





I love sunshine. There's something about the warmth on my face and the brilliance of light that brings joy to my heart. In fact, when we bought our car last year, I told my husband I didn't care what kind of car he picked as long as it had a sunroof. There's just nothing like opening the roof to let the sunshine flood in. The long days of summer are my favorite, especially here in Manitoba, where the sun doesn't go to sleep until after 10 p.m.

Cloudy days, on the other hand, are a mixed bag for me. I don't mind the fluffy white clouds that float lazily across a blue sky—they're like nature's artwork. But those thick, heavy clouds that block out the sun? I could do without them. They make everything feel a little dimmer, a little heavier.

Isn't life like that sometimes? We have sunny days when everything feels bright and full of possibility, and then we have cloudy days when the weight of the world seems to press in. It's easy to let the clouds take over, to let

*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

—1 Thess. 5:16-18

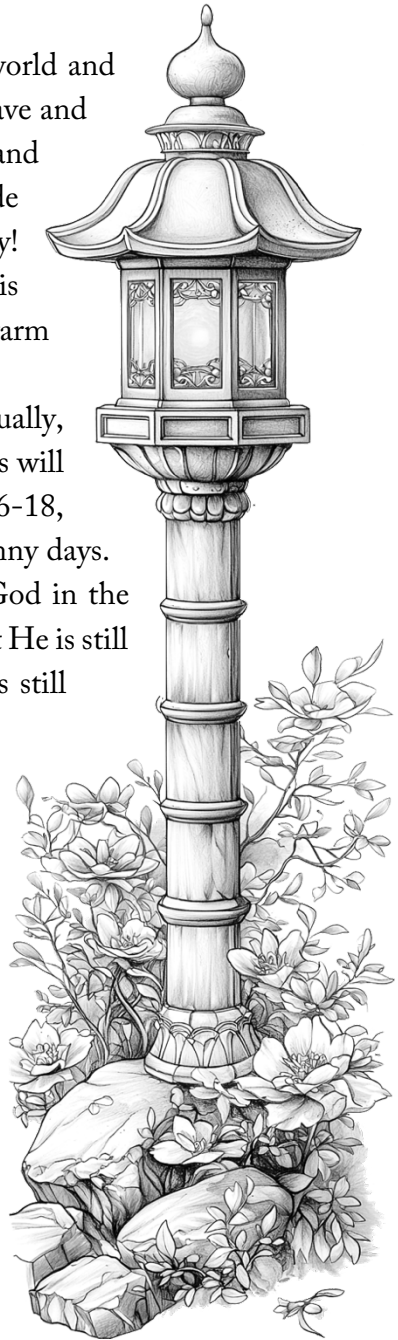
worries and frustrations block our view of the good things around us. But here's the thing—gratitude can be the key to shifting our perspective.

Gratitude shifts our focus away from this world and back onto Christ. It reminds us of all that we have and how much we are loved. It dissipates clouds and invites the sun to break through. Gratitude changes our attitude, thus changing our day! When we take time to thank God for His blessings—even small ones like sunshine or a warm cup of coffee—we open the door to joy.

The Bible says, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NIV). Notice that gratitude isn't just for the sunny days. It's for the cloudy ones too. When we thank God in the middle of life's storms, we're acknowledging that He is still in control, that He is still good, and that He is still working all things together for our good.

So how do we cultivate gratitude on cloudy days? Start small. Write down three things you're thankful for every morning. Pause to thank God for the beauty of creation, the kindness of a friend, or the simple joy of a favorite song. Gratitude isn't about pretending everything is perfect; it's about recognizing that God's goodness is present in every moment.

Just like a sunroof can bring a little light into a car, gratitude can bring a little joy into our lives. It doesn't chase away every storm, but it does give us the strength to face them with hope. Let's make it a habit to look for the sunshine—even when the clouds try to block our view.



## READ AND REFLECT

Read Acts 16:16-34. Paul and Silas chose to pray and sing hymns despite their painful circumstances. What can we learn from their response to trials about cultivating gratitude and joy?

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### 3 WAYS TO CULTIVATE JOY

1. MEDITATE ON GOD'S CHARACTER: REFLECT ON HIS MERCY, GRACE, AND STEADFAST LOVE.
- 2.
3. SPEND TIME OUTDOORS: TAKE A WALK OR SIT IN NATURE TO MARVEL AT GOD'S CREATION.
4. PRAY WITH GRATITUDE: BEGIN EACH PRAYER BY THANKING GOD FOR HIS BLESSINGS, BIG AND SMALL.

# TODAY I'M THANKFUL FOR

Use the space below to list four things that you're thankful for.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_



## LET'S MAP IT OUT

*Live in an attitude of prayer, bringing everything to God.*

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

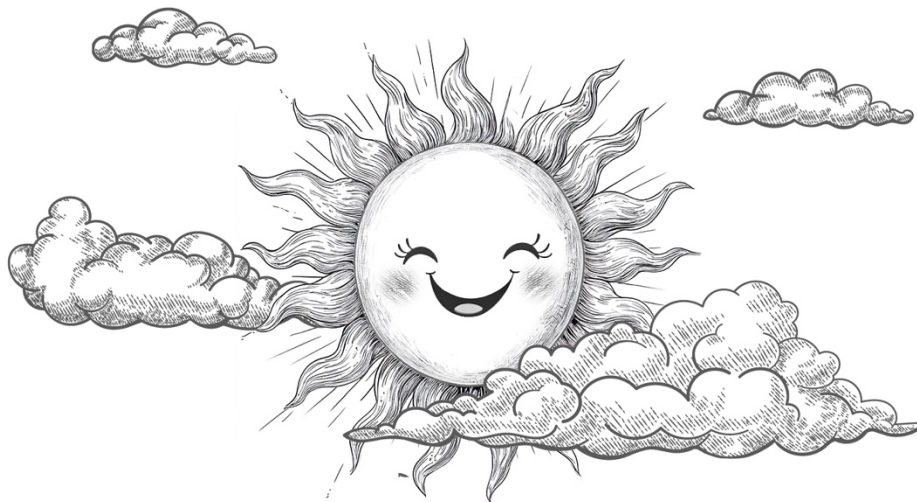
*Joy is not based on circumstances but on God's unchanging character.*

*Gratitude is not limited to when things are easy. Look for reasons to be thankful.*

*Thankfulness shifts our perspective, even in hardship*

1 THESS. 5:16-18, NIV

*God's design for us as Christ's followers.*



## WHAT'S CLOUDING YOUR VIEW?

Can you think of a time when joy felt far away? What challenges were clouding your view of God's goodness? And how might practicing gratitude have opened the door to joy?

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## *More Food for Thought...*

In that day they will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in Him, and He saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in Him; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.'

– Isaiah 25:9



The righteous will rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in Him;  
all the upright in heart will glory in Him!

– Psalm 64:10



Be glad, people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for He has given you the autumn rains because He is faithful.

– Joel 2:23



And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

– Luke 1:47

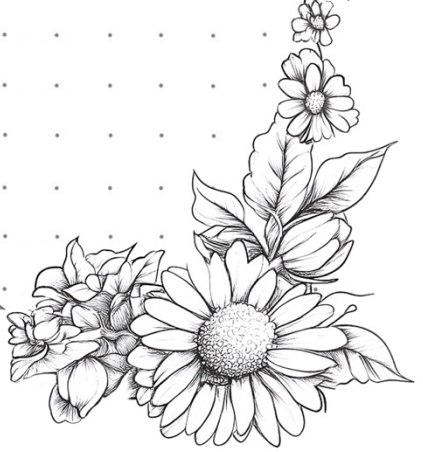
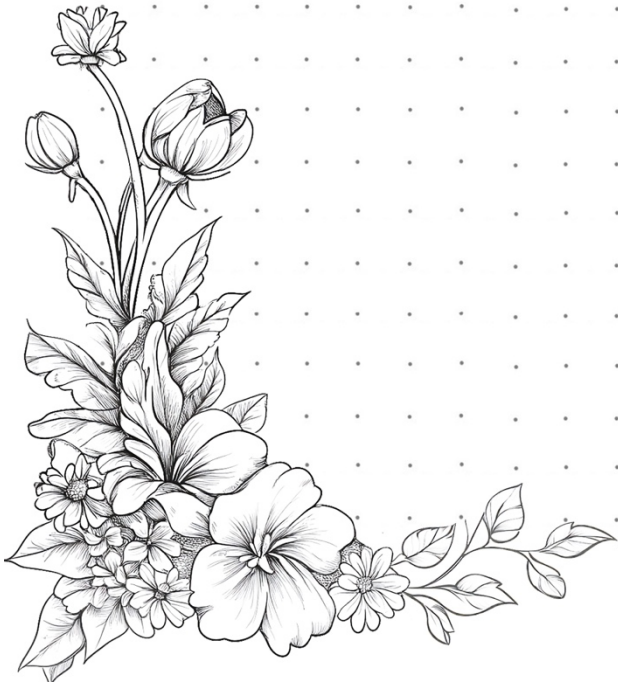


Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise Him.

– Psalm 33:1



Thoughts  
and Jots



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## WALKING AND LEAPING AND PRAISING GOD



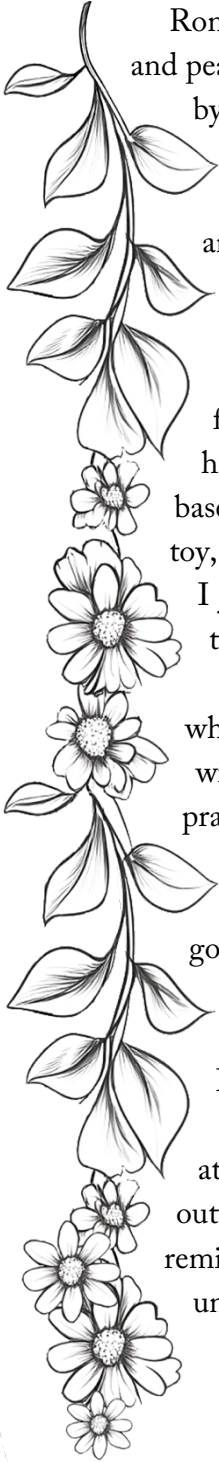
It's been years—a whole lot of years—but you never forget your first publishing contract. It all began with an interview I did for Christian Women Online Magazine, which opened the door to an exciting opportunity I hadn't anticipated.

The journey was fun, but not without challenges. Finding the right publisher took months—months filled with hope, uncertainty, and countless prayers. If there's one thing I clung to during that time, it was the power of prayer. I spent that season on my knees, pouring my heart out to God and trusting Him to lead the way.

Looking back, it's clear that those moments of waiting weren't wasted. They were a time of preparation, teaching me to rely on God more fully and to find joy in the process, not just the result. Often, we want answers right away, but God uses seasons of waiting to grow us in ways we wouldn't choose on our own. It's in those moments that we learn to lean into His faithfulness, trusting that He's doing a good work even when we can't yet see it.

*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



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." That verse perfectly captures what I felt during that season. My prayers, though filled with longing, were also filled with trust. I learned that joy and peace come not from the outcomes we hope for, but from surrendering to God's perfect will.

Eventually, the moment I had been waiting for came. One day, the phone rang with the news I'd been praying for—I had a publishing contract! I'll never forget the joy and hilarity of that moment. In my excitement, I bolted down the basement stairs to share the news with my son, tripped on a toy, and landed flat on my back. But even that didn't stop me. I jumped up, laughing at myself, and kept running to share the good news.

Whenever I think of that night, I'm reminded of the man who was healed in Acts 3:8. The Bible tells us, "Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God." His joy wasn't quiet or contained—it was a bold declaration of what God had done.

True joy isn't just about answered prayers or things going our way. It's about recognizing God's presence and faithfulness throughout the journey. Joy rises when we trust Him, not because everything is perfect, but because He is with us. It's the kind of joy that makes you laugh at yourself, stumble in excitement, and boldly proclaim, "Look at what God has done!" That's the beauty of joy—it's an outward expression of an inward trust in God's goodness. It's a reminder that His promises are true, and His love is unchanging.

# READ AND REFLECT

Read Acts 3:1-10. The people around the lame man noticed both his healing and his joy. What can the man's actions teach us about the way we respond to God's blessings?

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## LET'S MAP IT OUT

*God doesn't just offer us hope—  
He is the source of our hope.*

*God is filling us* *complete, abundant measure*

May the God of hope fill you with all

joy and peace as you trust in him,

*Joy = charaa (strong's 5479) a deep, abiding sense of joy and gladness that is rooted in spiritual realities rather than external circumstances.*

*an active, ongoing process of surrendering our worries to God.*

so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. *Hope is generated by the Holy Spirit*

*the purpose is to ↑ overflow and impact others.*

—ROMANS 15:13

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# 10 Reasons We Should Let Joy Overflow

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- 1. JOY IS A POWERFUL TESTIMONY OF GOD'S WORK IN OUR LIVES.**  
THE HEALED MAN'S JOY CAUSED PEOPLE TO BE AMAZED AND RECOGNIZE GOD'S POWER.
- 2. OVERFLOWING JOY POINTS OTHERS TO THE SOURCE OF TRUE HOPE.**  
OUR JOY AND PEACE ARE MEANT TO OVERFLOW BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, INSPIRING OTHERS TO SEEK CHRIST.
- 3. JOY IS CONTAGIOUS AND INSPIRES OTHERS.**  
A CHEERFUL HEART BRINGS JOY TO OTHERS. WHEN WE SHARE OUR JOY, IT LIFTS THOSE AROUND US.
- 4. OUR JOY GLORIFIES GOD.**  
WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE ARE FILLED WITH JOY, THEY GIVE GLORY TO HIM, AND OTHERS NOTICE HIS GOODNESS.
- 5. SHARING JOY ENCOURAGES OTHERS THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES.**  
GOD COMFORTS US SO THAT WE CAN COMFORT OTHERS. OUR JOY CAN OFFER HOPE TO THOSE WHO ARE STRUGGLING.
- 6. OVERFLOWING JOY SHOWS GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR HIS BLESSINGS.**  
THE HEALED LEPER RETURNED TO JESUS, PRAISING GOD IN A LOUD VOICE, AS AN EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE.

**7. IT FULFILLS OUR CALLING TO BE LIGHT IN THE WORLD.**

WE ARE CALLED TO LET OUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE OTHERS SO THEY MAY SEE OUR GOOD DEEDS AND GLORIFY GOD.

**8. JOY BUILDS UP THE BODY OF CHRIST.**

WHEN WE ENCOURAGE OTHERS WITH OUR JOY, WE STRENGTHEN THE FAITH AND UNITY OF BELIEVERS.

**9. IT REFLECTS THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES.**

JOY IS A FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND LETTING IT OVERFLOW SHOWS THAT GOD IS AT WORK IN US.

**10. OUR JOY GIVES OTHERS A GLIMPSE OF GOD'S KINGDOM.**

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT ABOUT MATERIAL THINGS BUT ABOUT RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE, AND JOY IN THE HOLY SPIRIT.



## *More Food for Thought...*

Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.

– Psalm 126:5



But you will rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

– Isaiah 41:16



My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to You—

I whom You have delivered.

– Psalm 71:23



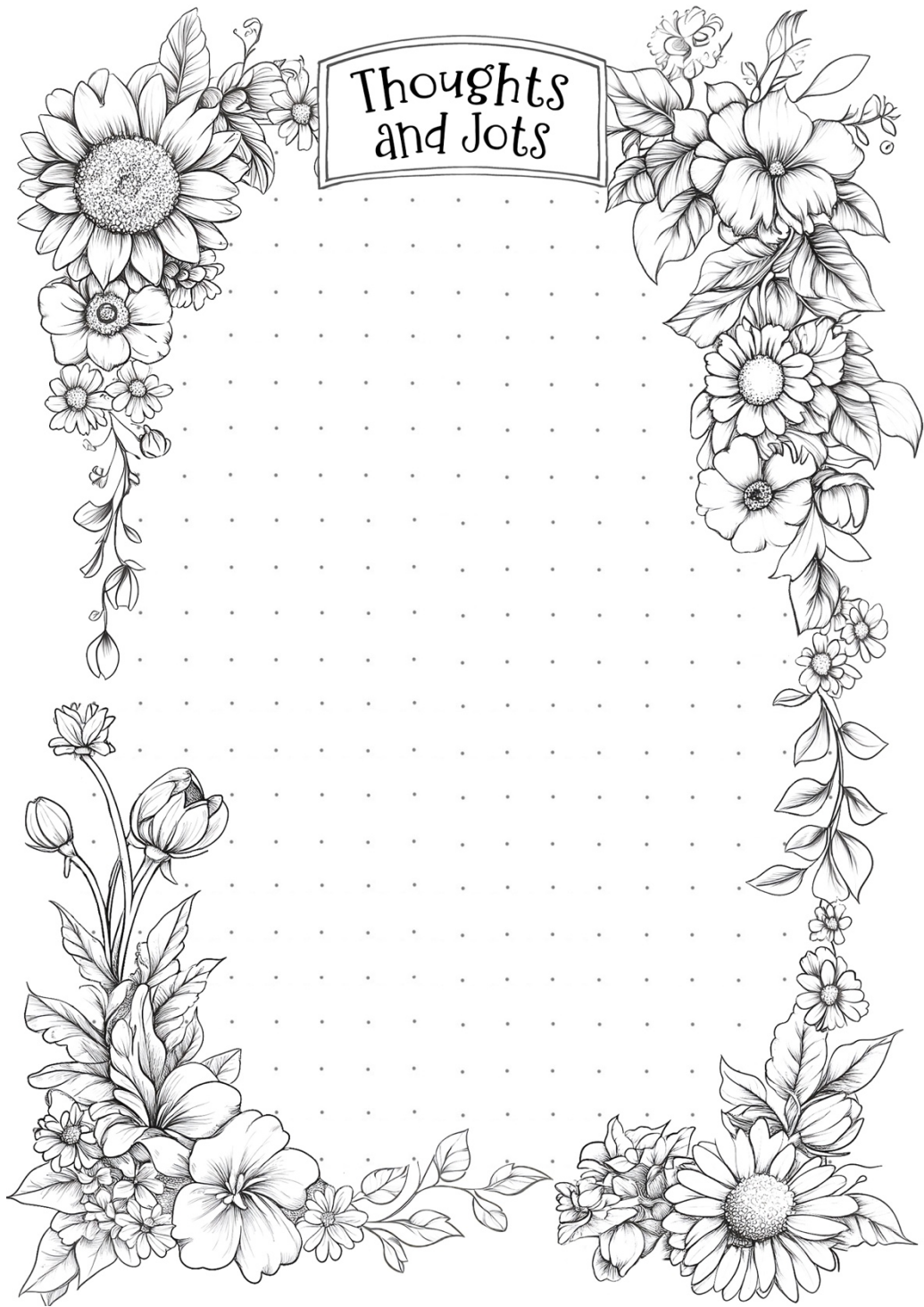
We wait in hope for the Lord; He is our help and our shield. In Him  
our hearts rejoice, for we trust in His holy name.

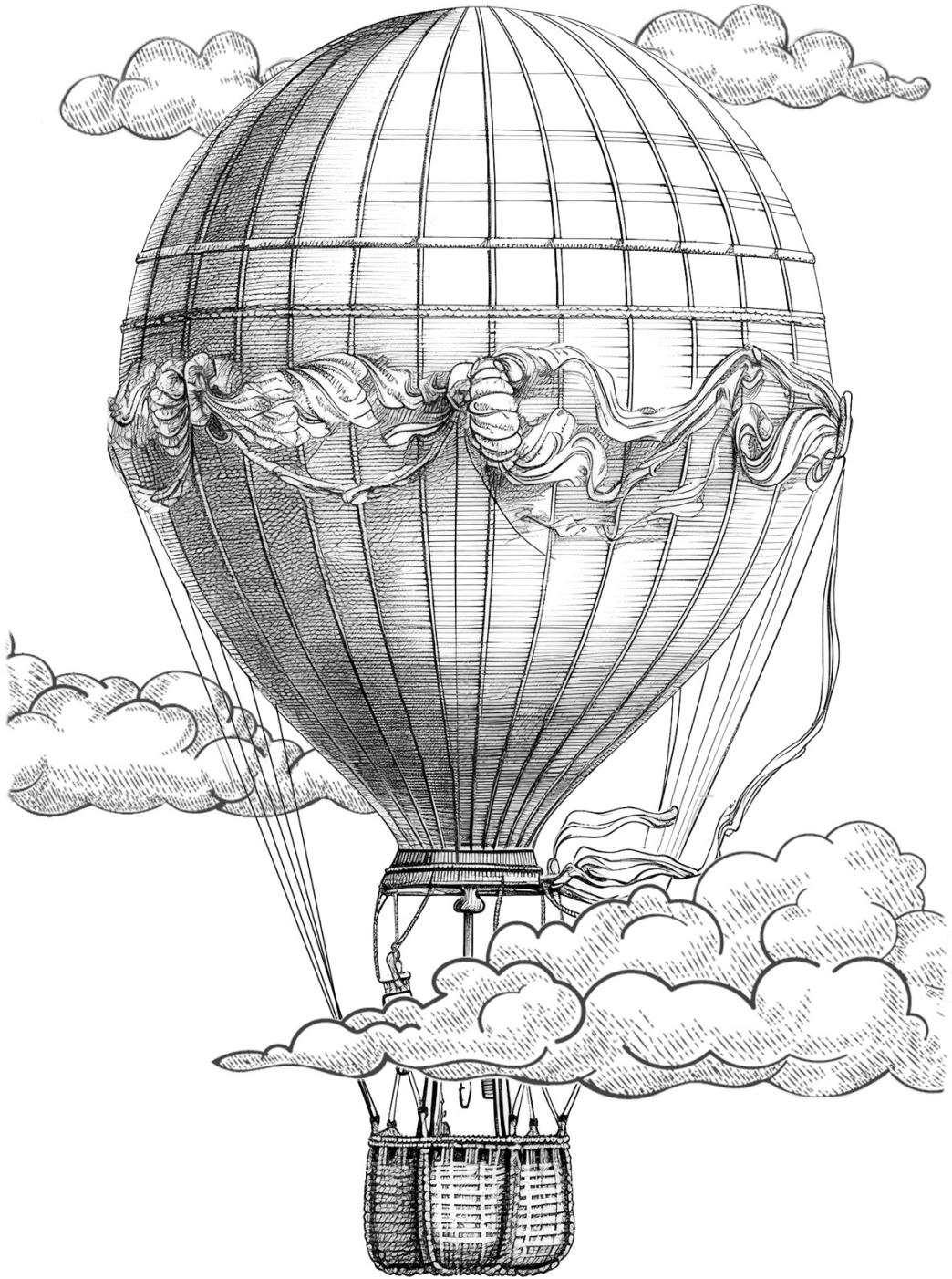
– Psalm 33:20-21



Deceit is in the hearts of those who plot evil, but those who  
promote peace have joy.

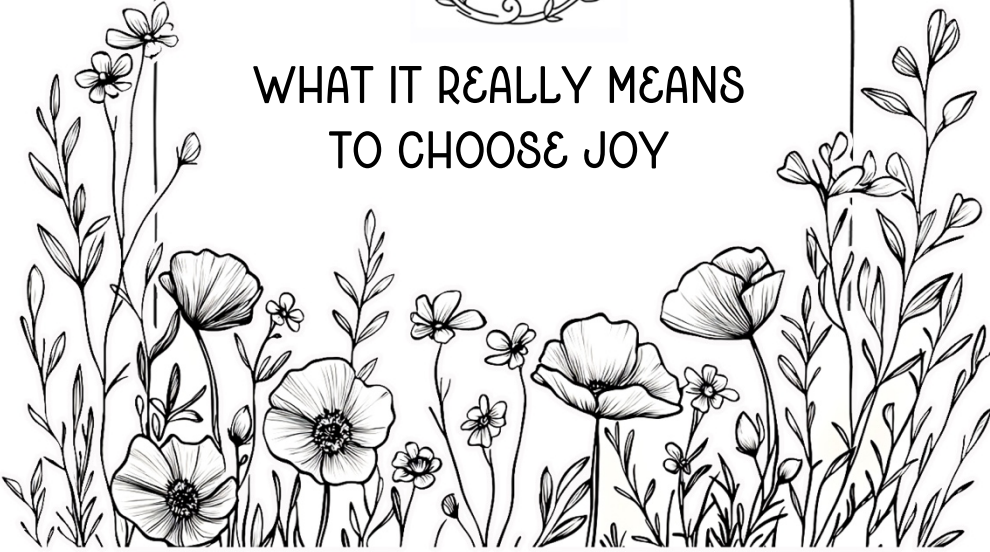
– Proverbs 12:20







## WHAT IT REALLY MEANS TO CHOOSE JOY



In times of deep sorrow, two little words can feel impossible at times: *choose joy*. Is it really that simple? Can I just *decide* to feel something I don't? It's almost as though people expect us to flip a switch and go from carrying deep hurt to radiating happiness, as if choosing joy means ignoring the weight of our pain. The idea feels almost dismissive of the depth of our pain. And yet, perhaps there's *more to those two words than meets the eye*.

When James writes, "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds*" (James 1:2, NIV), he's not telling us to fake a smile or pretend everything is fine. The word *consider* invites us to take a different approach. It doesn't ask us to deny our pain but instead to shift our perspective.

The Greek word for *consider* here, *hēgēomai*, implies leading or guiding our thoughts. In essence, James is encouraging us to *choose* how we interpret our circumstances. It's not about ignoring the reality of our trials but recognizing that joy and sorrow can coexist because of the hope we have in Christ.

*Consider it pure joy,  
my brothers and  
sisters, whenever  
you face trials of  
many kinds.*

—James 1:2



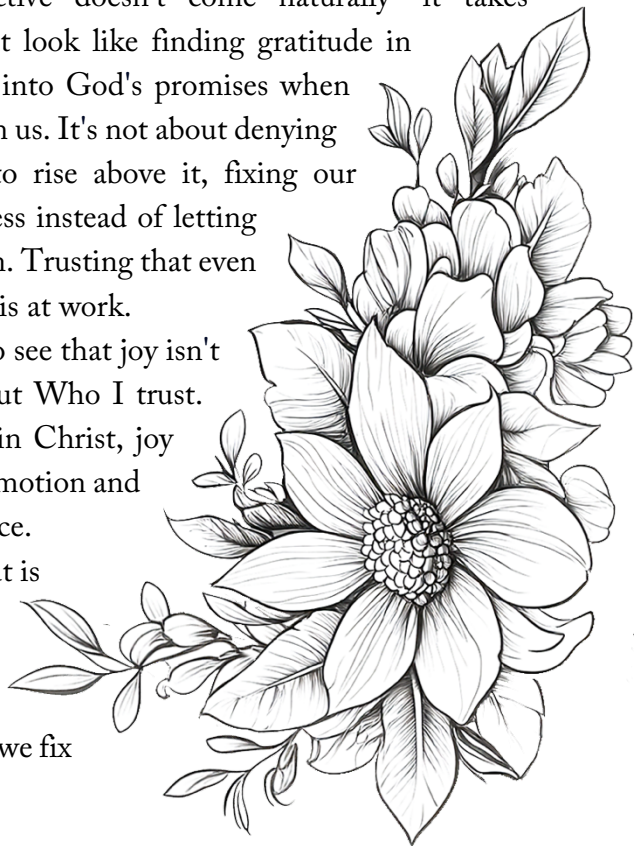
Think of it as a hot air balloon. Life's trials are heavy and burdensome, like sandbags weighing us down. But when we fix our eyes on God's promises and release those weights—fear, anger, doubt—we can rise above our sorrow. Joy doesn't erase the storm; it simply lifts us high enough to see the bigger picture.

Joy isn't about plastering on a happy face; it's a deep-seated confidence in God's goodness and faithfulness, even when life feels anything but good. This type of joy is rooted in knowing that our trials have a purpose. James goes on to explain that trials produce perseverance, which leads to spiritual maturity (James 1:3-4). Joy, then, isn't about *feeling* good but about trusting God's ability to bring good from the hardest moments.

This shift in perspective doesn't come naturally—it takes intentional effort. It might look like finding gratitude in small blessings or leaning into God's promises when fear threatens to overwhelm us. It's not about denying the pain; it's a decision to rise above it, fixing our thoughts on His faithfulness instead of letting our thoughts bring us down. Trusting that even when we don't see it, God is at work.

Over time, I've come to see that joy isn't about what I feel; it's about Who I trust. When I anchor my hope in Christ, joy becomes less of a fleeting emotion and more of a steadfast assurance.

So, is it simple? No. But is it possible? Yes—because joy isn't something we create; it's something that flows from within us when we fix our eyes on the Lord.





## READ AND REFLECT

Read Habakkuk 3:17-19. Habakkuk shows us what it looks like to trust God with a heart that says, 'Even if life falls apart, I will rejoice in the Lord.' Take a moment to write your own 'even if' prayer in a similar fashion, reflecting on how you can choose to trust and rejoice in God no matter what challenges you may face.

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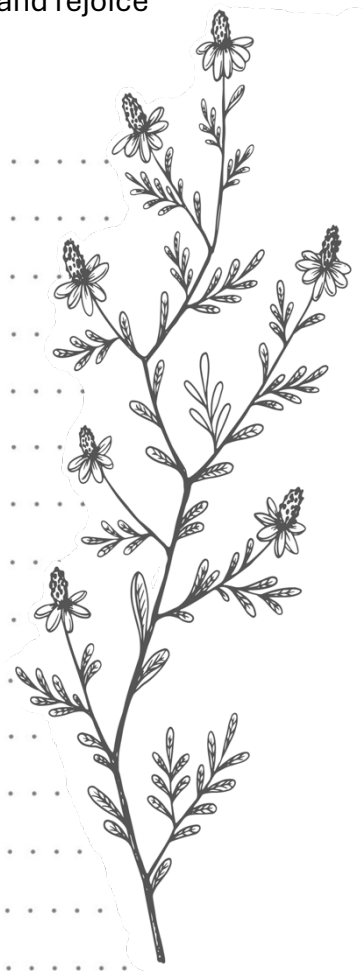
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NO SOUL THAT SERIOUSLY AND  
CONSTANTLY DESIRES JOY  
WILL EVER MISS IT. THOSE  
WHO SEEK FIND. TO THOSE  
WHO KNOCK IT IS OPENED.

—C.S. LEWIS



## JOY IN THE SIMPLE THINGS

Use the space below to list five things that have brought you joy this past week:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_





## LET'S MAP IT OUT

*hēgēomai in Greek is to lead, guide, or direct one's thoughts.*

Consider it pure joy,

*pure joy isn't mixed with other emotions like anger, bitterness, or despair*

my brothers and sisters,

whenever you face trials of many kinds.

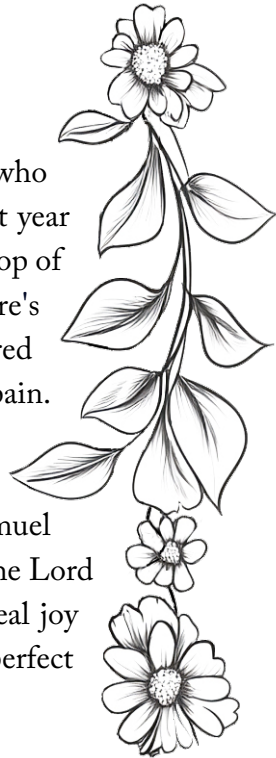
*emotional, physical, spiritual, financial, etc.*

*peripiō in Greek. To fall into unexpectedly.*

James 1:2, NIV  
*temptations, tests, or hardships*

## HANNAH CHOSE JOY

In 1 Samuel 1, we read about Hannah, a woman who knew the ache of waiting. She longed for a child, yet year after year, her prayers seemed to go unanswered. On top of that, she faced ridicule from those around her. But here's what stands out—Hannah didn't give up. She poured her heart out to God, trusting Him with her deepest pain. And her joy? It came *before* her circumstances changed. After praying, she worshiped, knowing God was faithful even in the waiting. Later, in 1 Samuel 2:1, she declared, "My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high." Her story reminds us that real joy isn't rooted in what we receive, it's in trusting God's perfect timing and unfailing goodness.



## *More Food for Thought...*

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold—may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

–1 Peter 1:6-7



For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

–2 Corinthians 4:17



Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

– Romans 5:3-4



For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline.

–2 Timothy 1:7

Thoughts  
and Jots

