

JOY

COMES IN THE MORNING

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“...I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people...”

Luke 2:10

When I am not teaching on Bible prophecy, I am a Pastor in Phoenix, Arizona. Serving at Standing Stones Community Church for almost twenty years, I have had the pleasure of preaching on biblical joy many times. But I have come to realize that sometimes people don't understand the difference between joy and happiness.

I am reminded of one occasion when a young couple, new to the church, had just welcomed their first child into the world—a beautiful baby boy named after his grandfather. The entire family was thrilled with his arrival, and they wanted to publicly acknowledge the blessing God had given them. So, the mom and dad scheduled a meeting with me to ask if we could have a baby dedication and it was my pleasure to plan for that.

Happiness is NOT Joy

A baby's dedication is as much about the parents as it is about the child. I explained to the new parents that they needed to be willing to acknowledge that this new bundle of joy is a gift from God and that their newborn son belongs to God. I told them that while they would have the pleasure of raising this little guy, they needed to publicly confirm their desire to raise him to know God and His Word. They agreed and were excited and happy to move forward.



As the meeting was about to close, they had one last request: they asked that when I prayed over their son, I would pray that he would grow up to be happy. They didn't care what their boy did for work when he grew into manhood, they just wanted him to be happy. I could have just smiled and reassured them that he would be fine as long as he grew up to know the Lord. However, they asked me to pray this during the service in the Name of the Lord. I responded that I would be delighted to pray that he grows up to learn to be content with whatever God blesses him with. They were not pleased with my response and were adamant that I should specifically pray for his happiness. I felt torn about how far I should go in explaining the difference between what people consider happiness and expounding on what Scripture defines as true joy.

Contentment is Biblical

I gently explained that the secular world has a diluted understanding of happiness. Happiness is always temporary and not a characteristic one should try to embrace. However, contentment is Biblical and, according to Philippians 4:11, pleases the Lord. I thought I was okay when I explained that contentment leads to joy, whereas happiness is fleeting and often isn't fulfilling or lasting. It causes people to crave the

latest and greatest things to make them "happy." The couple took a few days to ponder what I was saying but eventually agreed with my explanation.

I Would Be Happy If...

I am grieved when I hear people say, "I would be happy if only I had a better job," or "If only I had a better spouse" or "If only I could win the lottery." It seems many people go through life with no real sense of joy. Life becomes a series of tasks and chores, daily activities that they feel they must endure. Living life in that mode is emotionally draining. Their unattainable happiness remains elusive as they think, "Someday when..." or "If only..."



God has so much more for people, especially anyone who falls into the trap of constantly seeking the perfect circumstances to fulfill their greatest perceived need.

Happiness is not really a need; it's a burden. It is a fantasy that can never truly be attained. That is why people with vast sums of money are often still unhappy. Rich people travel wherever they wish and eat whatever and whenever they desire, constantly seeking fulfillment because they never 'learned' to be content.

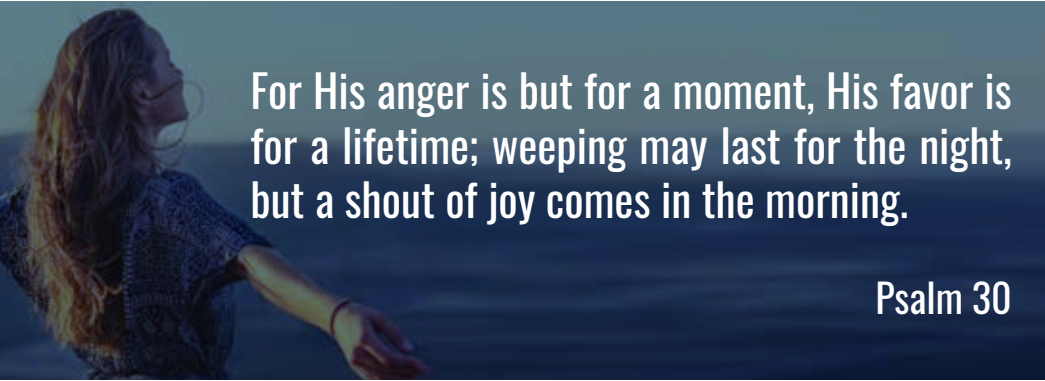
Joy is NOT an Emotion

Even though some of his circumstances were challenging, the apostle Paul modeled and taught about joy. Scripture explains what true joy is. Too many people have the impression that joy is an emotion. They cannot fathom how someone diagnosed with a life-threatening medical condition or who faces a crushing financial situation can be told to "count it all joy" (James 1:2).

To the secular mind, that makes no sense at all. And if joy were based on mere circumstances, then it shouldn't make any sense. However, real joy is not an emotion; it's an understanding. True joy is knowing that God is in control, no matter what happens to us. When you embrace that truth, you have the peace and joy of the Lord which passes worldly understanding.

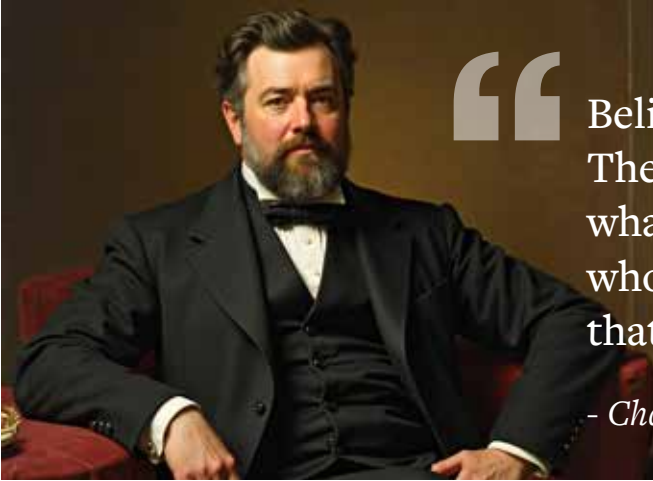
Joy Comes in the Morning

I enjoy the picture that Psalm 30 paints when it says weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. This emphasizes the certainty of God's comfort and joy, which He graciously extends to His people. Morning always follows night, which is a perfect analogy for the weeping believer who can be comforted with the knowledge that no matter what happens.



For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.

Psalm 30



“

Believers are not dependent upon circumstances. Their joy comes not from what they have, but from what they are; not from where they are, but from whose they are; not from what they enjoy, but from that which was suffered for them by their Lord.”

”

- Charles Spurgeon

God has a promise available to all who seek and trust Him. One way or another, all will be healed of any medical ailment, whether temporarily here on Earth or permanently in Heaven. Any situation that attempts to steal one’s joy can be overcome with God’s promise of joy. And the joy the Lord offers is not for a season but for eternity.

Charles Spurgeon, the Baptist preacher known as “the Prince of Preachers,” explained joy this way: “Believers are not dependent upon circumstances. Their joy comes not from what they have, but from what they are; not from where they are, but from whose they are; not from what they enjoy, but from that which was suffered for them by their Lord.” That understanding of joy is knowledge, not an emotion.

A Sign of Spiritual Danger

I have always been cautious about confusing happiness and joy. I also recognize that a sign of spiritual danger is losing your joy. Most Christians know that joy is listed as a fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. But there is a reason that amid his teaching about walking by the Spirit and his warning about gratifying the desires of the flesh, Paul lists joy right between the fruit of love and peace. Scripture leaves no room for debate as

to how one should live when Galatians 5:17 says, “The desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other” (ESV). Worldly happiness is in opposition to Biblical joy.

Joy Made Full

Jesus assures us that joy will result when we commit ourselves to Him and abide in His love. He said, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:10-11). To have the joy of Jesus is to be full indeed!

Too many people pursue happiness and search for pleasure, finding only emptiness instead of fulfillment. Those who trust Jesus find meaning and purpose—and realize His joy. Only when we let go of selfishness and worldly lust do we understand true joy.

There is another spiritual benefit to a life of joy. Bible expositor Matthew Henry says the joy of the Lord keeps you safe from temptation. It guards you from the empty pleasures the tempter uses to bait his hooks. Scripture explains that the enemy, the devil, seeks to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10) and protect His children even more. The Lord tells us the serpent, the devil, is ‘more crafty than any other beast of the field’ (Genesis 3:1). Sometimes his craftiness and deception are wrapped in the package the world calls seeking to be happy.

Only someone who found the joy of Christ could testify, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8). Because his joy was made full to overflowing, Paul could write: “In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy”. (Philippians 1:4).

