



Spreading
Joy





Spread Joy

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.

—Romans 15:13, NIV

Read: Philippians 1

My daughter's family moved four hours north, where they've settled into a beautiful home with a yard big enough for Maddy and the kids to raise a few chickens. But let me tell you, what I love most about their new place is the Northern Lights. The farther north you live, the more breathtaking and frequent they are. Just the other day, they posted a photo of the most stunning streaks of green and red, blending together across the sky with an almost surreal glow. I could hardly believe it was real.

That image got me thinking about something else today—the night of Christ's birth. Picture the shepherds, out in the field, going about their ordinary, everyday tasks when the angel of the Lord appeared, and the glory of God lit up the night around them. But as incredible as that sight must have been, it's the words the angel spoke that really get me. "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."

Joy. Real, soul-deep joy. You see, joy is a theme that weaves itself throughout the gospel of Christ—from the night of His birth to the early days of the church, as the apostles took this good news to the world. And let me tell you, one of the clearest places you see this joy in the Bible is in the book of Philippians. What's remarkable about Philippians is that Paul

wrote this letter while he was under house arrest in Rome. He could have easily complained, but instead, he chose joy and used his circumstances to advance the gospel. His attitude didn't just encourage the Philippian church back then—it has continued to strengthen and inspire countless believers, including us, to this very day. Paul's example shows us that joy isn't just a feeling we have when life is easy; it's something we can choose in every circumstance.

The message of joy isn't something to be separated from Christmas; it's deeply embedded in what Christmas is all about. But here's the thing: that joy isn't meant to stay locked away. Just like Paul, we are called to spread joy wherever we are, no matter what challenges we face. Paul didn't wait for his situation to improve before he shared the good news—he shared it right in the middle of his struggles. And when we do the same—when we spread joy in the midst of our own hardships—we offer hope to a world that's desperately in need of it.

Romans 15:13 says, “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.” Do you see that? This verse shows us that when we trust in God, He fills us with joy and peace, and that joy and peace overflow. It spills out onto the people around us. When we live with the joy that comes from knowing Christ, we don't just keep it to ourselves—our joy, like Paul's, can inspire others to seek Christ, no matter where they are in life. So let's be intentional about choosing joy and sharing it, for the glory of God and for the encouragement of those around us.

Today's Challenge:

Choose to spread joy in a small but meaningful way. It could be through a kind word, a note of encouragement, or a thoughtful gesture to someone who might need a little extra joy. Ask God to show you how you can be a light to someone today.

⓪ How can Paul's example in Philippians chapter 1 encourage us to share the gospel and spread joy in our own circumstances?

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⓪ What reason do we find in James 1:2-4 to have joy in the midst of our trials?

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Be Joyful in Giving

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." —Acts 20:35, NIV

Read: Luke 19:1-9 and 2 Corinthians 9

Emma was a new Christian, eager to grow in her faith, but struggling to find joy during the Christmas season. One afternoon, as she and her neighbor, Miss Maggie—a feisty, spirit-filled woman—sat together for their usual Bible study and tea, Emma poured out her heart. “I just don’t feel like I belong. I don’t have a ministry, and I don’t feel useful,” she confessed.

Miss Maggie, never one to waste words, smiled warmly. “Emma, I want you to come someplace with me tomorrow night. Be ready at 5.”

Curious but trusting her neighbor, Emma agreed. The next evening, Miss Maggie pulled up in her old station wagon, and they drove across town to a local shelter. When they arrived, Emma was surprised to see volunteers busy preparing dinner for the homeless. Miss Maggie handed her an apron with a wink. “Sometimes, the best way to find joy is to give it away.”

Emma joined in, serving meals and talking with people who were down on their luck. One elderly man caught her attention. He looked lonely, and without a second thought, she brought him a plate and sat with him for a while, listening to his story. In that moment, she realized that her own troubles seemed so much smaller compared to the needs around her.

As they drove home later that night, Miss Maggie looked over at Emma with a knowing smile. “How do you feel now, dear?”

Emma thought for a moment. “I feel...lighter,” she said, surprised at the peace in her heart.

“That’s the joy of giving, sweet girl,” Miss Maggie replied. “When we take our eyes off ourselves and focus on others, we discover the kind of joy that comes from the Lord.”

We see a beautiful example of this in the story of Zacchaeus. When Jesus called Zacchaeus down from the tree and invited Himself to his home, Zacchaeus experienced a transformation. His natural response to the grace and love of Jesus was to give—he joyfully pledged to give half of his possessions to the poor and repay anyone he had wronged four times over (Luke 19:8). His generosity flowed out of the joy he found in Christ, showing us that true joy comes from giving in response to God’s love.

It’s easy to get caught up in our own worries and the busyness of life, especially at Christmas, but the joy of giving is where we find true fulfillment. Whether it’s through offering a meal, lending a hand, or simply being present with someone who needs encouragement, we reflect the love of Christ in every act of kindness. As Acts 20:35 reminds us, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

So, as we celebrate the greatest gift of all—Jesus Christ—let’s remember that we’re never more like Him than when we are giving of ourselves. The joy of Christmas is found not in what we receive, but in how we share His love with those around us.

Today’s Challenge:

Give a thoughtful gift to someone in your life. It doesn’t have to be something bought from a store—it could be homemade, like baking, a handwritten letter, or even a small piece of art. The important part is that the gift reflects your care and thought for that person.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-7. What does Paul say about the attitude we should have when giving, and how might this perspective change how we approach helping others, especially during the Christmas season?

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How can giving generously—whether time, resources, or kindness—transform our own hearts as we reflect Christ’s love to others?

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Celebrate God's Goodness

*For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

—Psalm 100:5, NIV

Read: Luke 5:1-11 and John 6:1-14

Have you ever had a moment where you realized just how good God has been to you? I mean, one of those moments where His blessings come pouring in, overflowing your "nets" in ways you couldn't even imagine? That's exactly what happened to Simon Peter in Luke 5. Here was a man who'd been fishing all night—no luck, nothing to show for all his hard work. Then, Jesus steps in with a simple instruction: "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4). Now, I don't know about you, but I might have been tempted to question that. After all, Simon was the expert fisherman, not Jesus. Yet Simon obeyed, and what happened next? His nets weren't just full; they were full to the point of breaking! That's the kind of blessing God brings—overflowing, abundant, more than we ever dare to expect.

But here's the part that really moves me: Simon wasn't just dazzled by the miracle—he dropped to his knees in humility, overcome by the presence of Jesus Himself. He knew that this incredible blessing wasn't just about the fish; it was about the Giver, the One who knew exactly what he needed and met him right there in that moment. And that brings me to this thought—how many times have my own "nets" been full to breaking, yet I've been too distracted by the blessing to remember the One who gave it to me?

Christmas is a season full of blessings and beautiful moments, isn't it? Family gatherings, warm meals, lights, and gifts—they're all around us. But just like Simon, we have the chance to pause, to look past the gifts and focus on the Giver. Every one of these blessings is a reminder of the goodness of God, who loves us and delights in us. And as wonderful as each gift is, they are really just a glimpse of His heart—ways for us to remember that Jesus Himself is the greatest gift of all.

So this Christmas, let's make a conscious choice. Instead of letting the gifts, the busyness, and even the joyful chaos distract us, let's remember who it all points to. Let's celebrate not just what He's given, but who He is. He's our Provider, our Savior, our ever-present Help. And every single time He fills our nets, He's inviting us to come closer, to know Him more, and to share His joy.

Friend, there's something life-changing about taking the time to celebrate God's goodness—to let each blessing turn your heart back to Him. Let's come to the feet of Jesus, just like Simon did, with hearts that are grateful and eyes that see beyond the gifts. This season, may we be filled with joy—not because our nets are full, but because we know the One who fills them. After all, the best part of the blessings is knowing the One who gives them, who loves us more than we could ever imagine. And in that knowledge, there's a deep, abiding peace that nothing else can offer.

Today's Challenge:

Thank God for three simple blessings you might normally overlook—a warm meal, a kind word, or a moment of peace. Write them down and offer a quick prayer of thanks, letting His goodness bring joy to your day.



The goodness of God is shown in many ways—from being our Savior to our Provider. Connect a verse from the Bible to each of the following words that point to the goodness of God.

- Helper -

- Savior -

- Provider -

- Comforter -

- Redeemer -

- Healer -





Live in Gratitude

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. —1 Thessalonians 5:18, NIV

Read: Luke 17:11-19 and Psalm 100

The year that Madison was born, Michael was on his own for Brendan's birthday. It was a week before Christmas, and I had just gotten home from the hospital, recuperating from a C-section. I decided to stay back and wrap some gifts while taking care of the baby. Thankfully, Michael and his brother offered to host the party—eight energetic kids on the loose, full of sugar, at a local arcade.

Apparently, after buying them lunch, giving them cake, and supplying them with handfuls of tokens, Michael had a run-in with a six-year-old girl. With her hands on her hips and shoulders pulled back, she announced, "I demand more tokens!"

"It's ungrateful, but not all that out of the ordinary for kids," I told Michael that evening. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that ungratefulness isn't all that out of the ordinary for adults either. For many people, Christmas becomes a season of "give and give me some more." Stores are overrun on Boxing Day, and it's not just because people are exchanging their gifts—they're filling their carts with everything they wanted but didn't get the day before.

In many ways, it mirrors our prayer life. James 4:3 says, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." We're often willing to pray, but do we treat our prayers like a wish list? And as the days unfold, are we truly ready to

give thanks for all things? Sure, we may thank God for the big blessings, but do we thank Him for the ordinary ones we've come to expect? Do we thank Him in the midst of our trials? Do we thank Him when life doesn't go as we planned?

Billy Graham once said, "A spirit of thankfulness is one of the most distinctive marks of a Christian whose heart is attuned to the Lord."

This brings to mind the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17. These men, afflicted and cast out, found themselves on the fringes of society. When they saw Jesus, they recognized Him as their only hope, crying out, "Master, have pity on us!" Jesus, in His mercy, instructed them to go and show themselves to the priests, and as they went, all ten were miraculously healed. But only one—a Samaritan, an outsider among outsiders—turned back to give thanks.

Jesus noticed his return and asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" It's a question that echoes for us today. Are we among the nine who quickly receive but rarely return to give thanks to God? Or do we choose the path of the one grateful leper, who recognized that his healing came from a hand far greater than his own?

There's a difference between being healed and being whole. All ten lepers received physical healing, but only one experienced the deeper wholeness that comes through faith and gratitude. The Samaritan leper's heart was transformed because he chose to acknowledge and give thanks to God, seeing beyond the gift to the Giver.

As we approach Christmas, let's step back from the "give me" mentality that so easily surrounds us. Let's cultivate a spirit of thankfulness—a heart willing to return to God, no matter what we receive or how our prayers are answered.

Today's Challenge:

Take a few minutes today to list five things you're grateful for, no matter how small they might seem. Then, spend a moment in prayer, giving thanks for each one. Let this be a reminder of God's constant presence and goodness, even in the ordinary moments.

❓ In Luke 17:11-19, what distinguishes the one leper who returned to Jesus from the other nine? What can this teach us about the importance of gratitude in our own lives?

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❓ What are some specific ways that Psalm 100 encourages us to express gratitude to God?

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Joyfully Serve

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. —Galatians 6:9, NIV

Read: Proverbs 31:10-31

One of my all-time favorite memories was captured in a photo of my son Nathaniel, back when he was about eight years old. I had stepped away from rolling dough for a moment, and when I came back, there he was—on his hands and knees, leaning over the cupboard, rolling dough with such concentration. Caught in the act, knee-deep in baking, he had this quiet joy on his face, as if he was doing exactly what he was meant to do.

That's classic Nathaniel. He's 23 now, and his heart for serving others has only grown. He holds doors open, carries groceries, fills water glasses without being asked, and even pulls weeds from the garden. It's more than just kindness; it's a willingness to do good, the kind of "well-doing" that Paul talks about in Galatians.

Paul writes, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." (Galatians 6:9-10, NIV).

This isn't just about being a "good" person; it's about deep, intentional goodness—the kind that gives without expecting anything in return. It's a light that shines simply because that's what light does. As Matthew Henry said, "Our present time is seed time; in the other world, we shall reap as we sow now."

Isn't that what this season is about? Christmas invites us to sow seeds of joy, to give from a place of love, expecting nothing in return. But, if we're honest, it can be easy to grow weary, can't it? We pour ourselves into gift-giving, meal-prepping, and serving our families, and sometimes, we wonder if anyone even notices. Yet, Paul reminds us not to lose heart. The joy in serving doesn't come from applause or recognition; it comes from knowing we're reflecting the love and kindness of Christ.

Do you remember that little song, "This Little Light of Mine?" We sang it as kids, putting our fingers up like little candles, promising not to hide our light. But what is that light, really? It's more than just a declaration of faith; it's a way of life. It's letting the goodness of God show up in the small, everyday moments—like rolling dough beside your mom or offering a helping hand to someone in need.

Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). This Christmas, let's let our light shine through acts of joyful service. Let's make it a season of spreading joy—not just with decorations or presents, but with the kind of goodness that comes from a grateful heart. When we serve joyfully, we reflect the love and kindness of Christ, and that's a gift that lasts well beyond the season.

So, as you move through the busy days ahead, remember that every small act of kindness is a seed. And even if we don't see the fruit right away, we can trust that God will use those seeds in ways we may never know. Let's joyfully serve, let our light shine, and celebrate the goodness of God with every step.

Today's Challenge:

Look for one simple way to serve someone today without expecting anything in return. Maybe it's holding the door for a stranger, refilling someone's coffee, or lending a listening ear. As you do this, take a moment to silently thank God for the opportunity to reflect His goodness. Let it be a reminder of how even the smallest acts can spread joy.

⓪ Read Proverbs 31:10-31. What are some specific qualities of the 'woman of noble character,' that reflect a heart for serving others?

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⓪ Proverbs 31:20 says, “She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.” What are some practical ways we can follow her example during the holiday season?

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Share the Good News

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

—1 Corinthians 1:17 (NIV)

Read: 1 Corinthians 2

One Sunday morning, my mom and dad were sitting in church, listening closely as the pastor spoke about the power of sharing the gospel. He painted a picture of the gospel as a seed, explaining how even a single one, when planted, grows and produces more seeds over time. “If you keep planting those seeds,” he said, “they’ll multiply again and again.”

To help everyone remember that message, the pastor asked the ushers to pass out two seeds to each person in the congregation. It was a simple but powerful reminder, as if he were saying, “Plant the good news and watch it grow.”

The following summer, after another Sunday service, my dad walked up to the pastor and handed him a small paper bag. Surprised, the pastor asked, “What is this?”

My dad smiled and replied, “These are the seeds you gave us last year. I planted them, and I wanted to show you how they multiplied.” Each seed was a reminder of how the gospel spreads, reaching further than we might ever see.

A few years later, after my dad passed away, we gathered by his graveside to say our goodbyes. During that tender moment, the pastor reached into his pocket and pulled out that same small bag. Holding it up, he said, “I got

this bag of seeds from your father a couple of years ago. These seeds represent the gospel he planted in each one of your lives.” Then, as he reached into the bag to pass out the seeds, he continued, “And now, it’s your turn to keep planting those seeds.”

If there was one thing about my dad, it’s that he loved sharing the gospel. He saw it the same way the angels did the night they appeared to the shepherds—as good tidings of great joy. The coming of Christ was good news that had to be shared. And do you know who else shared the gospel? The shepherds. Despite their low social status, God chose them to be among the first people to hear and spread the news of Jesus' birth. The Bible tells us that after they went to Bethlehem to see the child, they "spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child" (Luke 2:17). The choice of these humble, marginalized men to announce the arrival of Jesus reveals an important theme in the gospel: God often works through the least likely people to carry out His plans.

And you know what? Sharing the gospel doesn’t have to be a 45-minute sermon. It doesn’t require a well-known speaker or someone with thousands of followers. God can use each of us right where we are—whether we're influential or unnoticed—to share His love and truth. Often, the most meaningful ways we share the gospel are through small acts of kindness, a listening ear, or a simple word of encouragement. It’s those small, sincere moments that touch hearts the most.

Today’s Challenge:

Share something meaningful about your faith with someone today. It doesn’t have to be lengthy and in fact can be simple—follow God’s lead. Let your words reflect the purity and power of the gospel message, trusting that God will work through even the humblest efforts.

⓪ According to 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, what did Paul rely on instead of wise and persuasive words? And why was that important?

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⓪ According to 1 Corinthians 1:26, what three characteristics does Paul say were *not* typical among those called by God? How can this encourage us when we feel inadequate in sharing the gospel? (also see 1 Corinthians 1:27)

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Seek God's Presence Daily

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. —John 1:14, NIV

Read: John 1

Last Christmas, there was a knock on our door. When I opened it, three people stood on our front steps, bundled up with rosy cheeks and wide smiles. One held a guitar, another shook sleigh bells, and they began singing Christmas carols right there on our doorstep. Their voices floated through the cold air, filling our home with warmth. Just listening to them sing brought me back to all those years when caroling was something we did every December, moving from house to house, sharing joy with neighbors. I knew the words to so many carols back then.

To be honest, I never stopped to think about what the words really meant, but this time was different. The words hit me in a new way, and I stood there, truly listening. One line from "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" stood out: "Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel."

Take a moment and let that sink in. Did you know it has always been God's desire to dwell with His people? Not just to watch over us from a distance, but to be with us, right here in our lives.

The name Immanuel—"God with us"—captures this perfectly. God didn't just send a messenger or an angel; He came Himself, stepping into our world as Jesus, living among us, and sharing in our joys and struggles.

He didn't come with palace grandeur or worldly power. Instead, He chose to come humbly, stepping into our broken world to bring hope.

The words of that carol echo the prophecy in Isaiah: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (Matthew 1:23). God had been promising this for centuries—a Savior who would make His home with us.

Throughout the Bible, we see God's heart for dwelling with His people. In the Old Testament, God's presence was with the Israelites in the form of a cloud by day and fire by night. Later, He instructed them to build a tabernacle, a special place where He could be near them. But even then, there was a sense of separation. Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and even that was only once a year. God's desire wasn't to keep us at a distance. He wanted intimacy with His people—a closeness that would break down every barrier.

And that's what He did through Jesus. John 1:14 tells us, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Jesus took on human form, not just for a moment, but to fully live as one of us, experiencing our pain, our joy, and our temptations. He was "pleased as man with man to dwell." God didn't come reluctantly; He came joyfully, choosing to make His home with us, knowing it would cost Him everything.

This is the heart of the gospel—that God's love compelled Him to draw near, to bridge the gap, to make a way for us to know Him personally. And as we reflect on these carols this season, don't just sing the words; let the message sink in. God's desire is still the same today. He wants to dwell with us, right here, right now, bringing us hope, comfort, and peace. That's Immanuel. That's the miracle of Christmas.

Today's Challenge:

As you go about your day today—whether you're working, cooking, or running errands—play some Christmas carols and really listen to the words. Let them sink in. Reflect on the message of each song and allow the reminder of God's love and presence to fill your heart with hope and peace.

⓪ Read John 1:14. What does it mean for ‘the Word’ to become flesh and make His dwelling among us?

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⓪ We know that God desires to be close to us. What are some ways that you intentionally draw closer to Him?

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