

# What Joy Can Do For You

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I want to tell you what joy has done for me. Last time, we talked about joy being a commandment from God – a commandment God wants us to keep. There are reasons behind that commandment. God doesn't want us to have a miserable old time being joyful just because we have to be. He has given us the commandment to be joyful because it's good for us. I never realised how beneficial joy was going to be in my life until everything crashed and all the things that used to give me joy either became a burden or were stripped away. So I want to tell you what joy has done for me.

When I crashed with burnout, the chronic fatigue and depression that followed were some of the lowest points in my life. But that's where joy came in. In seven years of not being well, joy was a major factor for my healing – in my mental health, and in many other areas of my life. I want to share with you five blessings of joy that I have experienced. As I share those, I also want to show how other people in the Bible have received the same blessings as they built joy into their lives.

Before I get to that, have a listen to this verse from Proverbs 17:22.

*A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. (NIV)*

I really like the way the Good News Bible puts it.

*Being cheerful keeps you healthy. It is slow death to be gloomy all the time. (GNB)*

That's exactly what we are going to talk about today! Joy is a natural healer for both mental and physical health. Someone who is joyful and healthy isn't out looking to self medicate with selfish or sinful activities to ease their burdens – they are happy with life. Joy makes it easier for us

to come into the presence of God. With joy, we find life, hope, and salvation. Joyful people have a positive outlook in life and a can-do attitude.

It's slow death to be gloomy all the time! Grumbling, hopeless, everything is too hard, aches and pains. And if we are not in the presence of God or pleasing him in our gloominess, think about it: *It's slow death to be gloomy all the time.*

So here are five benefits of joy as I have found them:

1. Joy helps with our physical and mental health.
2. Joy helps us resist sin.
3. Joy brings us nearer to God.
4. Joy gives us hope.
5. Joy gives us strength.

Let's go through them one by one, because I want to tell you what joy has done for me.

## Joy helps with our physical and mental health

If you are wanting a medical or psychological explanation about exactly how joy helps physically and mentally, I am not going to give it to you, because that's not my area of expertise. But what I can do is to tell you what God says in his word, and what he has done for me through joy.

Think about the verse we just read and what it says about the benefits of joy to our health.

*A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. (Prov 17:22)*

Here I have two options. I can be cheerful, make the most of any situation, see the best in it, and rejoice in my trials – even though I might be unwell – and it does me good like a medicine. That doesn't mean disregard your troubles to put a happy face on it, but instead of choosing self pity (which is what I usually want to choose), I have to chose to look for beauty and joy. Even if we can't find much, every little bit helps.

The Amplified Version puts it this way, *A happy heart is good medicine and a joyful mind causes healing.* Medicine and a joyful heart both help us to get better. Medicine is good for us. It keeps us from getting sick and it helps us to get better if we are sick. And that's what a cheerful spirit or a merry heart will do for us as well. It's good like a medicine. It will help you feel better. It will take away pain and aid healing. Being cheerful keeps you healthy.

Please, if you have deep depression and joy seems impossible to find, ask for prayer and also seek professional help to find a balance, so that joy can be found and begin to do its work. The alternative to having a happy heart or a joyful mind is to have a crushed spirit that dries up the bones – you may be gloomy all the time and experience a slow death.

Here are a couple of other translations: *If you are sad, you hurt all over* (CEV) and *depression drains one's strength* (God's Word Translation). I have experienced those in person. Dried up bones are no good for anything. There is no life and there is no strength in them.

It's a life and death choice. Joyfulness and health, or gloominess and death.

Proverbs 15 says a similar thing.

*A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit. (Prov 15:13)*

At the time of my burnout, God started me on my “medication” early in preparing a series of talks on joy. I wanted to know where my joy had gone. That joyless spirit caused a drying of my bones, a gloomy outlook. It caused depression, anxiety, hopelessness, helplessness. It drained my strength. I know exactly what those verses talk about because that was me. But God prepared the best medicine – a study on joy.

I had to ask: What is joy? How do you get it? Why is it important to God and to us? How do we practice it? How do we keep it? And as I immersed myself into those thoughts on joy and started to put them into practice in my life, slowly there was healing. The medicine of joy took effect. The anxiety eased off, the lows of my mood were less low, my body responded to the healing, and my energy levels rose. I was able to begin to rest in God. And the darkness I was living in began to lift as glimmers of joy made their way in.

Joy was not the only factor in my healing – there was also rest and the great support of my family, ecclesia and doctor. But joy was certainly a major player in my healing. I don't think my recovery would have happened at all without growing a spirit of joy.

*Being cheerful keeps you healthy. It is slow death to be gloomy all the time. (GNB)*

So how healing is joy? Think about this: no more crying, no more pain, all tears wiped away, no more mourning, no more death. What is left? Death has been wiped away, so we have everlasting life. Sorrow, pain, weeping, and mourning have been wiped away, so we are left with joy. Everlasting life and joy are what is left! In God's new creation, everything that takes away joy has been taken away.

*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Rev 21:4)*

Joy plays a big part in healing the mind, body, and spirit. Joy gives life. Being cheerful helps keep you healthy. It is slow death to be gloomy all the time. Help your body by addressing the joy in your heart.

## Joy helps us resist sin

I have done a lot of thinking about sin. Why is it that sometimes temptation is much harder to resist than at other times? I think I figured out part of the answer. When I have had a bad day, if I am not feeling well, if I am tired, or if I am in a particularly low mood, I want something to pick me up, to help me feel better and to lighten my mood. That's when I should turn to God. I say "should". Unfortunately, "should" is not what usually happens. Instead I turn to other things that give me the endorphin boost I think I need. That's when we might find ourselves picking on someone smaller than we are and feel good from it. That's when we start eating for comfort, shopping when we can't afford to spend money, drinking to drown our sorrows, viewing pornography, spreading gossip, or resorting to violence. All because we feel gloomy.

I have also noticed that when I am in a good mood, when everything is going right and I am full of joy – especially full of joy in the Lord – temptation to sin is not a problem. I don't need anything to pick me up. I am satisfied. Life is good.

Joy has been one of the keys to my battle with temptation and sin. And I'll tell you what, I struggle with temptation. Sin is the hardest thing in my life to overcome. But it makes such a big difference when I am filled with joy. It's like 80% of the temptations that tempt me just evaporate. And the rest have far less power over me.

Let's have a think about the time David brought the ark of God back into Jerusalem. This was one of the most exciting, happy, joyous days in the whole of Israel's history. Everyone was there. They were all excited. Sacrifices and offerings were being made, music was playing, people were shouting, dancing, and rejoicing.

*So David and the elders of Israel and commanders of units of a thousand went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the house of Obed-Edom with rejoicing. ... So all*

*Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouts, the sounding of trumpets, and of cymbals, and playing of lyres and harps. (1Chron 15:25,28)*

*David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets. (2Sam 6:14)*

I am going to take a guess on this, but I reckon that with all Israel rejoicing and celebrating before the LORD, there wasn't much sin going on. If you could look at a chart of sin per day, the day that Israel brought the ark up to Jerusalem with rejoicing, sin would have been at an all time low. Everyone had their minds on God. They were all happy and weren't looking around for other things. Joy kept them from sin.

But then there was Michal. All Israel might have been rejoicing, but she wasn't. Michal was having a mood – a bad mood – in an upstairs window. She refused to rejoice with the rest of Israel. She refused to join in, to sing, to dance, to follow the procession. She was grumpy, moody, sour, gloomy. She had her “I've just sucked a lemon” face on. And did she successfully resist sin while blatantly avoiding joyfulness? No. Instead she despised David, a man after God's own heart. She thought evil thoughts. She grumbled and tried to crush the joy out of those around her – especially David. Michal refused to rejoice, so sin had its way with her.

Joy helps keep us from sin. A lack of joy will lead us into sin. That's the second way joy has been a blessing to me. Joy helps keep me from sin.

## Joy brings us nearer to God

The third way joy has been a blessing to me is that it brings me nearer to God. For sure, suffering brings me to my knees and re-focusses me on God in a dramatic way at times. But at other times, simple things like the antics of children, the flowers in the garden, a bird hopping along a fence, the beauty of a sunrise, or finding a gem in the word of God, will fill my spirit with joy. They leave me feeling much closer to God than I am when I am not looking for those moments of joy. Joyful moments give me opportunities to offer a spontaneous prayer of thankfulness, to praise, to sing. They help me feel like God is there – even when life is dark – and that there are rays of sunshine in the darkness.

When I am together with other brothers and sisters and songs of praise are sung joyfully, I can almost feel like God is right there in the room with me. Joy brings us closer to God. If joy keeps us from sin and also brings us closer to God, it's no wonder God commanded us to have joy! Joy is good for us! And when we put joy into our lives, we are obeying him, so we are pleasing him, and so he loves us for our joy. Not only do we come closer to God when we have his joy in our hearts, but he comes closer to us as well. So why do we choose the slow death of gloom when we could have the joy of the Lord in our lives instead?

When David brought the ark into Jerusalem, he and all the people would have felt really close to God that day. Psalm 100 is a psalm that tells us the best way to come into God's presence. Listen to this.

*Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. (Psalm 100:1,2)*

It's a joyful attitude that God wants from us when we go to meet with him. And joy is not just a feeling – it's a choice. We can choose to have and to show joy. When we are thankful for his blessings, when we see him in our lives, and when we realise how blessed we are and how much hope we have, we can cultivate and grow our joy. (But thankfulness and choosing joy are subjects for another article.)

God didn't punish the joyful people in the wilderness. No plague broke out when the people sang the song of Moses, and when Miriam and the women celebrated with tambourines, but when they were grumbling and joyless, God removed them from his presence. Joy brings us nearer to God.

*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. (Rom 14:17,18)*

In serving God with joy we become pleasing to him. In serving God with joy we are coming closer to the kingdom of God. In serving God with joy we are growing the fruit of the spirit in our lives. Wow! What huge benefits we gain from growing joy in our lives. Closer to God and closer to his kingdom.

## Joy gives us hope

Here is something I have noticed about me. The more *joyful* I am, the easier it is to be hopeful about the future. And the more *hopeful* I am about the future, the easier it is to be joyful. Hope and joy feed off each other. Joy can give us hope.

Sometimes during the hardest times of my burnout, and with all the health issues that went along with it, it was really hard to find something to look forward to. Life was bleak. There seemed to be no end of struggling through work, coming home to sleep, then heading back out to work again before I had even recovered from the previous day. Then doing it all again. If that was all I had to look forward to, life was looking very grim for me. The kingdom was always there, but it seemed so far away. It was against that grey background that joy made such a difference to me. Just being able to find a little bit of joy each day – in something I saw, something someone said, an encouraging Bible verse, or a glimmer of hope – made each day a little more hopeful and a little more bearable.

I said earlier, that at the beginning of my burnout I was doing a series of studies on joy for our Bible class. What a blessing that was! As I immersed myself in the joy-filled verses of the Bible, my spirits lifted and hope began to grow back – especially during the study that considered the role of joy in the hope of the kingdom. (You can look forward to that in a later article).

Paul found that joy was an ingredient of hope too. As he blessed his brothers and sisters in Rome, this is what he said,

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 15:13)*

Joy has been given to us so that we can overflow with hope. We need to be filled with joy so that we can overflow with hope. David made a similar connection when he said,

*You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psalm 16:11)*

When we are filled with joy, there are eternal pleasures to be gained. What an awesome hope that is – if we choose to fill our lives with joy.

And Jesus was the same. Joy and hope intertwined giving him the motivation to follow through with the agony of the cross.

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:2)*

The fourth benefit of joy is that joy gives us hope. The greater our joy, the stronger our hope. The more we choose to have and show joy in our lives, the more hopeful we will become. Whether we take joy from things like a birdsong, or from our vision of the kingdom, joy fills us with hope. We can't live without hope. Hope is crippled without joy. Hope is a great benefit of joy!

### Joy gives us strength

The fifth way joy has been a blessing to me is the strength that I gain from it.

When the Jews came back from captivity they found that the temple and the walls of Jerusalem were completely broken down. Not only that, but they had enemies on every side wanting to stop any productive work they were doing. As Ezra and Nehemiah encouraged the Jews through the challenge of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, they also discovered that the Jews who had returned didn't have a very good understanding of the law of the LORD, and that their devotion to the LORD was compromised. Those who had returned from captivity were weak and they needed all the strength they could get.

Nehemiah galvanised them into action and got them working to be able to build the wall of Jerusalem in just 52 days. And Ezra also got to work, teaching the people the law. The people were weak and vulnerable. When all the people were gathered together in the court of the temple, Ezra opened up the scrolls of the Law and read them in the presence of the people. Suddenly they all started to understand just how far from God they had been. Reading the law, they understood how sinful they had been. Their reaction was to weep because of the severity of their sin. The problem was that *their weeping was sapping their strength*. In a state of mourning they were in no position to build, to grow in God, or to defend themselves from their enemies.

So instead of weeping, Ezra and Nehemiah changed the theme of the day and told the people to be glad that they had understood the law. This is what we read.

*Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, 'This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not*



*mourn or weep.’ For all the people had been mourning and weeping when they heard the words of the Law. Nehemiah said, ‘Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to the LORD. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.’ (Neh 8:9,10)*

Understanding the word of God was a cause for celebration. The joy from their celebration became the source of their strength. Nehemiah, Ezra, and Israel found their strength in the joy of the LORD. In that strength, they were able to be strong for the work they had to do. They were able to stand against their enemies, and they were strong enough to re-dedicate their lives, to confess their sins (which takes a lot of strength), and to live for God.

I have had the same experience in my life. Joy from the word of God gives me strength as I face the day. For me, it comes from doing a Bible reading in the morning and being able to think about it during the day. I also get strength from the Bible verses I write in my diary. Lately a lot of them have been about joy. Being able to see joy every time I look in my diary has been a really big source of encouragement and strength for such a small thing to do. I get strength for the day, strength to help me overcome sin, strength to keep my spirits up, strength to stay focussed on God, strength in knowing that there is more to come, strength of knowing that God will give me all I need in any given situation.

Joy gives us strength. Joy gives us a positive outlook on life that helps us when times are hard. Joy is a strength to get our lives right with God. Joy is a strength that comes from our encouragement in God’s word. But a broken spirit saps a person’s strength.

## Benefits of joy

We have considered five things that joy can do for us.

1. Joy helps with our physical and mental health.
2. Joy helps us resist sin.
3. Joy brings us nearer to God.
4. Joy gives us hope.
5. Joy gives us strength.

Joy is a commandment from God, but it’s there for our good. Living for God is so much easier with joy. Why don't we choose it? Next time we will think about ways to choose and grow joy in our lives. It's easier than you might think!