

# JOY!

## Introduction

Prophesied in the Old Testament and manifested in the New, scriptures reveal we obtain an inexpressible fullness of joy through relationship with Christ Jesus. Yet, as a believer in relationship with Jesus, I struggle daily to experience this promised joy. I often cry out, Lord help me to feel joy! Nevertheless, no matter how much I pray I just cannot seem to feel joy. Could it be that joy is not meant for me in this season of my life? As the apostle Paul says, God forbid! In fact, it is just the opposite. God wants us to experience joy in every season of our lives, regardless of the circumstances.

As you journey through this devotional, I pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal a deeper understanding and practical ways of how to access the joy that is always within you because of the love and grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

### **ISAIAH** 9: 1-3

The people who walked in  
darkness  
have seen a great light.  
They lived in a land of shadows,  
but now light is shining on  
them.  
You have given them great joy,  
Lord;

### **LUKE** 2:10-11

“Don't be afraid! I am here with  
good news for you, which will  
bring great joy to all the people.

This very day in David's town  
your Savior was born—Christ the  
Lord!

### **JOHN** 15: 9-11

I love you just as the Father loves me; remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

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## ① fixing Our focus

The world defines joy as a feeling of great pleasure and happiness, and like all other feelings it will come and go depending on our circumstances. But the truth, as scripture reveals, is that joy does not come and go, it is always within us. When we accepted Jesus into our lives, our bodies became a temple of the Holy Spirit; as a result, our bodies are no longer our own and neither is our joy. Since joy is the fruit of the Spirit, it is not dependent upon our circumstances or our own might and power. It is simply the joy of the Lord within us that fills and gives us strength.

So how do we access the joy that is always within us? We must shift our focus. Pastor Steven Furtick says, “joy is a focus before it is a feeling”. To feel joy, we must first focus our priorities on the things of God and walk in His Spirit, especially during difficult times. Jesus tells us that in this world we will face troubles; so, we have to let go of the idea that joy is the “absence of sadness” (Furtick). Because if we allow ourselves to believe that experiencing joy is dependent upon the smoothness of the seas we sail, we will never live the abundant life God wants for us.

Therefore, we must learn how to fix our focus when the storms rage and the waves crash against us. We must frequently remind ourselves of what our ABBA, our good Father, has done for us in the past, and set our minds on His promises for our future (Jeremiah 29:11). When we fix our focus, we will be able to access the joy that will never leave or forsake us no matter the circumstance.

So, when the clouds roll in, where will your focus be?

### **NEHEMIAH** 8:10

Today is holy to our Lord, so don't be sad. The joy that the Lord gives you will make you strong.

### **PSALM** 126

The Lord has done great things for us. And we are filled with joy.

### **1 CORINTHIANS** 6:19

Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and who was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourselves but to God.

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## ② following Jesus' example

Jesus understands that fixing our focus to experience joy is a daily battle, which is why He tells us to “take up our cross daily”. Figuratively, this implies we must put to death our own plans and desires and turn our lives over to Him, every day. And the great news is, we will receive His promise of joy when we do!

So, what are practical ways we can take up our cross and surrender our lives unto Jesus? Simply put, we must follow His commandments and the example He set for us. Jesus tells us the two most important commandments are to love God with all our hearts, souls, and minds and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-38). These two go hand in hand because if we truly love God we will demonstrate it through our interactions with others.

An obvious way to show our love for God is to offer charity, a dedication or sacrifice of our time or finances, to those in need. These acts of faith honor God because we are freely giving the same love, grace and comfort He’s provided us in our own times of need. When we cheerfully give, both we and the recipient experience the joy of the Lord! However, Jesus desires more than sacrifice, He desires mercy.

Because we have been given and forgiven much, Jesus calls us to show the same love and forgiveness to those who have offended, trespassed, or stood at odds with us. Whether it is an ornery coworker, a challenging parent or student, or even an inconsiderate driver on the road, Jesus tells us to love, pray for and make peace with our enemies. This is not a suggestion but a command, and it is intended for our benefit. Because if we allow anger and resentment to take root, we will prevent the Holy Spirit’s peace and joy from manifesting within us.

Even while suffering on the cross Jesus loved, prayed for and forgave his enemies and fixed his focus on the joy to come. By following His example, we will be able to experience the abundant, joyful life we were created to have, and maybe even win the most obstinate of souls for Christ.

If we truly love God and desire the joy of Jesus, let’s ask ourselves- who **must** we show love to today?

### LUKE 9:23

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

### LUKE 6:27-36

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you... Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

### JOHN 13:15-17

For I have given you an example, that you should do for each other what I have done for you. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.

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## **3** Finding Time for Communication

Throughout this devotional, the Holy Spirit has revealed how accessing the joy within us requires action: fixing our focus on the righteousness of God and following His example. When we do these things, we are abiding, or remaining steadfast in the love of Jesus, which He promises will allow our joy to be complete. Nevertheless, these actions are not easily achieved even on our best day. So, how do we receive the guidance and strength needed to persevere in our pursuit of joy? Through direct communication with Jesus.

The world would have us believe the most important forms of communication are those we participate in digitally with our fellow man: e-mail, text message, Facebook, Twitter, etc. However, these relentless forms of communication tend to leave us drained and distracted, and cause us to neglect those that are simplest and most fulfilling: reading God's Word and speaking to Him. If we truly want to experience joy, we need a loving and lasting relationship with God, which, like any other, is founded on verbal communication.

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus frequently withdraws from crowds, his apostles, and even his family to study the word of God and pray (Matthew 26: 36; Mark 1:35; Luke 2:49, 5:16). He models the importance of communicating with God on a regular basis, at all times of the day and in all circumstances. Jesus offers prayers of thanksgiving, petitions for others, and strength to accept the suffering he must endure; and in return, He receives God's comfort and direction.

If following Jesus' example will complete our joy, then we too must build a deeper relationship with Our Father by knowing his Word and spending time in prayer. Psalm 37:23 states God is interested in every detail of our lives, so let's include him! After all, how can we grow in our understanding of, and draw nourishment from, God if we don't take the time to talk to him? That being said, let's make communication with God a priority. He desires to hear from us, let's not delay!

Reflection: What times throughout the day can we steal away to read His Word and speak to Him?

### PSALM 1

Blessed is the one...whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.

### EPHESIANS 6:18

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion

### JAMES 5:16

The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

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## **4** fellowship

Fellowship, or companionship, is the key to a lasting relationship with God. Putting forth effort to spend time together, communicating with words of praise and affirmation, and doing good for one another are ways to sustain any loving relationship, and these are exactly the kinds of daily sacrifices that please God most. As highlighted in the previous devotionals, Jesus reveals the two most important commandments are loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Therefore, if we truly want fellowship with God we must have fellowship with one another.

When Jesus was arrested and crucified, His apostles scattered, leaving one another to fend for themselves. But after His resurrection and the fulfillment of His Holy Spirit, the apostles recognized the importance of companionship and devoted themselves to fellowship every day. Not only did their fellowship advance God's kingdom, by bringing others to Christ, but it also deepened their own relationship with Him. And as a result of being united with each other, they felt God's presence even stronger, producing joy in their hearts.

By gathering regularly with a community of believers who share our faith we too will be more closely connected to God and experience the fruit of joy in our hearts. This is because participation in a faith-based community can break the strongholds of sin and keep us on the right spiritual track by reminding us how to keep our salt and light. God wants us to fellowship, not only for the benefit of others, but also for ourselves.

So, if we are reluctant to gather and participate in our church community, we must dig deep and ask ourselves why. Are we distracted by the things of this world? Do we fear the opinion of others? Or do we feel unworthy, thinking our presence does not make a difference? If we answer yes to any of these questions, it is imperative that we return to the Word of God to be reminded of our true identity.

Holy Scripture tells us we are a new creation through Christ and should not conform to the things of this world. Holy Scripture commands that we should fear no man but God. Holy Scripture assures us we are gifted with talents that enable us to do great works by the power of the Holy Spirit. And most importantly, Holy Scripture confirms that we are forgiven and loved by our patient Father in Heaven.

From the beginning, God created us to be companions because He knew we would struggle navigating this world alone. So, we can rest assured that our Good Father will bless our obedience and sacrifice to fellowship by making our joy complete.

### **GENESIS** 2:18

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him."

### **1 JOHN** 1:3-4

We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.

### **ACTS** 2:42

They were continually and faithfully devoting themselves to fellowship...everyone felt that God was near...and their hearts were glad.

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## **5** focused gratitude

To access the joy of the Lord within us we need to develop an “attitude of gratitude”. An attitude is defined as a way of thinking that influences one’s behavior, and gratitude as the quality of feeling thankful, including, a readiness to show appreciation. Simply put, if we regularly focus our thoughts on things we are thankful for, and rightfully praise God for them, our attitude, or the way we see life, will shift, better enabling us to experience joy.

Now, let’s be honest. It’s easy to feel and show gratitude when things are going well. It is in the midst of trials when gratitude is challenging. But it is precisely during these difficult times when we most need an attitude of gratitude.

Sometimes when we’re growing through a difficult season, others attempt to encourage us by saying things like, “it could be worse,” or “be thankful, other people have it worse than you”. And while this may be true, it often invalidates the difficulty of what we are experiencing and generally does not make us feel better. Therefore, encouragement to be thankful during a difficult season should not negate someone’s feelings but help to shift his or her focus to a spiritual perspective.

As discussed in the first devotional, we Christians know that “here on earth we will have many trials and sorrows” (John 16:33), and in order to overcome them, we must “fix our focus” (Furtick). To achieve this, we must be mindful of negative thought patterns and intentionally shift our focus to the many blessings God has given us: those in the past, the present, and His promises for our future. Because if we allow ourselves to focus only on our troubles, we stifle the fruit of the Holy Spirit and His ability to work within us.

A quick and effective way to fix our focus is to lift our voices in prayer and praise. Communicating with our Father and audibly giving him thanks brings us into the present moment and restores our focus. Once our focus has been restored, we can then view our situations from a heavenly or spiritual perspective. This perspective acknowledges God’s power and ability to work in our lives and allows us to let go and let Him work. Essentially, interrupting these negative thought patterns with prayer and praise will enable us to experience the promised joy and peace of Jesus.

But it’s important to understand, gratitude is more than a feeling, it’s a habitual way of thinking which requires action. So, let’s get into the habit of lifting our voices in praise and thanksgiving to the only God, our good Father, who has given us all things! In Him alone, we have unending joy!

**1 CHRONICLES 16:34**

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever.

**HEBREWS 13:15-16**

Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name.

**1 THESSALONIANS 5**

Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.