

The Power of Joy

I want to propose to you that **your destiny, the direction which your life takes, will be determined by what you choose to be your primary source of joy.** 25% of job success is predicted by IQ and 75% by your optimism, social support and ability to see stress as a challenge instead of a threat.

God has designed our biology and physiology to make us happy. Happy hormones generally refer to endorphins, and research shows that serotonin in particular, lingers in your system after exercise and can be released by maintaining a positive mood. Dopamine is released when you move toward a goal, and oxytocin is activated through physical contact, intercourse, childbirth. These are actually neurotransmitters and your body's natural pain killers. Work is being done where they are increasing people's happiness and seeing their productivity going up by 31%. It's a predictor of longevity just like smoking, high blood pressure and obesity have correlations with premature death. **Happy people feel more secure, decide easier, have more cooperative behaviour and finally have a satisfying life in today's dynamic and changing environment (Vinhoven, 1993).**

In this message I will unpack the nature of true biblical joy and illustrate how we can use joy as a weapon in victorious Christian living.

What is Joy?

Joy is a state of mind and an orientation of the heart. It is a settled state of contentment, confidence and hope. It is something that provides a source of happiness.

Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control. The quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every circumstance. Rick Warren.

Levels of happiness:

1. **Pleasure of the moment** eg .enjoying an ice-cream. Then its gone. Momentary. **Yet some of the most extreme expressions are made at this basic level of joy.**
2. **Success by winning or achieving.** Feeding into self worth. Eg scoring a goal. Feeling like the training paid off. But you can still have buyer's remorse. You look back and are satisfied/happy with your work.
3. **Contribution to your community** feeling connected and significant
4. **Fulfilment of a cause or purpose bigger than ourselves.** A sense of Meaning.

Chara - "extend favor, lean towards, be favorably disposed" – properly, the awareness (of God's) grace, favor; joy ("grace recognized"). "Enter the joy of your master", "They returned with joy". "Hear the word with joy" "More joy in heaven for the sinner who repents..."

Chadah - Rejoice

Ancient Greek – joy is something you feel moving towards your potential cf modern thinking of joy merely as pleasure.

Whether we are talking about a long run or child birth it is painful but joyful. Joy makes you want to do certain things. Joy makes us want to invest as deeply as possible into our loved ones. A common myth is that happiness comes from being blind to the negative.

“If you sugar-coat the present you make poor decisions for your future”. Shawn Achor

1. Joy is an internal state

It's not based on external circumstances

Phil 4:11-12 11I am not saying this out of need, for I have learned to be content regardless of my circumstances. 12I know how to live humbly, and I know how to abound. I am accustomed to any and every situation—to being filled and being hungry, to having plenty and having need....

James 1:2-3 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

This is why when people ask how life is treating me, I say “I am treating life well”. This is the ability to see opportunity in calamity.

1 Peter 1:8-9 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Joy is essentially more to do with the unseen than the seen. When you are delighted by circumstances then you just experience the lower levels of pleasure.

Joy is primarily a heart condition, having a joyful heart.

Prov 17:22 A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Endorphins are released naturally through the pituitary gland and these serve as “feel good chemicals” and natural analgesics. Smiling helps too. Once you smile, the facial muscles are automatically stretched. The movement of these muscles then triggers the brain to produce endorphins. **So what you do with your body does affect your internal emotional state.** Research shows that people who laugh more often release higher levels of endorphins in a day. In fact, statistics depict that children who laugh approximately 300 times per day are shown to release more endorphins relative to adults who only laugh about 5 times per day. Some people dispute these figures but the point is that children laugh a lot more than adults.

One of Norman Cousins’s (Political journalist) most famous quotes is: ***Hearty laughter is a good way to jog internally without having to go outdoors.***

2. God is our source of Joy

Isaiah 9:2-3 2The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. 3You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

Romans 15:13 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.

Joy and peace produce hope. Hope is a by-product of joy and peace. **Our role is to trust Him. That's our work. It's to believe. His work is to fill us with joy and peace. Joy is a by-product of trust.**

Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"

The degree to which you make Jesus the source and centre of your joy is the degree to which you will experience supernatural inexpressible joy. You will always rejoice in something but when you rejoice in God it produces true joy.

3. Joy is a central aspect of the Kingdom of God

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Luke 2:10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

What news are you listening to?

1 Chronicles 16:27 Splendour and majesty are before Him; strength and joy are in His dwelling place.

Rom 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

The King of the Kingdom is full of joy so joy is part of being Christ-like.

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected--a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.

If we can't feel sorrow then we won't feel joy. Numbing is not selective.

Ps 45:6-7 6Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. 7You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your fellows.

Ps 45:7 You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

Ps 45:7 New Living Translation You love justice and hate evil. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you, pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on anyone else.

4. Joy gives you strength

Nehemiah 8:10 Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Research has shown that joy produces dopamine that helps you to perform better. Sadly many people are anxiously trying to perform in order to produce results so that they can be happy, but it actually works the other way round.

It is important to guard your joy, especially before embarking on significant endeavours.

5. Joy draws people

Joy can be experienced at a national level. This is emotional contagion. Joy is infectious and people are attracted to it.

Esther 8:17 In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.

They were not intimidating but joyful yet fear seized the others and drew them in.

6. Joy is our response to His presence

Sad to say, many people disassociate joy and gladness from church. They think of religion like health food—it may not taste good, but it's good for you so you endure it. But the Bible declares that **in God's presence is fullness of joy; at His right hand are pleasures forever (Ps. 16:11).** If we as His people are to reflect His image, then we must become joyous people.

Isaiah 12:6 Praise the LORD in song, for He has done excellent things; Let this be known throughout the earth. 6 Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, For great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Jonathan Edwards has a wonderful sermon, "God, the Best Portion of the Christian," based on Psalm 73:25, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth." He writes (The Works of Jonathan Edwards [Banner of Truth], 2:106),

Hence we may learn, that whatever changes a godly man passes through, he is happy; because God, who is unchangeable, is his chosen portion. Though he meet with temporal losses, and be deprived of many, yea, of all his temporal enjoyments; yet God, whom he prefers before all, still remains, and cannot be lost. While he stays in this changeable, troublesome world, he is happy; because his chosen portion, on which he builds as his main foundation for happiness, is above the world, and above all changes. And when he goes into another world, still he is happy, because that portion yet remains.... How great is the happiness of those who have chosen the Fountain of all good, who prefer him before all things in heaven or on earth, and who can never be deprived of him to all eternity!

7. Sacrifice and giving should be done in Joy.

Ps 27:6 Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord.

When you do God's work do it in joy. Stop whining as you serve and sacrifice for the Kingdom.

Ps 100:2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Ezra 6:22 For seven days they celebrated with joy the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because the Lord had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.

What do you need to be celebrating right now?

Proverbs 12:20 "Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, But counselors of peace have joy."

Proverbs 21:15 "It is a joy for the just to do justice, But destruction will come to the workers of iniquity."

8. Negative situations can change

Isaiah 35:10 and those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

What should I do to become more joyful?

1. Let your spirit command your soul

Why are you down cast Oh my soul? Put your hope in God. Ps 42:5

2. Embrace your power to choose

Research shows the correlation between autonomy and joy. Don't allow yourself to be manipulated. *"I love you and give to you because that's what I want to do, not because I am afraid of you. I am free."*

3. Develop meaningful relationships

Harvard Study of adult development (75 years they have tracked the lives of 724 men). They found that the happiest people were those in meaningful relationships.

2 John 1:12 I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

4. Abide in Christ

This is called spiritual object constancy. You carry His love in your heart.

Your joy will be complete when you are filled with His words.

John 15:11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

This produces contentment. In Christ I am complete. His words are so dominant in my heart that other words don't affect me. His voice is the loudest within me. Listening to Jesus words breaks us into new levels of joy.

Research has shown the positive impact of prayer on your emotional state and immune system.

Research has also shown a positive correlation between spiritual intelligence and happiness.

When we walk closely with Jesus we carry His heart and are more likely to do random acts of kindness which influences our level of happiness positively.

5. Develop a lifestyle of gratitude

This is rejoicing! You become joyful to the degree to which you rejoice. This is a verb that produces joy.

What you think about and what you thank about is what you eventually bring about.

Develop a gratitude journal where you write down 3 to 5 things that you are grateful for daily.