

## Joy ~ Part 1

**"Don't be afraid, because I am here announcing to you Good News that will bring great joy to all the people." ~ Luke 2:10**

As we near the time when we traditionally <sup>1</sup> remember the birth of our Savior and Lord, I'm reminded of one of my favorite hymns ~ **"Joy to the World."** [We like it so much that it's our ringtone year-round for our front doorbell.] Issac Watts wrote the lyrics based on Psalm 98. According to Wikipedia, Watts originally wrote the lyrics as a hymn glorifying Yeshua's triumphant return at the end of the age, rather than a song celebrating His birth. As of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, "Joy to the World" was the most-published Christmas hymn in North America.

Joy to the world! The Lord is come  
Let earth receive her King!  
Let every heart prepare Him room  
And heaven and nature sing  
And heaven and nature sing  
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

[media file goes here]  
Performed by Bing Crosby and Choir

As the angel declared to the shepherds tending their flocks at Yeshua's first advent as fully God and fully man, **"I am here announcing to you Good News that will bring great joy to all the people"** ~ Luke 2:10. But what does Scripture have to say about this concept of **Joy**?

### Definition of Joy

Earlier this year, my wife and I read Kay Warren's "Choose Joy: Because Happiness Isn't Enough" as a part of our morning devotionals. We highly recommend it to you. Kay defines **Joy** this way: *"Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be all right, and the determined choice to praise God in all things. Joy is a settled conviction ABOUT God. It's a quiet confidence IN God. And joy is a determined choice to give my praise TO God. God doesn't promise answers or explanations on demand. He promises joy. So joy is much more than external things. It's much more than that happy, giddy feeling that may come every once in a while. The joy that God speaks of in His Word is something you can count on. It has nothing to do with the circumstances of our lives – and that, I've discovered, is very good news."* <sup>2</sup> I confess that even though this is written as a women's devotional, I have received a lot of insight from it.

Now, let's see what scripture has to say about **Joy**. **"For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, shalom and joy in the Ruach HaKodesh. Anyone who serves the Messiah in this fashion both pleases God and wins the approval of other people."** (Romans 14:17-18) For a number of years, the virtue of **joy** was neither evident in my life nor very high in my value system. With regard to Romans 14:17, I considered myself a man of shalom, and I felt I was seeking after the ethical righteousness that is referred to in that passage. I was a Promise Keeper, a Man of Integrity. But I really hadn't given much thought to the importance God places on the fruit of **joy** in my life.

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<sup>1</sup> I deliberately used the word 'traditionally' because we don't know from God's Word exactly when Yeshua was born. Personally, I believe it was during the Feast of Sukkot in the fall when He tabernacled with us. (see John 1:14 YLT)

<sup>2</sup> "Choose Joy: Because Happiness Isn't Enough"

Then one day as I was reading through Romans 14, I realized that God was not satisfied with only righteousness and shalom in our lives. Sha'ul tells us very plainly that the kingdom of God is a matter of not only righteousness and shalom but also **joy**. Furthermore, I learned from verse 18 that without joy, my life was really not very pleasing to God. The fact is, only Believers have a reason to be joyful, but it is also a fact that every Believer *should* be joyful.

We are not to sit around waiting for our circumstances to make us joyful; we are *commanded* to be joyful always. Rabbi Sha'ul writes: **"Always be joyful"** (1 Thessalonians 5:16) and **"Rejoice in union with the Lord always! I will say it again: rejoice!"** (Philippians 4:4) Like the other character traits contained in the Scriptures, **joy** is not an option available only to those whose temperament is conducive to it. God intends that every one of His children exhibit the fruit of **joy**.

However, just being joyful is not enough; we should continually be growing in **joy**. It is a contradiction for a Believer who professes to be a child of the one and only God - who created the universe and who governs it for His glory and the good of His people - to wear a gloomy countenance.

Yet if we are honest, most of us must admit that life is so often anything *but* joyful. It often seems that at best life is dull, and at worst it is filled with anxiety, conflict, and tension. What is it that blocks **joy** in our lives?

### Stumbling Blocks

Let's look at several stumbling blocks to our experiencing Godly joy.

1. **Sin in our lives.** True **joy** is essentially the enjoyment of God, the fruit of communion with Him. Sin obviously breaks that communion and the enjoyment of His presence. When David was confessing his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, he prayed, **"Restore my joy in your salvation."** (Psalm 51:12)

Psalm 32 vividly describes David's lack of **joy** as he agonized over his sin. He wrote: **"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away because of my groaning all day long; day and night your hand was heavy on me; the sap in me dried up as in a summer drought."** (Psalm 32:3-4)

When we are not experiencing **joy**, we should examine our hearts and our lives. Are we doing or have we done something that is displeasing to God that we need to confess and forsake? The fruit of **joy** cannot exist when such attitudes have control of our hearts. All sin; be it in attitude or action must be dealt with if we are to display the virtue of **joy** in our lives.

2. **Misplaced confidence.** Sha'ul told the Philippian Believers to **"rejoice in union with the Lord"** (Philippians 3:1). He then made it clear that the opposite of rejoicing in the Lord is to put confidence in the flesh - in our good works or religious attainment. For the Believers of Sha'ul's day, it was Jewish legalism. For us today, it might be our personal disciplines, such as a regular quiet time, a consistent Scripture memory program, or faithfulness in witnessing to non-Believers. Whatever it is, if the source of our confidence is anything other than Yeshua and His grace, it is a false and oft-interrupted **joy**.
3. **Chastening or discipline that God often administers to His children.** Scripture says, **"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful."** (Hebrews 12:11 <sup>HCSB</sup>) Discipline is never a joyful experience; it is not meant to be, else it would not accomplish its intended results. If we lose sight of its intended results, or feel we don't deserve it, discipline can lead to self-pity. The secret of maintaining some semblance of **joy** in the midst of discipline is to remember that **"the Lord disciplines the one He loves,"** and that **"later on, however, it [the discipline] yields the fruit of shalom and righteousness to those who have been trained by it."** (Hebrews 12:6,11)
4. **Experiencing trials of faith.** Trials differ from discipline in that their purpose is to exercise our faith, not deal with sin in our lives. In His infinite wisdom, God allows trials in order to develop perseverance

in us and cause us to fix our hopes on the glory that is yet to be revealed.

Trials can come in many forms: nagging health problems, financial reverses, criticism and rejection, outright persecution. Whatever forms the trial takes and however severe it may be, it is intended to strengthen our character. Weight lifters and other athletes have a saying: "No pain, no gain." The message is plain. Weight lifters know they have to endure some agony of lifting more than their muscles can comfortably handle if they want to increase their strength. So it is with faith. Our faith and perseverance can grow only under the pain of trial. James has this to say about the trials we face: ***"Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance."*** (James 1:2–3 <sup>HCSB</sup>)

People are like tea bags. You don't know what's inside of them until you put them in hot water. Stress and problems have the uncanny ability to reveal what's inside each of us. God says to, *"Consider it a great joy, whenever you experience various trials."* The word "consider" tells us that we have a choice. We can't choose our trials but we can always choose how we respond. So how does God want us to respond to these trials? He wants us to consider it **joy**. In fact, "pure **joy**!"

Notice that James says, *"Whenever you experience various trials . . ."* Storms in life are inevitable. If you're not in a storm right now, just wait - you will encounter one soon enough. Nobody sails through life easily from the cradle to the grave. What's most important is how you choose to face your storms.

In closing, I quote from Sarah Young's *"Jesus Calling"* for December 16<sup>th</sup>, *"As you seek MY (Yeshua's) presence above all else, you experience peace and **joy** in full measure."*

In my next post, we'll take a look at some stepping stones that can take in experiencing the fruit of **Joy**.