

THE JOY OF THE LORD

STRONG SOULS (9)



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

The Joy of the Lord

The Joy of the Lord
Strong Souls (9)
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The Joy of the Lord

Welcome to *The Joy of the Lord*

“Joy” is the consequence and conclusion of our calling to seek the Kingdom and righteousness of God. It is the sustaining affection of the heart in that, once we have attained it, nothing can shake us from it or deter us from the happiness and peace it entails.

The joy of the Lord is the work of God’s Spirit in us. As we yield to Him and His work, we realize more deeply and consistently the joy that comes from being in the Presence of God. God gives us joy, even in the hard times and tight squeezes of life, and we express that joy for all the world to see in a variety of ways.

Joy is God’s gift and our heritage. Let’s enter it as often and as fully as we can.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We’re happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you’ll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Enter the Joy

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12.1, 2

Strength in sorrow

We should not think of the Christian life as being without grieving and sorrowing. A well-kept heart, the anchor of a strong soul, knows how to grieve with hope, to sorrow and suffer without despairing. Jesus promised that, in this world, we would have tribulation, and we don't normally associate tribulation with good times (Jn. 16.33). Our lives are a journey through a valley of weeping, and we expect to know grief and sorrow during our sojourn on this earth.

But a well-kept heart is set on the joy that is ours in Jesus Christ, so that no amount of grief or sorrow, and no lesser forms of happiness, can dislodge us from that quintessential Kingdom condition (Rom. 14.17, 18).

We may bear up under all sorrows if we, like our Lord Jesus, will fix our minds and hearts on the joy that is set before us, in the Presence of God and His glory (Ps. 16.11). So great is the joy our Lord Jesus knows at the right hand of the Father, that even the *prospect* of that joy was sufficient to enable Him to bear up under the greatest trial and suffering imaginable.

That same joy is available to us, and it can turn our valley of weeping into a journey of joy and rejoicing. Strength to endure through grief and sorrow comes from looking *through* our trials *to* our eternal destination, and laying hold on the joy of the Lord to sustain us on our journey.

Joy is the great *sustaining* affection. It completes the cycle of affections that begins with love and reinforces the heart for even greater exertions for the Lord. As we work to keep our hearts with all diligence, therefore, let us nurture the joy which is ours to enjoy in the Presence of the Lord.

Joy in the Presence of the Lord

The end of our journey in life is pure, uninterrupted, fullness of joy in the Presence of the Lord (Ps. 16.11; 1 Jn. 3.1-3). The joy we know in the Lord's Presence is the joy He experiences with the Father and the Spirit. As we lay hold on the promises of God, we partake of Him, and participate in His love, joy, peace, and all the other fruit and virtues which the Persons of the Deity enjoy continuously together (2 Pet. 1.4).

The ultimate fount of joy is the Lord. From Him, from within His very Being, joy flows continuously, a joy which nothing can take from Him, nothing can obstruct or obscure, and which it pleases Him to share with us. This is pure joy, joy uninterrupted and unbounded, joy that comes from nestling into the very being and essence of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We rejoice to be *in* the Lord, and we are joyful *in* Him (Is. 61.10). Whatever may be the outward circumstances of our lives – whether favorable or dire – we may “rejoice in the LORD” and “joy in the God of [our] salvation” (Hab. 3.18). Whenever we come to the Lord in prayer, in His Word, in worship, or in periods of silent reflection sprinkled throughout our day, we may expect to know “exceeding joy” (Ps. 43.4) because of our relationship with Him. As we shelter in Him, resting in the shadow of His redeeming and protecting grace, we rejoice, feel exceedingly glad, and know complete and perfect peace (Ps. 63.7).

And we do this here and now, knowing full well that whatever *taste* of joy is ours in the present, it is but the most meager of *bors d'oeuvres* before the banquet of joy which is to come.

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As we run our race through this valley of weeping, fixing our eyes on Jesus and the joy in which He now dwells, we commit ourselves to the Lord and draw near to Him, and He will keep us from stumbling into despair, buoying us with His Presence and joy, and pointing us forward to when we will live forever “before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1.24).

Where we are, where He is

Joy is the great *sustaining* affection of the life of faith. The joy of the Lord is our strength throughout our journey, both as we *anticipate* the joy we will know in the eternal Presence of the Triune God, and as we *experience* His joy here and now.

For we know that the God Who *is* joy, *in Whom* is *all* joy, is with us always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28.20). He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13.5). We have been seated with Him in the halls of eternal joy and rejoicing (Eph. 2.6), so that we enter the joy of the Lord, knowing His Presence with us, where we are, and with Him, where He is.

This is the great privilege and hope of every Christian, and this is what separates believers in Jesus Christ from those who vainly seek the joy for which they have been created anywhere other than in Him. We *know* the Lord! His Spirit *dwells within our hearts!* And we *have access* to the Father by our faith! Thus, the joy of the Lord, that which our heart desires above all else, is available to us now and forever, world without end!

The love we nurture in our hearts for God strains and stretches toward the joy that comes from knowing Him. And that joy, when we experience it, greatly enlarges our love for Him Who is our joy, and strengthens our soul for serving Him in everything we do.

For reflection

1. What is joy? Do people sometimes mistake happiness for joy? What’s the difference?
2. Why do we say that we may know the joy of the Lord here and now? How can we do that?
3. What are the greatest hindrances keeping you from knowing the joy of the Lord?

Next steps – Preparation: Review the verse for today’s lesson. What does it mean to fix your eyes on Jesus, exalted in glory? How can you begin to practice this more consistently?

2 The Work of the Spirit

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Galatians 5.22, 23

From without

Joy comes to us as a gift from God. Make no mistake about it, the only joy you will ever know, the joy you need for strength to travel through your valleys of weeping, and the joy you hope for beyond this life, that joy – the only *true* joy – is in and from God alone. We can't gin it up from within ourselves. It does not attach to things or circumstances. Joy is a fixed condition, inherent in the Being of God, and it is bestowed, nurtured, and sustained within us by God Himself.

Joy is a primary fruit of the Spirit of God, as He works within us, willing and doing of God's good pleasure (Phil. 2.13).

Because joy comes from *without*, by the work of the Spirit *within*, if we want to experience joy, we must understand as much as possible about the Holy Spirit, how He works within us, what He's trying to accomplish, and how we may collaborate with Him (Phil. 2.12) for joy and all the fruit, gifts, and power He bestows.

Let's take a closer look.

The Spirit's goal

Joy comes from the Spirit. He exudes joy within us as He shapes us into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are made for joy, and we are made to be like Jesus. The Kingdom into which Jesus has conveyed us has joy as its defining state (Rom. 14.17, 18). One day we will be as perfectly like Jesus as is possible for each of us to be, because we will see Him as He is (1 Jn. 3.1-3). Then our joy will be *complete*, that is, we will be joyful and rejoicing always. At the same time, our complete joy will continue to increase as well, as we discover more and more of the infinite riches of beauty, goodness, and truth that are our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our joy will be full and increasing at that time because we will be like Jesus, Who dwells in perfect, complete, and infinite joy (Jude 1.24). Since our joy will be *exceeding* in "the presence of His glory" on that great day, it makes sense to believe that our joy will *increase* in this life to the extent that we are shaped and transformed into the image of Jesus by the inward work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

This is the Spirit's goal in your life. By sending His Spirit to dwell within you, God's purpose is to have full and unlimited access to your soul – mind, heart, and conscience – so that He might shape your thinking, guard and nurture your affections, and shore up your priorities for a life of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3.18). The more you become like Jesus – *learning* Jesus, as Paul put it (Eph. 4.17-24) – the more you can expect to experience the *joy* of Jesus by the work of the Spirit within.

You will be frustrated in knowing the joy of the Lord if your goal in the Christian life is anything other than that which the Spirit is seeking. If you just want to find a good church, have some reliable Christian friends, learn lots of neat things about the Bible, or be daily assured that you're going to heaven when you die – if any of these or anything else is the goal of your Christian life, then you will not know the joy God has for you in Jesus as fully as you might.

But, by understanding and submitting to the work of the Spirit, joy can be your daily experience, and joy can grow in you day by day.

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The work of the Spirit

It's not without reason that the Scriptures instruct us to *walk* in the Spirit, to *be filled* with the Spirit, *set our minds* on the Spirit, *sow* to the Spirit, and be careful not to *quench* the Spirit (Gal. 5.16-23; Eph. 5.18-21; Rom. 8.5-8; Gal. 6.8; 1 Thess. 5.19). Since the joy for which we have been created and redeemed comes from the Spirit, we should do everything we can to get on board with His agenda and follow along as He leads.

This means understanding the work of the Spirit. Jesus summarized the work of the Spirit as a work of *conviction* (Jn. 16.8-11). *Conviction* means establishing something as a priority, a working principle, or a life value. The Spirit wants to *convict* us in every possible way to keep us moving along the path of joy, the path of becoming more like Jesus.

Conviction begins with *instruction*, emerges through *persuasion*, settles in with *affirmation*, and becomes a working part of our lives in specific forms of *action* or *obedience*. The Spirit wants us to be *convicted* about sin – so that we can recognize it, repent of it, and build up a hatred of it. He is working to *convict* us about righteousness – about that way of life defined by the Law and Word of God. And He wants to *convict* us about judgment – God's promise to bring discipline against His wayward people when they refuse to follow His paths.

By being often in the Word of God and prayer, waiting for the Spirit to search and teach us (Ps. 139.23, 24), we can hear His instruction, submit to His persuasion, affirm His teaching, and take the necessary steps which, as we persist in them, will find us being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Doing so will keep us in the path of righteousness and minimize the likelihood of God's exercising His judgment against us to return us there when we stray (Heb. 12.3-11).

As we dwell in Scripture and prayer, listening for the convicting work of the Spirit, He exudes His joy within our souls, and we know it, experience it, relish and rejoice in it, and find the strength, through God's gift of joy, to press on through our daily valley of tears.

Joy is an attribute and gift of the Spirit of God, as He works within us to will and do of God's good pleasure. We will know joy, and increase in it, to the extent that we seek and submit to the Spirit, and are filled and walk in Him according to the teaching of God's Word.

For reflection

1. Since joy is a fruit of the Spirit, we must seek it from Him. What does this involve?
2. What's the difference between joy and happiness? Why can we not find true joy anywhere other than in the Lord?
3. What will it require of you to submit more consistently to the work of the Spirit in your life?

Next steps – Preparation: The Spirit works to convict and transform us especially when we're reading and meditating in the Scriptures. What can you do, during your time in God's Word, to be more sensitive to the convicting work of the Spirit?

3 Conditions for Joy

*But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You;
Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them;
Let those also who love Your name
Be joyful in You.
For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous;
With favor You will surround him as with a shield.* Psalm 5.11, 12

It doesn't just happen

It used to be, before the present policy of “Y’all come” immigration, many people from other countries, having fulfilled certain conditions, would take the oath of allegiance and become citizens of the United States. This didn’t just happen. Conditions had to be met to *become* a citizen of this country, and to *enjoy* one’s citizenship to the fullest.

That sound Constitutional policy seems to have gone the way of all flesh these days. But the point is still valid.

Citizenship should be not automatic. Nor should it be the result of simply insisting one is an American. Full-fledged enjoyment of the benefits of living in this country demands conformity to certain conditions. They make the best citizens of the United States who accept the terms and conditions of citizenship and are diligent in fulfilling these every day.

Experiencing the joy of the Lord is like this. Many Christians will testify that they do not always experience the joy of the Lord, and when they do, the experience is fleeting. Others will say they *think* they have known this joy, but they aren’t quite sure. And at any rate, they’re quite sure this is not a continuous experience. Believers in Jesus Christ may *enter* the joy of the Lord, and we may daily *experience* it. But it doesn’t just happen. Conditions must be met. And unless we understand and conform to those conditions, the joy which is ours to know in Jesus Christ will remain an elusive commodity.

What are the conditions for knowing the joy of the Lord?

The most obvious condition

Four primary conditions establish the foundation on which we may expect to know and grow in the joy of the Lord.

The first and most obvious of these is that we must have the Spirit of God dwelling within us. The joy of the Lord is part of the fruit the Spirit bears in, for, and through us. We have seen why this is so, but how does this come about?

We receive the Spirit when God sends Him to us through the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we hear the Gospel, the Spirit comes to open our minds and hearts, and to take up residence within us. He empowers us to *believe* the Gospel and to *confess* Jesus as Savior and Lord, and God as our Father (cf. Gal. 4.6, 7). The Spirit is the gift of Jesus Christ and God the Father for all who believe in Jesus and trust in Him for forgiveness of sins and everlasting life.

This being accomplished, we must learn to be filled with and walk in the Spirit, so that we can increase in the joy of the Lord as we become daily more like Him. That is, we must submit daily to the Spirit’s work of conviction, and of His striving within us to make us more like Jesus in every way (Phil. 2.13; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

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Do not quench the Spirit by ignoring His Presence and work within you. And do not grieve Him by departing the path on which He would lead you. If you have believed in Jesus and received His Spirit, then you are well-positioned to know the joy of the Lord regularly and increasingly.

Three other conditions

Three other conditions are necessary for experiencing the joy of the Lord.

First, remembering that our joy is in the Lord Himself, and nowhere else, we must set the Lord always before us, fixing our minds on Him, meditating on Him exalted in glory and ruling over the progress of His Kingdom (Ps. 16.8, 11; Col. 3.1-3). We must train the eye of our heart (Eph. 1.5-23) on Jesus our King, and, as He did on the cross, project ourselves into the joy which will finally and completely be ours when we stand before Him and see Him face to face (1 Jn. 3.1-3). Much as, when you were a child, you could work up a healthy measure of delight just thinking about Christmas morning – especially the closer it came to that glorious day, and the more you imagined the contents of those presents under the tree. Just so, abounding joy, exceeding joy, awaits us forever in the presence of the Lord. But we must set our minds and hearts to enter that joy, in prospect and in actuality, every day of our here and now.

Next, we must think often on the works of the Lord, and that this powerful and amazing God is *our* Father, Savior, Redeemer, Comforter, and Friend. So the prophet Joel exhorts us: “Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done marvelous things...Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you...” (Joel 2.21, 23). The more we reflect on the mighty works of God in creation, providence, redemption, and sanctification, the more our joy will increase as we realize that He Who does such marvelous works is with us where we are, and we are with Him where He is, even now. He is always thinking about us, thoughts more numerous than we could count (Ps. 40.5, 17), and by those thoughts He sustains and blesses us.

Finally, seek the Lord for joy: “Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face evermore!” (Psalm 105.3, 4) Seek the Lord in His Word. Seek His glory in every aspect of the surrounding creation. Seek Him in the faces and words of those who know Him. Seek to talk about Him with others, to share what you’re learning about Him, and to celebrate the many reasons to rejoice daily in the Lord. Seek Him so that you know Him, and thus know the fullness of joy that comes from being in His Presence.

If you’ll keep these conditions in mind, preparing each day to know the joy of the Lord, and living each moment from within these conditions, you’ll experience more of the joy for which you have been created and redeemed, the joy of your Kingdom citizenship (Rom. 14.17, 18), and your heart will soar with love for God Who gives you such joy each day. A joyful heart is a well-kept heart, and a heart that can strengthen your soul to know, love, and serve our Lord increasingly.

For reflection

1. What are some of the great works of God you might focus on as a reminder of His goodness and passage into His joy?
2. What is your approach to meditating on the vision of Christ, exalted in glory? Can you think of any ways to improve this?
3. What are some practical ways you might remind yourself to seek the Lord through the course of a day?

Next steps - Conversation: Think of a way to begin a conversation about the Lord with a fellow believer today. How might you broach the subject? What questions might you use? What would you like to share, so that the two of you might know the joy of the Lord today?

4 Prompts to Joy

*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.* Psalm 51.12

An elusive condition

Because we make our journey in life through a valley of tears, joy can be an elusive commodity. And not only elusive, but brief.

C. S. Lewis described his experience of joy as something that suddenly enveloped him with a sense of overall happiness and wellbeing, but which, when he began to reflect on it and analyze it, just as suddenly was gone (*Surprised by Joy*). Try to re-enter the experience of joy, and it's hard to make it happen.

Besides, being yet sinners, it's too easy for us to fall into the idolatry of thinking that joy can be found somewhere other than in the Lord. Thus, we fix our hopes for joy on transient, material things or circumstances, only to discover that such false "joys" are merely fleeting, and never as satisfying as we'd hoped.

The Lord knows how hard it can be for us to experience joy the way He does – continuously, completely, and increasingly. He also knows we need to be reminded that true joy can only be known in Him, as He draws us into His joy and shares it with us by His Spirit.

This being so, God graciously surrounds us each day with reminders, glimpses, brushes with, and refractions of Himself, prompting us to enter His joy via the many avenues and portals with which He surrounds us each day. God is continuously prompting us to see Him and His glory in the everyday things and situations of our lives. By staying alert to the prompts and responding in faith, we can know the joy of the Lord more continuously.

What might some of these prompts be?

Our salvation

First, of course, is the salvation we have by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews comments on how *great* our salvation is, and warns us that it's easy to drift from that strong and blessed mooring (Heb. 2.1-4). God, knowing our tendency to this, is always bearing witness to Himself, beginning with our salvation, so that we might cling to, and increase in, the joy we have in Him.

David understood this, and he prayed that the Lord might restore to him the joy of His salvation (Ps. 51.12), that wonderful, combined sense of being forgiven, accepted, loved, and secure in the Presence of God, now and forever, together with the potential of growing in His grace and serving Him more effectively. Hope for renewed joy followed confession of sin and repentance in David's case, and this is an excellent reminder for us. For sin, harbored in our hearts, cuts us off from the Lord, and from the joy we earnestly seek (Ps. 6.18; Is. 59.1, 2).

If your salvation means only going to heaven when you die and having a nice church while you're still alive here and now, then your view of salvation is not as great as it should be. Certainly, it's not great enough to buoy you above the trials and travails you can expect to meet in the normal course of your daily life, or to keep you from dallying in sin. We need to follow the advice of the psalmist, who in response to *receiving* the salvation of the Lord, resolved to *be drunk with it*, to hoist the cup of salvation and drink it fully down with joy (Ps. 116.12-14). Rather than fill our minds, hearts, and days with the fleeting things of this life, let us be filled with the Spirit, submitting to Him for the teaching and convicting we need, so that we might grow in our

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great salvation, and all the joy that comes with it (Eph. 5.18-21).

Additional prompts

The Lord is with us always, beckoning us into joy through a wide variety of what might seem to us unlikely witnesses.

Here are just a few, together with some Scripture to meditate on, to help you become more aware of and sensitive to these refractors of the joy of the Lord. The Lord beckons us into His joy through:

- the Treasury of His Word (Pss. 97.8; 119.162)
- the example of saints from the past, of their lives, trials, and works (Lk. 6.22, 23)
- the Voice of the Lord, as He speaks in the works of creation (Ps. 19.1-4)
- reports of unbelievers who have come to faith in Jesus Christ (Lk. 15.7, 10)
- reports of answered prayers (Jn. 16.24)
- the infectious joy of other believers (2 Cor. 2.3; 7.13; Philem. 1.7, 10)
- the joy that comes from praying for and serving others (Phil. 2.2; 4.1; 1 Thess. 2.9, 10)
- sharing the sufferings of the Lord, because of the Name of Jesus (1 Pet. 4.15; Acts 5.41)
- the joy that comes from being a peacemaker (Prov. 12.20)
- and the joy of seeing your church fulfill its calling to bring joy to its local community (Ps. 48.2)

As should be obvious, we're never very far from many of these witnesses to the joy of the Lord, which can renew us in the joy of the Spirit, by returning our focus to the Lord and His works, so that we seek Him in all our ways.

We are never separated from the joy of the Lord because the Lord Himself, Who is our joy, is ever with us. The problem is we're so easily distracted by many things and much to do, that we fail to take the time to sit at the feet of Eternal Joy, moored to His Presence, and basking in His radiant and undying love (Lk. 10. 38-42). If we can find time, like David in Psalm 27, to wait hopefully on the Lord in prayer and meditation, seeking the beauty of His joy and the glory in His face (2 Cor. 4.6), He will, in His time, bring us into His joy, so that we grow in love for Him and gratitude for all His grace.

The Lord has come, and the Lord is here, everywhere, all around us, all the time, bidding us to see Him and enter His joy at every moment of our lives. And from there, to bring the joy of the Lord to the people in your world.

For reflection

1. Would you describe your salvation as *great*? Why or why not? How can you improve your understanding of the *greatness* of your salvation?
2. Which of the prompts to joy, mentioned in this study, are you likely to encounter today? How will you respond?
3. How can you prepare each day to make sure you don't miss any of these prompts to joy?

Next steps – Preparation: How can you use your morning prayer time to set your mind and heart to respond to the prompts of joy God sends your way each day?

5 Joy Expressed

And it will be said in that day:

“Behold, this is our God;

We have waited for Him, and He will save us.

This is the LORD;

We have waited for Him;

We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.” Isaiah 25.9

Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous;

And shout for joy, all you upright in heart! Psalm 32.11

Uncontainable joy

As we enter the joy of the Lord, it’s natural for that joy to come to expression in various ways.

Who can sit placidly by when his favorite team has just won the championship on a buzzer-beater? Who doesn’t express delight at the return of a dear one? Of course, our delight is overwhelming at such times, and we cannot help but let it show.

But these are merely expressions of *happiness*, not joy. If we have ways of expressing such forms of *happiness* – shouting, clapping, weeping, laughing – should we not expect the *joy* we have in Jesus to find expression?

Joy is experienced inwardly first, as a form of gladness which, because of Jesus and what He has accomplished, and what in Him awaits us, settles the mind, delights the heart, and comforts the conscience. When we find ourselves engaged with the joy of the Lord, we experience peace, unshakeable wellbeing and security, and gratitude of a rich, general nature. We’re simply grateful to God for everything, and we delight in every aspect and detail of our lives.

This is the experience of joy which C. S. Lewis described in *Surprised by Joy*. There’s no explaining it because it doesn’t depend on circumstances or things. Suddenly, you’re just there, brimming with joy. The whole world looks beautiful, and you can say, “It is well with my soul.” Such profound, inward gladness may lead you to a season of quiet reflection, weeping tears of joy, and simply uttering, over and over, “Thank You, Lord, thank You.”

But expressing your joy might not end there. Joy is not for the Christian life an *event*; God intends His joy to be our constant companion, breathed in and expiring from us with the richness and beauty of the living Christ.

Outward expressions of joy

The gladness of soul you experience in the joy of the Lord may break forth in some outward form. That is to be expected. The outward expression of joy is what we call *rejoicing*, and rejoicing in the joy of the Lord can take various forms.

In the first place, rejoicing can be expressed as *singing*. Singing is an important outlet for joy, and a most basic means of rejoicing, as David understood: “I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High” (Ps. 9.2). When we express our joy in singing, we enhance the experience of joy, and thus impress the joy of the Lord more firmly on our souls. Since singing engages our thoughts, affections, and values, the entire soul – mind, heart, and conscience – can be fortified as we sing with joy to the Lord.

Much increase of joy and strengthening of our souls can be gained through singing. It’s important, therefore,

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that believers have a repertoire of songs available to them so that, when their gladness begins to seek some outward manifestation, they won't want for songs of joy to express what they are feeling.

Joy can also be expressed in various forms of prayer. Obviously, thanksgiving should be a primary means of expressing the joy we feel, as the psalmist teaches: "Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name" (Ps. 97.12). Giving thanks acknowledges that, whatever may have prompted our joy, it is always and only from the Lord, Who *is* our joy. The more specific we can be in our thanksgiving, the more we will be aware, day by day, of the many blessings of God with which He surrounds us, and the more we will know the joy of His Presence.

Praising the Lord is another important outlet for joy: "Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth; break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises" (Ps. 98.4). In praise, we focus on the Lord, and His many excellencies and virtues.

Shouting can also be a wonderful way of expressing joy (cf. Pss. 32.11; 98.4). I recall one morning early, I was driving from our home to a meeting several hours away. I'd had a particularly rich time with the Lord before leaving, and I was praying for Susie and her day, filling up with joy in the Lord for her, our home, my work, the beauty of the creation around me, and the morning sunlight. Suddenly, from a hill on the right, a wild turkey took flight, gliding right in front of me across the highway, and landing on the other side of the road. I couldn't help myself, I just shouted out, "Lord, You are so incredibly amazing and good!"

We can also express our joy by bearing witness to others of the goodness of the Lord (Ps. 9.14). As we talk about the Lord, and the joy we know in Him, our joy increases, and we are equipped *in* joy for our calling to live as witnesses for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Made for joy

We are made for joy, and as we *rejoice*, by all these means, God enhances our joy and grows us in Christ-likeness, for He is our reward and our *joy*.

Too often we give the impression that being a Christian means being dour or angry or sober and joyless. But God intends for His people to be the joy of the whole earth (Ps. 48.2), that we might be joy-bringers to our weary world by living in the joy of our salvation and sharing it with the world.

A well-kept heart, grounded in fear and love for God, will abound with joy, a joy that we cannot contain but must express.

For reflection

1. How do you typically express the joy of the Lord when you find yourself in it?
2. Can you recommend a song that you have found helpful in expressing your joy? Why does this song help you enter the joy of the Lord?
3. Why is it important that we bear witness to our joy as often as we can?

Next steps – Conversation: Talk with another Christian about expressing joy. What can you learn from one another? Why is it important that we express the joy of the Lord?

6 Joy in the Hard Times

“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
Matthew 5.12

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. James 1.2-4

Unquenchable joy

The joy we have in the Lord is easy enough to experience when everything’s going well in our lives. If our circumstances are agreeable, then, sure, we can get into the joy of the Lord and sample its many pleasures and delights.

But that is to confuse joy and happiness, and to make favorable circumstances the source of whatever joy we might know. Doing so can easily spill over into idolatry, where we look to things and situations for that which only God can give.

It’s when it seems like everything’s coming down around us, our world is caving in, or someone is treating us wrong that joy is about the last thing we’re thinking about or experiencing. This is the time for grieving, right? Or for righteous anger? Or getting even?

Yet the joy we have in the Lord, because it is *His* joy, which He shares with us, is *always available and ready to hand*. If we keep that in mind, and if we practice access to joy at other times, then when trials come upon us, we’ll discover just how unquenchable the joy of the Lord is, and how powerful it can be to buoy and sustain us in the hard times.

It’s in the hard times that we need joy the most, and God is poised to grant it to us by His Presence.

Rejoicing in trials

Jesus and James teach us to rejoice in the midst of trials and adversities, especially those that come upon us because of our faith. James explains why this is so important, so that we might grow in patience and sanctification. Trials play a role in our lives, for they represent an opportunity to increase in Christlikeness. We recall that Jesus knew the joy of the Lord even as He was dying on the cross (Heb. 12.1-3). For this reason alone, we should rejoice when trials come upon us, even though we may grieve and sorrow as we endure them.

It’s hard to understand how we can experience both these affections – sorrow and joy – at the same time. But this is part of the mystery of the Christian life. We travel this life as in a valley of weeping, but our destination, with the reward of unceasing joy that awaits us there, is never out of sight. So, even as we sigh under the weight of our various burdens, our hearts are buoyed with joy, and we find the strength to go on.

Trials have the potential to obscure our joy; so Jesus explained how we may, in the midst of even the most severe trials, make our way through rejoicing into the joy of the Lord. The first line of response to trials is to give thanks and rejoice – to pray, sing, shout, bear witness to the goodness of the Lord, and in other ways to enter the joy that awaits us at journey’s end, and that is always available to us here and now. Rejoicing with thanksgiving can help us enter more deeply into the joy of the Lord.

This way to joy

As we have said, we need to bear in mind that trials and even suffering are simply part of life in our journey toward the heavenly Presence of the Lord. Our duty is not to try to avoid suffering, as though suffering were

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not to be expected in following Jesus. God gives us suffering just as He gives us saving faith (Phil. 1.29), to make us more like Jesus. Suffering received as a gift, with thanksgiving, can open the door to joy in the Presence of the Lord.

Further, Jesus makes no mention of seeking relief through political means or other forms of social pressure. Instead, Jesus teaches us how to live as citizens of a Kingdom not of this world. We must look into the heavenly places, that we might see Jesus, seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3.1-3), see Him with the eyes of the heart as He is revealed to us in glory in His Word (Eph. 1.15ff.). He is our reward, and the joy we may know in Him is exceedingly great. Meditate on His beauty. Draw near to Him, where He has seated you (Eph. 2.6). Rest in the joy of His Presence, power, and promise. Give thanks to Him with rejoicing, and hope in Him with praise (Ps. 42.5). Follow the example of Stephen, and you will know the peace and joy he did, as he accepted his suffering at the hands of the enemies of the Lord (Acts 7.55, 56; 2 Cor. 4.16-18).

At the same time, look around in the throne room of the Lord at that assembled host of faithful saints and martyrs who have preceded you into their reward and yours, and at the myriad angels who are ready to come to your aid (cf. Heb. 12.1; Dan. 7.9, 10; Heb. 1.13, 14). Remember that those who have preceded us into glory endured many trials, and many of those trials much worse than anything we will ever know (Rev. 4-6; Heb. 11.35-40). Identify with them. Let your mind see them carrying your sanctified prayers to the Lord, glad to identify with you in your trial. Rejoice in the joy they express as they serve God and you in their heavenly abode.

Remember always that your citizenship is in heaven, and that you belong to a triumphant company and race, with whom you always dwell in the Presence of the Lord. Your trials may continue and even grow worse, and they will bring pain and sorrow. But in Christ you may rise above the sorrow and pain to rejoice in the larger and permanent truths of who you are and what you possess in Jesus Christ.

God is with us always, our ever-present help in times of trouble (Ps. 46.1). Thus, though we must endure hardship, trials, suffering, and perhaps even persecution, nothing and no one can wrest us from the Father's hand (Jn. 10.28, 29); therefore, joy is just a season of rejoicing away.

For reflection

1. Suggest some practical ways that you might express sorrow and joy at the same time. Why is it important that you do this?
2. How clear and compelling is your vision of Christ, exalted in glory? Where could you look in Scripture to enhance this vision?
3. Can you think of any departed saints who endured suffering with patience and rejoicing? How can the example of our forebears in the faith help us to count our trials all joy?

Next steps – Preparation: Spend some time today working on your vision of the unseen realm, and the throne room of Christ. Meditate on Revelation 4 and 5, and any other passages that come to mind (Pss. 45, 47, 93, 110, etc.). Try to form a picture in your mind of that joyous court, and pray with rejoicing over what you see there.

7 Heart of Joy

*Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous;
And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!* Psalm 32:11

A well-kept heart

The heart is the foundation and driving force of the soul, which is to say, of the life itself. From the heart, the incubator and hot house of all our affections, issue all the defining issues of our lives, as Solomon explained (Prov. 4:23). Our duty is to understand the heart and its function in relationship to the mind and conscience, and to guard our heart carefully, so that all the right affections, properly focused and developed, can contribute to a strong soul and a faithful and joyful life of following Jesus.

We begin with the fear of God, which He commands, and which is the beginning of all wisdom. Add to that love for God and our neighbor and thanksgiving as our continuous acknowledgement of God's Presence and goodness. Hope, courage, good grief, and joy round out the defining affections we must seek to get in place and keep in place by keeping a close watch over our soul.

Joy is the consequence and condition of a well-kept heart. Where all the other affections are functioning as God intends, we will know His Presence and pleasure, and thus we will abide within the joy of the Lord in all we do. Knowing the joy of the Lord begins in rejoicing, in using our words to express by faith the joy we know is ours in Jesus Christ.

Words of joy

We must not underestimate the power of words for bringing us into the joy of the Lord. This is why so many of the psalms contain exhortations to rejoice and reminders of why we should. It was to encourage them in joy that Jesus spoke to His disciples and the apostles wrote to their fellow believers. Words fitly spoken can prime our hearts to tap the joy of the Lord, so that joy wells up and overflows from us.

Long after the awakening fires of the Celtic Revival (ca. 430-800 AD) had cooled, leaders of the Irish Church looked for ways to recover some of the spiritual vitality, fervor, and joy that characterized that period. They prepared devotional guides called litanies, which were intended for use in personal and corporate worship.

These litanies were carefully-crafted poems of invocation, confession, longing, and praise, which drew on the riches of Scripture, the memories of Christian forebears, and the composer's own desire to know the joy of the Lord. These litanies offer powerful words of worship and joy. Reading them can open a spigot for the joy of the Lord to flow in our hearts.

Here is an excerpt from one of my favorite of these litanies:

O holy Jesu;
O gentle friend;
O Morning Star;
O mid-day Sun adorned;
O brilliant flame of the righteous, and of righteousness, and of everlasting life and eternity;
O Fountain ever-new, ever-living, ever-lasting;
O heart's Desire of patriarchs;
O Longing of prophets;
O Master of apostles and disciples;
O Giver of the Law;
O Prince of the New Testament...

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Give and grant and impart to me Thy holy grace, and Thy Holy Spirit, to protect me and preserve me from all my sins present and future, and to kindle in me all righteousness... (“Litany of Jesus II” from *Charles Plummer*, tr. and ed, *Irish Litanies*, The Boydell Press, 1925, 1992).

This is about a tenth of this glorious litany of praise and celebration, seeking the Presence and joy of the Lord. The words, we can well imagine, ushered all who used them into the joy of the Lord. Such words can be for us a key to the treasury of joy to be known in the Presence of the Lord.

A litany of joy

Sadly, these wonderful litanies are not readily available, nor would they be readily understood without some background knowledge of the period of Celtic Christianity.

Still, the idea of such a litany, scripted to lead us into the joy of the Lord, strikes me as a worthwhile project. So to conclude our series on the joy of the Lord – and our study on keeping the heart with all diligence – I offer a contemporary “Litany of Joy”, which you may feel free to use in entering the sustaining joy of the Lord:

God Almighty, Whom to fear is
right, and just what You command –
Father, Word, and Holy Spirit,
let me in Your Presence stand.
In this vale of tears I seek You,
there where sin does not alloy.
Hear, Lord! Grant me leave to speak to
You, Who dwell in boundless joy.

There You know eternal gladness,
Three in One forever blessed.
Here we walk in tears and sadness,
from our troubles seeking rest.
Draw me, woo me, touch and lift me,
o’er life’s burdens gently buoy.
Though all foes would shake and sift me,
fill me with Your constant joy!

Jesus, You rejoiced in sorrow,
looking toward Your great reward.
Tears will all be gone tomorrow
in the bosom of the Lord.
Let me know Your constant Presence,
strong, bright angels, Lord, deploy,
bearing with them just the essence
of Your never-ending joy!

Now You reign in joyous rapture,
saints and angels all around!
My soul let Your Spirit capture,
in Your love securely bound!
Let me with that joyous throng be
ever found in Your employ;
let my every prayer and song be
filled with Your abounding joy!

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Joy to know! Now bursts my heart to
fill the world with Your great Name!
Joy unbounded to impart to
all who would Your praise proclaim!
Joyous shouting, joyous singing,
joyous praise would I employ,
thus Your great salvation ringing
and with it Your boundless joy!

And in case singing is for you a cherished means of expressing the joy of the Lord, you can sing this litany of joy to the tune of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" ("Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee").

May the joy of the Lord abound in you today and always!

For reflection

1. What are your favorite passages of Scripture for expressing the joy of the Lord?
2. What can keep you from knowing the joy of the Lord each day? How can you prepare to overcome those obstacles by rejoicing in the Lord?
3. What suggestions can you offer for knowing the joy of the Lord more deeply and consistently?

Next steps – Transformation: Use the "Litany of Joy" in today's study for the next several days. Does this help you know more of the joy of the Lord? Do you find your joy increasing as you express it?

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Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What is the joy of the Lord? How would you explain that joy to an unbelieving friend?
2. Why is important to understand that the joy of the Lord is a work of the Spirit of God?
3. How does *rejoicing* help us in knowing the joy of the Lord? What place should rejoicing have in our daily lives as believers?
4. What are the conditions for knowing the joy of the Lord? How firmly are those conditions in place in your life?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study about the joy of the Lord? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.