

7 Robbers of Your Strength

The book of Nehemiah says that “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10, NIV). Do you wonder how that can be true when you find it hard to maintain your joy for five full minutes? Do you think this is a biblical truth that applies to everyone but you? Think again.

The joy of the Lord is our strength. It is God’s will for our lives. And what He wills, He is able to accomplish in us—even in the midst of a bustling holiday season when we feel pulled in every direction.

If the joy of the Lord is our strength, then it stands to reason that joy would be a major focus of attack by the enemy. He wants to weaken us in whatever way he can. In order to fend off his attack, we have to be aware of the joybusters and strength-zappers he uses against us. Here are seven of them:

Resentment. Resentment is nothing new; it was evident even in Moses’ family. His sister Miriam and his brother Aaron envied him and began grumbling against him. They resented his leadership, his wife and his relationship with God.

The Lord heard their grumbling, and He called them into His presence. “[Moses] is faithful in all My house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?’ The anger of the Lord burned against them, and He left them” (Num. 12:7-9).

In essence, Miriam and Aaron were questioning God’s call on Moses’ life—much as some of us do with our own or others’ calls. We must realize that we have been called to our particular ministry for a purpose. No single ministry is better, more important or more valuable than another.

Still, some believers grumble about their places in the body:

“Why can’t I be like that person? Why have You given me this ministry? Why am I stuck at home with the kids when so-and-so gets to go out there and be on TV?”

If there’s something you resent, take a moment right now to repent before God and say, “God, I’m sorry I got my focus off You. I give up my resentment.” Keep in mind that God does care about our words and the condition of our hearts. There is no joy in resentment. Get rid of it.

Bitterness. Bitterness also will zap your joy in a heartbeat. But it doesn’t affect only you. In Hebrews 12:15, the Lord says, “See to it bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”

Bitterness doesn’t zap just your energy and strength, steal just your joy, and defile just you—it defiles many, those around you. Have you ever been in a relationship with someone who has allowed bitterness to grab her joy and tear it down? It’s almost impossible to feel joy in that person’s presence.

We do not live—or worship God—in a vacuum. When we allow the enemy to come in and steal our joy, our loss is contagious.

But the opposite is also true. If you breed joy and thanksgiving, your attitude will be infectious. Make it a point not to let bitterness creep in. Put an axe to the root as soon as you see it growing.

The longer you allow resentment to lodge in your thoughts, the more energy and power it acquires, giving rise to bitterness. Remember what James wrote regarding the tongue: “How great a fire is set by such a small flame!” (See James 3:5.) The flame of resentment can lead to a forest fire of bitterness—and eventually anger.

Anger. That’s another joybuster—anger. The Word tells us, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph. 4:26, NASB). Like bitterness, anger can “defile many.”

There is such a thing as righteous anger. Jesus got angry. God the Father got angry. But such anger does not lead to sin.

If you hear someone curse God or notice him working against God's plan, you have reason to get angry—with a holy, righteous anger. But you can't allow the anger to have to act on it and get over it.

Matt. 5:22 reads, "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (NIV).

Jesus obviously sees anger as a very big deal. He says that any person who speaks ill of his brother deserves the fire of hell. We may feel we have a reason to be angry, resentful and bitter toward another person, but when we allow these wrong attitudes to take up residence in our hearts, we are liable to judgment.

Unforgiveness. Eph. 4:32 says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Forgiveness sets us free—free to work in God's army, to be powerful in the joy of the Lord. Unforgiveness, on the other hand, steals our joy.

It also disqualifies us from receiving forgiveness ourselves. Jesus said, "'If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins'" (Matt. 6:14-15). God will forgive us as we forgive others, but if we refuse to forgive, then God withholds His forgiveness.

Eph. 4:31 tells us to "get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." Once we do that, we are supposed to move on toward

forgiveness.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Don't give up your power to the enemy.

Fear. Sometimes we hang on to joybusters for protection, not fully trusting God to take care of us. Lack of trust is actually fear—a huge joybuster.

The Word says in 2 Timothy 1:7, "God hath not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (KJV). The only fear we are to have is fear of the Lord, which is awesome reverence for Him, His majesty, His magnificence, His omnipotence, His power of creation, His power for salvation, His power for victory over the enemy. But we are not to be afraid of anything.

Fear causes us to be timid and lose the power and the sound mind that God has given to us. 1 John 4:18 tells us that "there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love" (NIV).

No one is greater than God, and nothing is more powerful than His love. If you are afraid—afraid you're not going to get that promotion, afraid someone is not going to like you, afraid of death, afraid for your children—remember, perfect love casts out all fear. God knows all, sees all, can do all and can heal all. There is no fear in love.

Offense. We will find opportunities to be offended everywhere we go. But if we choose to be offended, then we allow Satan to take away all the joy that is our strength.

Ps. 119:165 says, "Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble." To stumble means to be offended.

We don't want to stumble over anything. We want to be as sure-

footed as the deer, to have hinds' feet in high places. We want to ascend to the heights with God. If you're offended, if you are stumbling, then you cannot climb, sure-footed, to the heights.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus told his disciples, "[Some people] hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away " (Mark 4:16-17). In other words, they stumble.

Jesus tells us that in this world we will have trouble and persecution. He essentially says, "Trust Me, you're going to have tribulation and persecution. You're going to have trouble. Don't be offended. Don't fall away because of it." We want to be like the seed sown on good soil—those that hear the word, accept it and produce a crop yielding 30, 60 or even 100 times what was sown. We cannot waste our time and energy on offenses.

Disobedience. Sometimes we know what God wants us to do, but we just don't do it. Then we wonder why we lose our joy. We must acknowledge that disobedience is a major joybuster.

Remember when Jonah disobeyed God? God told Jonah to go to Nineveh because He had a message for the people there, but Jonah boarded a boat heading in the opposite direction. He endangered the lives of many because of his disobedience.

There is a ripple effect to sin. We don't want to hurt people through our disobedience, but we do hurt them when we allow Satan to steal our joy.

Jonah experienced no joy in his disobedience. He was hiding out, living in fear. When you're joyful you want to celebrate: You're powerful, productive and strong.

Jesus Christ came that you might have life and have it abundantly. But the enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy.

Don't let him get your joy. If you have never turned over these joybusters—resentment, bitterness, anger, unforgiveness, fear, offense and disobedience—to God, now is the time! Repent and be healed.

Marianne Clyde *is a licensed marriage and family therapist in Virginia.*