

4 Reasons You Don't Have to Plaster on a Fake Smile

What happens when we go day after day, month after month, year after year and literally feel no joy at all?

Christians are supposed to be the most joyful people on earth, right?

But often, they are not. In fact, I'd venture to guess that there are as many Christians battling depression as there are unbelievers.

What has happened to our joy?

I'll never forget the day I was finally ready to admit I'd lost my joy.

Oh, it wasn't that I suddenly woke up one day and didn't feel any joy or happiness at all. It had been going on for quite a while. I just didn't want to admit to myself, much less anyone else, that I was in a state of depression.

Smiling was exhausting.

I was done pretending everything was okay with me when it wasn't.

I messaged my best friends and asked them to pray for me, and then I did the best thing I could have ever done in that moment:

I took out my Bible, I turned all the way to the back and found the section header "Joy" and began writing down Scripture references.

Over the next few weeks, I began meditating on verses that spoke about joy and rejoicing.

I wrote them down on index cards and kept them in my pocket. Throughout the day I'd take them out, read them, and then in a very animated way I would point my finger in the air and say, "God! Do you see that? Your Word says that your kingdom is joy! You give joy! I want that joy! I need that joy! Give me your joy!"

At first, it didn't seem as though anything had changed.

But this practice is much like taking vitamins as opposed to pain medicine. You won't see a change in four to six hours. It takes days, weeks, even months of stepping out in faith and believing that God's Word truly does change us from the depths of our being. ...

until our emotions
until our mind
until our will

all come into alignment with what Scripture says.

God rewarded my faith, and slowly, I began to notice a change in my emotions. That change began to reflect itself in my body as my energy levels began to rise.

Over time, laughter once again flowed from me in a very natural way and the small things—like my son's dimply smile, and my husband's crazy silliness—gave me incredible pleasure and satisfaction.

While there are simple changes we can make on the physical level that help, like cutting back on screen time so that our adrenaline isn't running on high all of the time, making healthy food choices and regular exercise that raises our

endorphin levels,

true joy comes from a supernatural source.

You cannot get joy from any tangible source. It is impossible! There is nothing in this life, in this realm, in this world that you can see, taste, touch, smell or hear that will give you joy.

It may give you pleasure and it may bring you happiness, but joy is supernatural.

What does the Bible say about joy?

1. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit

In Galatians 5, Paul lists nine qualities—or fruit—of the Spirit. The word Spirit in this verse is capitalized, meaning that he wasn't referring to our spirit, that these qualities are produced from inside of us, rather that these qualities are descriptive of the Holy Spirit.

He goes on to say that if we belong to Christ we have died to the passions and desires of the flesh, and we now live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit; so that these nine qualities of the Holy Spirit grow and become evident in our own life.

If we want to have joy in our life, we must first make a choice to stop doing those things that grieve the Holy Spirit. We must walk away from the desires of the flesh and live disciplined lives. And as we choose to

discipline our mind
discipline our will
discipline our emotions

we will find a greater joy inside as the Holy Spirit has

greater freedom to govern our lives the way God intended and the natural outcome of that is joy.

Just as we must prune a fruit tree if we want to have better, healthier fruit, so we must prune our own lives if we want the fruit of the Spirit to grow.

2. Joy and happiness are not the same.

Equating joy and happiness is like equating apples to oranges.

Joy is a quality of the spirit whose source is supernatural and is only dependent upon our abiding relationship with Christ. It is stable and cannot be taken away by outside sources.

Happiness is an emotion whose source is physical and is dependent upon circumstances and balanced hormones and mineral levels. It is unstable and subject to change at any moment.

Joy can lead to happiness, but happiness cannot lead to joy; because the physical cannot give birth to the spiritual.

You can be walking through the darkest hour of your life and still have joy.

In Hebrews 12:2b, we read that Jesus endured the cross and shame “for the joy that was set before Him”. Surely, enduring that level of torture, pain and ridicule was not just physically painful but emotionally painful as well. But He kept his eye on “the joy that was set before Him,” which was the salvation of the world.

When we choose to discipline our minds, our thoughts, and our emotions, we will find that while we may be going through the most painful circumstance of our life, we still have joy.

In fact, we may even find that our joy grows during this time, as we allow the Holy Spirit—and not our circumstances— to govern our soul.

As He continually reminds us to shift our eyes off of our circumstances and focus on what is good, true, honest, lovely, a good report, virtuous, and praise-worthy.

And that joy that grows in our life through godly discipline and the governance of the Holy Spirit will be a testimony to those around us.

3. Joy give us strength.

One of the most well-known verses of Scripture is from Nehemiah 8:10c, “For the joy of the Lord is your strength”.

The children of Israel had rebuilt the wall in Jerusalem, and the priest Ezra stood and read them the law. As he read the law, the Levites helped the people understand what they read. They were suddenly confronted with their sin.

Their rebellion had exhausted the Lord’s patience, and He allowed them to be taken into captivity and the seriousness of that sin has now hit them with full force. Nehemiah knew a time of mourning and fasting was to come, but first, they were to celebrate that holy day of the Lord.

The joy of the Lord would give their bodies and spirits strength.

Proverbs illustrates this when it says a joyful heart is good medicine. But in contrast, a sorrowful spirit dries up the bones.

It is medically proven that depression can lead to osteoporosis among a long list of other physical ailments and diseases.

I love what Proverbs 3:7-8 says, “Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from will be health to your body, and strength to your bones.”

When we choose to walk in the spirit, we will have joy. And the natural outcome of both is a healthy body and strong bones.

4. Joy cannot be taken away.

Stuff happens. Life happens.

We experience financial setbacks, an unexpected diagnosis, a death in the family, or wave after wave of small things that begin to accumulate.

Happiness dissipates, but joy doesn't have to.

The only one who can take away your joy is you.

God doesn't take away your joy. Circumstances cannot take away your joy. Mean people and bullies do not have the power to take away your joy.

Only you can take away that joy, and the only way you will find your joy is lost is

- when you stop focusing on Christ and start focusing on your circumstances
- when you stop identifying with Christ and start identifying with your past
- when you choose to live in sin

Those are the only three things that will cause your joy to be taken away, and all three of them rely on decisions made by you.

In John 16:22, Jesus promises His disciples that there will

come a day when their persuasion that Christ was the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy and that He had risen from the dead would be so firmly planted in their hearts that literally nothing could take away their joy.

And truly, each of them walked through horrific persecution, and all but one were martyred.

Their joy was never shaken, because their focus wasn't on the persecution, the tyrannical and maniacal rule of Nero, but on Jesus Christ.

And when our eyes are focused on Christ, nothing and no one can ever take it away.

Do you want that kind of joy in your life?

Do you want that joy that acts as a strong foundation for your life, on which you can plant your feet and joyfully endure the hurricanes of life?

Do you want to be 100 percent sure that no matter what happens, your joy will never be taken away?

This month, we are praying through Philippians, and we'll be talking more about how we can maintain our joy even through life's difficult seasons.

I hope you'll join me. {eo}

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