

The Supernatural Source of True Joy

For many Christians, serving God is a duty when it should be a delight. Billy Sunday said, "If you have no joy, there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere." Indeed, Christians should be the happiest people on the planet. A happy Christian is a strong Christian because "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). As C.S. Lewis stated, "Joy is the serious business of heaven."

Unfortunately, the Bible is perceived by some as a book of gloom and doom, rules and regulations, and super serious theological issues. Consequently, God is viewed as a killjoy in heaven who doesn't want people to have any fun. After all, God is somber, strictly business, and serving Him is drudgery, right? Wrong! That, my friend, is not an accurate picture of the Bible or the God who inspired it. The great revivalist John Wesley said, "Sour godliness is the devil's religion ... it originated among unhappy, semi-religious people who had just enough religion to make themselves miserable but not enough to do them any good."

God is the source of true joy. We can't have complete joy apart from Him. "In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11).

There is "fun" in sin or no one would commit it, but it is short-lived and the consequences take a terrible toll. You don't have to drink alcohol, do drugs, gamble, or engage in illicit sex in order to have "fun." It might surprise you how many joy-related words are found in the Bible. Words like "happy, glad(ness), joy, joyful(ly), joyous, rejoice(d), rejoicing, cheer, cheerful(ly), laugh(ed)" occur nearly 700 times combined in Scripture. Whoever said being a Christian is no fun was reading the wrong Bible.

God must have a sense of humor because He started the nation of Israel with a 100-year-old impotent man (Abraham) and a 90-year-old barren woman (Sarah). Isaac, their son's name, means "laughter." God promised them a son 25 years beforehand, but He waited until it was no longer humanly possible for them to conceive. Then God did the impossible, gave them Isaac, and restored joy and laughter to their lives. Proverbs 17:22 reminds us that "A merry heart does good, like medicine." Thinking about how funny Abraham's story is should give you a good dose.

Most Christians can quote Nehemiah 8:10—"The joy of the Lord is your strength"—but few know its historical context. The Israelites were a defeated, dejected, depressed people. They had just returned to their homeland after 70 years of Babylonian captivity eager to rebuild Jerusalem. Ezra, the scribe, read the Law of Moses "from the morning until midday" (and you thought your preacher is long-winded). Many of these former captives had never heard the Law. When they realized how far short they had fallen from God's expectations, they began to weep in despair. Ezra and Nehemiah calmed them down and told them not to weep but to rejoice. You see, wallowing in the misery of the past doesn't help or change it. Instead, we should rejoice that God has given us a new beginning and focus on a brighter future.

The psalmist David enjoyed his walk with God perhaps more than any other Bible character, but he temporarily lost his joy due to compromise. When he repented for his adultery with Bathsheba, David prayed, "Restore unto me the joy of my salvation" (Ps. 51:12). Condemnation lifted and his joy returned. Later, he wrote, "I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the house of the Lord" (Ps. 122:1). Then he urged his readers to "serve the lord with gladness" (Ps. 100:2). Serving God should be our delight not merely our duty!

As believers, we don't have to go to church, read the Bible, pray or give offerings—we get to! It's a privilege to serve

God. Joy is one of the surest signs of the presence of God. Joy, a fruit of the Holy Spirit, is an evidence of a Spirit-filled life. One author noted, "Joy is the flag that flies over the castle of the heart telling us that the King is in residence." When the Queen of England stays at Buckingham Palace, the British flag flies proudly to signify her presence. If the King of kings is living in our hearts, joy should be a main indicator of His presence.

True joy doesn't result from things or circumstances. Joy is not the absence of trouble, but the presence of Christ. Jesus never promised trouble-free living. In fact, He predicted the opposite, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). To quote C.S. Lewis again, "Don't let your happiness depend on something you may lose." New things may bring a temporary sense of happiness, but alas the newness wears off, the payment book arrives, and buyer's remorse sets in."

Lasting joy is not tied to material things but to a vibrant relationship with the one who is our source of joy! So take time to rediscover your joy, and learn to "enjoy the journey while you're getting where you're going?"

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