time, in particular the fact that his happiness was out of reach of his enemies. This is the core of the message I'm hoping to relay in this book: Our joy is out of reach of our enemy; Our treasure is not only a future, but a present good; The joy set before us is tipping the scales of the life we're leaving behind.

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18, KJV)



What can we learn about joy from John 16:22?

What do you think it means when the Bible says “Weeping endures for a night, but joy comes in the morning?” (Psalm 30:5)

Look up the verses in Philippians that mention “joy” or “rejoice” and highlight them in your Bible. Write one of the verses out here.



The secret of joy is Christ in me, not me
in different circumstances.
- Elisabeth Elliot -



Look up the word “joy” on Dictionary.com. How might that definition of joy be different from the fruit of joy in a Christian’s life?

Fill in the blanks:

A joyful heart is good _____, But a _____ _____ dries up the bones.

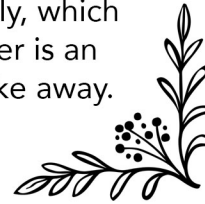
(Proverbs 17:22, NAS)

Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with _____ _____ and full of glory. (1 Peter 1:8, KJV)



Sorrow is coming on the ungodly, which nothing can lessen; the believer is an heir to joy which no one can take away.

- Matthew Henry -



What do you think this verse means? (If you aren't sure, try looking it up in Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary)

Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.
(Psalm 126:5-6, NIV)

• YOU WILL KEEP IN •
PERFECT PEACE
THOSE WHOSE MINDS ARE
STEADFAST
• BECAUSE THEY •
Trust in You

• ISAIAH 26:3 •





4 - PEACE



Reading Psalm 63, we see find the words of David who writes,

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me. (Psalm 63:1-8, KJV)

Scholars say that this was likely written at the time that David went to the forest of Hereth in Judah (1 Samuel 22:5). He was in hiding, as King Saul was determined to kill him. In fact, Saul's jealousy was so intense that he ordered the priests of Nob to be put to death for helping David. And then, beyond the priests, the men, women, sucking infants, oxen, donkeys and sheep.

We all have a King Saul in our life, and yes—he too is this evil. The Bible tells us that our “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8, KJV). We feel that heavy presence in our life when we're tempted and tried. We feel the stress when we're pressed on every side.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

When Christ said, “Do not think I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.” He was referring to the Word of God which the world considers foolishness, but to those who believe it is precious.

Reading those words from Psalm 63, we can learn from David's example. He teaches us how a servant of God should respond during dark and trying times. He teaches us how to find inner peace when we're troubled:

- Verse 1 - He seeks God out.
- Verse 3 - He sees things from a different perspective:
 God's loving kindness is greater than life itself.
- Verse 5 - He doesn't just praise God, he praises Him with joy.
- Verse 6 - When he can't sleep, he meditates on the Lord.
- Verse 7 - He acknowledges the faithfulness of God.
- Verse 8 - He fervently pursues the Lord.

When I look at the word peace, I see it goes hand in hand with contentment. When we are content with our situation, with God's will, with His timing, and with the things that we have, we can rest from the worry and stress of this world.

The opposite of peace is to be anxious, which in the Greek means to be pulled to pieces. It's triggered by worry, stress, discontentment, irritation and unhappiness. You see, peace stems from within, and unrest from without. This unrest is determined by the circumstances around us. When we allow ourselves to be anxious, we lose our sense of peace.

Elizabeth George wisely said, "Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of God. (A Woman's Walk with God)

Peace comes with trusting God. There's freedom in knowing and believing that everything is under His control. It gives us strength for today and hope for tomorrow. It removes every trace of worry, and every hint of stress as we safely place it in His hands. Like David, we need to seek God out. We need to praise Him and to meditate on His Word. Remember, verse 8 tells us that he fervently pursued the Lord. He didn't just sit around waiting for things to get better, he got his spirit right with God. Peace will follow suit when our heart is right with God.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

Peace is a major theme in the Bible, appearing 420 times in the King James version.

And what about our discontentment? How do we resolve that? Through an intimate relationship with God. David knew the Lord and thus he valued the lovingkindness of the Lord saying, "Because your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise you."

The Bible says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." (Isaiah 26:3, KJV)

The Hebrew word for "peace" in this verse is "shalom" which means to be whole or complete. The word for "perfect" is also "shalom." It's not simply peace as the world knows it, it's perfect and complete peace, for in Him we

Peace I Leave With You

lack nothing. It comes from having our hearts and minds transformed by the power of God. We have peace with God, and peace with one another.

Jeremiah cried out against the prophets and priests of his time who declared “peace peace”, but there was no peace. The people were deceived into thinking that their sins would not bring punishment from God, but God declared they would be cast down for rejecting His law. (see Jeremiah 6: 13-19)

The fact is that sin separates us from God, but when Jesus rose from the dead and was seated at the right hand of the Father, He bridged the gap between God and man. Now we have peace with God and peace in God.

Paul writes, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7, KJV)

It passes all understanding because this world doesn’t know the hope of salvation like we do. Their eyes are fixed on that which is seen, while our eyes are fixed on the unseen.

Does that mean we’re perfect? Does it mean that we’re never worried or stressed? No. We’re not perfect, but we’re growing. And, each time we turn our eyes off of this world and back onto Christ, we’re growing just a little bit more.

Two years ago, I struggled with anxiety, and one of those days was worse than the others. I had a full out knee-knocking, heart-pounding, mind-racing moment when all I wanted to do was crawl back into bed and stay there, for a decade or two. I’d never experienced fear like this before—at least not physically. But there I was pacing the floor, gasping for air, and desperately needing a hug.

Shortly after, Michael came home, and as per usual he brought light to my life. You see, my husband has a way of comforting me. He’s like a tub of Rocky Road ice cream at the end of a horrible day. He’s thick-skinned and wise, taking difficulties in stride while I’m more of a mull-it-over-until-I’m-terrified kind of girl—or at least I was that day.

We prayed together, and while I decided to leave it all in God’s hands I didn’t quite follow through. Day two was bad, and day three even worse... I was facing a giant and I wasn’t prepared.

You see, confrontation is my Achilles heel. You can throw pretty much anything at me and I’m rock solid, but tell me that someone is angry with me, and I fold like a dollar-store lawn chair. It’s not good. Trust me, I know. The Bible is pretty clear when it comes to the topic of fear and trusting God in ALL situations, yet somehow spiders, heights, snakes, roller coasters, and angry people find a way to wiggle their way in and disrupt our otherwise peaceful lives.

The good news is that there’s hope. There’s grace. And there’s growth to be had when we face our fears God’s way. If we were all perfect, I wouldn’t be writing this Bible study. The fact is we’re not. We’re growing, we’re reading God’s Word, and learning to trust. Peace and a heightened level of courage doesn’t happen because we’re mighty, thick-skinned, or wise. It comes from Jesus Christ and our reliance on Him.

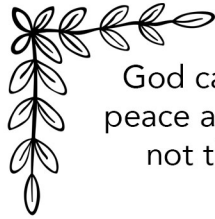
At that moment when your knees are knocking and your heart is pounding, slow down, take a breath and fix your eyes on the unseen power of God.

When was Psalm 63 likely written, and what was David doing at the time?



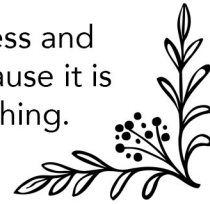
Who did Saul punish for helping David evade him?

What is the Hebrew word for “Peace”, and what does it mean?



God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.

- C. S. Lewis -



Who falsely declared “peace peace” in Jeremiah’s time, and what was the outcome?

What did David do when he was unable to sleep?



What was the common greeting found at the beginning of all of Paul's letters to the churches? (Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, etc.)

What was the first declaration of peace in the Bible, and to whom was it made
(Genesis 15:15)?

The power to take peace from the earth
was given to the rider of what color
horse (Revelation 6:4)?

What two things are we to pursue
according to Hebrews 12:14?



With complete consecration
comes perfect peace.
- Watchman Nee -



Proverbs 12:20 says deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil. What is promised to those who bring peace?

Fill in the Blanks:

And the _____ of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your _____ and _____ through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7, KJV)

Thou wilt keep him in perfect _____, whose _____ is stayed on thee: because he _____ in thee.” (Isaiah 26:3, KJV)

When I remember thee upon my bed, and _____ in the night watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. My soul followeth _____ after thee: thy right hand _____. (Psalm 63:1, KJV)

