

Growing In Joy When The Valley Is Deep

Introduction:

NIV **Job 5:7** . . . man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.

Ours are lives of pain and pang, suffering and heart ache, moan and groan, and woe. Yet, I can tell you from personal testimony that we can have supernatural joy in the midst of it.

It's been said that joy is the lubricant of life. Joy removes burdens from the heart. Joy will help you in the time of your deepest need.

How do you Grow In Joy When The Valley Is Deep?

I lost Sandra, my wife of 34 years, to cancer, in 2017. Worst experience I've ever been through, and of course, it was much worse for her. I felt sorrow upon sorrow—there's just no two ways about it. If we had had a terrible marriage I suppose it might not have hurt quite so badly, but the fact is that we had a good marriage, a great marriage, so the blow was hard. That was a deep valley for me. In many ways it still is. I'm very thankful the Lord brought Lixin into my life, but I still miss Sandra very much. I still can hardly believe it happened. Yet through it all I had, Sandra and I both had, the joy of the Lord.

The joy of the Lord didn't remove my pain; the joy of the Lord helped me bear it.¹

How are we to grow in joy when the valley is deep?

******Look what three things are we told to do in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18a**

ESV **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18a** Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances . . .

Triumphal Trinity: These three—rejoice, pray, give thanks—are a set, a triumphal trinity. They are inextricably bound together.

The tie that binds these three together is found in 5:18b. The reason Paul gave for always rejoicing, always praying, and always giving thanks (5:18b):

ESV **1 Thessalonians 5:18b** . . . for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

The reason given is simply because it is God's will that we do so. *Want to know God's will for your life?* Here it is!

How? It is commanded that we rejoice, but How do we do that? How do we Grow In Joy When The Valley Is Deep?

¹ Adrian Rogers, *Adrianisms* (Collierville, TN: Innovo Publishing, 2015), 96.

Definition

Perhaps we'd better first attempt a definition of the word joy.

- **“Rejoice” (5:16)**²: “Rejoice” is from *chairo*. BAGD simply says it means to “be glad.”³ I didn’t find that very helpful. Let me confess to you:
I certainly did not feel *glad* when Sandra was diagnosed with cancer.
I did not feel *glad* on our many trips to the emergency room and subsequent hospital stays.
I was not *glad* when she lay writhing in pain in the middle of the night.
I did not feel *glad* the morning she died.

I think BAGD gave the secular meaning of rejoice, but they didn’t deal with its sacred meaning.

The New Testament often takes a secular word and gives it somewhat of a specialized meaning, and I think this is certainly the case with the word “joy”.

- The problem with gladness or happiness is that it is based on happenstance. If your hap is bad, you’re sad.
- Being dependent on happiness makes you a victim of circumstances. **What is Christian joy beyond being “glad”?**

Happiness evaporates with trouble; Christian joy is intermixed with trouble.
Happiness is outward; Christian joy comes from the inside.
Happiness is cosmetic; Christian joy is character.

Paradoxical Observation: And so we have a paradox. *Joy is not incompatible with sorrow.*

Paradox Example, Jesus

Jesus said:

ESV **John 15:11** These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you . . .

When Jesus spoke these things, He was facing dark Gethsemane and bloody Calvary.

ESV **Hebrews 12:2** . . . Jesus . . . for the joy that was set before him endured the cross . . .

There is a paradox when it comes to being joyful. Jesus Himself is described as:

ESV **Isaiah 53:3** . . . a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief . . .

Yet the writer of Hebrews said of Jesus:

ESV **Hebrews 1:9** . . . God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness . . .

² 1 Thessalonians 5:16 the second-shortest verse in the Greek New Testament.

³ Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 873.

Paradox: Even when our life is a deep valley of tragedy, sorrow, pain, moaning, and woe, we can have joy.

Paradox Example, Paul

Paul was no hypocrite. He practiced what he preached. Paul Himself rejoiced always. Yet this doesn't mean he plastered a fake smile on his face all the time. Rejoicing in the Lord didn't mean Paul felt no sorrow. Epaphroditus had a close call with death; Paul said:

ESV **Philippians 2:27** . . . he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

Paul had been to heaven and back. He knew how good it was. Yet, had Epaphroditus died, Paul would have felt "sorrow upon sorrow." That's because Paul would have been left behind, holding the bag. He would have felt like Elisha felt when the chariot of fire took Elijah away.

I really miss Sandra. It hurts. I'm sure Sandra doesn't miss me nearly so much as I miss her. *How could she?* She's in paradise in perfect fellowship with Jesus!

ESV **Philippians 1:23b** My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Insight: Joy is not there to *remove* the pain, but to help you *bear* the pain.

Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and then thrown into prison, their feet in stocks. Yet Luke records that they were:

ESV **Acts 16:25** . . . praying and singing hymns to God . . .

ESV **2 Corinthians 7:4b** In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.

Paul had triumph in tribulation. Like Paul, we will have pain and trouble too. Like Paul we can overflow with joy.

ESV **Nehemiah 8:10b** . . . the joy of the LORD is your strength.

So, how might we define Christian joy?

John Piper: "Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world."⁴

Does God command *feelings*? **Augustine:** "Father, command what you will and grant what you command."⁵

⁴ John Piper, "How Do You Define Joy?", DesiringGod.org. Accessed September 11, 2019.

⁵ John Piper, "How You Define Joy?", DesiringGod.org. Accessed September 11, 2019.

Theopedia: “Joy is a state of mind and an orientation of the heart. It is a settled state of contentment, confidence and hope.”⁶ Joy is truly being able to say, “It is well with my soul”.

The Most Helpful: “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 alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.”⁷

I felt absolutely no gladness related to Sandra’s cancer, but:
I did have the settled assurance that God was in control.
I did have a quiet confidence that ultimately everything would be alright.
We did make a determined choice to praise God in every situation.

I. Rejoice Always, 5:16

Now, back to our question: **How do you Grow In Joy When The Valley Is Deep? *Rejoice Always.***

Ia. “Rejoice” is a choice.

You must purpose to do it. Grammatically, this is an imperative. Joy is commanded (5:16). It’s not automatic. You don’t have to rejoice. Joy is a deliberate choice.⁸ You have to choose to do it.

Joy is . . . the determined choice to praise God in every situation.

Happiness is like a thermometer, it registers the way things are. Joy is more like a thermostat, it regulates the way things are.

How is this possible? How are we able to rejoice despite bad circumstances?

1) Grace

Greek Stem: Joy is supernatural in its origin. The Greek word “joy” and the Greek word “grace” come from the same Greek stem. It is only because of God’s grace that we can experience supernatural joy.⁹

Augustine: “Father, command what you will and grant what you command.”

Joy is a command, and it is also a grant. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit:

2) Holy Spirit’s Fruit

⁶ “Joy”, Theopedia.com. Accessed September 11, 2019.

⁷ Definition by Rick Warren, quoted by Bill High, “How Do You Define Joy?”, BillHigh.com. Accessed 09/11/2019.

⁸ Gary Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 224.

⁹ Ernest Best, *First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 235.

ESV **Galatians 5:22** . . . the fruit of the Spirit is . . . joy . . .

Since you have the Holy Spirit, the potential is already in you to be joyful, to have joy, to rejoice. Joy really is an inside job. Joy is supernatural in its source, but you have to tap into it.

The Holy Spirit within us gives us supernatural ability to be joyful—if we so choose. Remember, it is a *command*.

3) It is Jesus' Joy

ESV **John 15:11** [Jesus] I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you . . .

Amazing Truth: It's not your joy; it is Jesus' joy in you! It is not joy *like* His; it is His joy. Joy is the manifestation of Jesus in your heart.

ESV **John 15:11** . . . I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, **and that your joy may be full**.

Joy of Jesus is abundant. There is a lot of it: "full".

It is a fruit of the Spirit; it is the manifestation of Jesus in your heart. Therefore, joy can be commanded because joy is possible through Jesus in you.

Joy is . . .the determined choice to praise God in every situation.

Ib. Rejoice in the Lord

Our passage today commands: "Rejoice always . . ." We get more information from a similar command:

ESV **Philippians 4:4** **Rejoice in the Lord always . . .**

More specifically, our rejoicing must be focused: **We are to rejoice in the Lord —not in our circumstances.**

ESV **Psalms 37:4** Delight yourself in the LORD . . .

Example, House: If when you get home you discover your house has burned down, I'm sure you wouldn't be glad. But if you lose your joy, then you are getting your joy in the wrong place. The Hebrew Christians had learned the lesson:

ESV **Hebrews 10:34** . . . you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property . . .

Joy is . . . the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life . . .

It takes settled assurance in God's sovereignty to rejoice and be thankful in *all* circumstances. Paul didn't say that all circumstances are good. Many are evil. Yet by faith we realize that God's greater, sovereign purpose is accomplished even in bad circumstances. Ultimately everything is going to be alright. *Do we really trust the Father, or don't we?*

ESV **Job 13:15** Though he slay me, I will hope in him . . .

Joy is . . . the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright . . .

Notice that the reason given for the Hebrews' joy:

ESV **Hebrews 10:34** . . . you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property *since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.*

To rejoice "in the Lord" means you need to "know" some things:

Primarily, we need to "know" Jesus Himself. Know Jesus and know joy; but, no Jesus, no joy.

We also need to "know" what Jesus has promised out of His loving grace.

ESV **Romans 5:2b** . . . we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

ESV **Romans 5:3** More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings . . .

How can you rejoice in sufferings? Again, you need to "know" something:

ESV **Romans 5:3-5** . . . we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

We rejoice in hope of glory God. It's very sad to hear a doctor say that the situation is hopeless. However, just imagine the worst thing that could happen to you, it is still not hopeless if belong to Jesus.

ESV **Romans 8:28-29a** . . . we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

ESV **Luke 10:20** . . . do not rejoice . . . that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

Joy is . . . the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright . . .

ESV **Romans 8:18** . . . the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

NIV **1 Corinthians 2:9b** "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"

ESV **2 Corinthians 4:17** . . . this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison . . .

Joy is . . . the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright . . .

Ic. Rejoice Always

How to grow in joy when the valley is deep?

1a. "Rejoice" is a choice

1b. Rejoice "in the Lord" (not circumstances)

1c. **Rejoice "always"**. You have keep on doing it—even in deep valleys.

Circumstances change. We are to rejoice in the Lord—and the Lord never changes. That's why you can rejoice "always".

Witness: Having joy is a powerful witness. That's where the reality of your faith shows forth. Some joyless Christians go around like advance agents for the undertaker. It is as if they have a Bible under one arm and a tombstone under the other. They ask, "Wouldn't you like to believe in Jesus?" People will say, "No thank you; I've got enough troubles already."¹⁰

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 alright, and
- the determined choice to praise God in every situation.

II. Pray Without Ceasing, 5:17

How do we grow in joy when the valley is deep?

Chrysostom thought the way to grow in joy (5:16), how you do it, is found in 5:17: pray without ceasing. The answer to HOW is though constant prayer (of course, thanksgiving, 5:18, is a type of prayer).¹¹ Frankly, I'm not so sure Paul was writing out a formula here, but I am certain that God does want us to practice all three simultaneously (rejoice, pray, thank), so since they're a package deal, I want to take a look at what Paul wrote about prayer and thanksgiving.

So, another piece of the puzzle of how to grow in joy is to: Pray Without Ceasing, 5:17

¹⁰ Illustration given in a sermon by Adrian Rogers.

¹¹ John Eadie, *Greek Text Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 207.

- **“pray” (5:17):** The Greek word here for “pray” is *proseuchomai*, the general, umbrella word for prayer; it includes all types of prayer (just communing with God, praises, petitions, thanksgiving, imprecatory (!)).¹² The point: we are to talk to the Lord—about everything.

NAS Philippians 4:6-7 . . . in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Having God’s peace is very much like having joy, so maybe Chrysostom was on to something.

- **“without ceasing” (5:17):** The adverb for “without ceasing” (*adialeiptos*) refers to something that happens over and over. It was used with reference to a continual uninterrupted cough¹³ or a sustained military attack.¹⁴ What he’s talking about here is an attitude of prayerfulness; it is being quick to pray.

ESV Psalm 105:4 Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!

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 alright, and
- the determined choice to praise God in every situation.

III. Give Thanks in All Circumstances, 5:18

I. Rejoice is a choice /rejoice in the Lord /rejoice always

II. pray without ceasing

III. The third ingredient to growing in Joy is to Give Thanks In All Circumstances, 5:18

- **“give thanks” (5:18):** We are to pray without ceasing, *but in particular*, giving thanks is to be a large part of our praying.

What are we to give thanks for? John Piper got prostate cancer. He wrote, “You will waste your cancer if you do not believe it is designed for you by God. It will not do to say that God only uses our cancer but does not design it. What God permits, he permits for a reason. And that reason is his design. If God foresees molecular developments becoming cancer, he can stop it or not. If he does not, he has a purpose. Since he is infinitely wise, it is right to call this purpose a design. Satan is real and causes many pleasures and pains. But he is not ultimate. So when he strikes Job with boils (Job 2:7), Job attributes it ultimately to God (2:10) and the inspired writer agrees: “They . . . comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him” (Job 42:11). If you don’t believe your cancer is designed for you by God, you will waste it.”¹⁵

¹² William Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus, New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 138.

¹³ Give example of man in audience coughing through a message and ruining the recording.

¹⁴ Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1980), 603.

¹⁵ Gervase Markham, “Thank God for Cancer”, Blog.Gerv.Net. Accessed September 11, 2019.

Example, Broken Limb: A month before Sandra got sick for the last time, she had a dream that she was sitting in a tree. The limb broke and she fell to the ground. She wasn't hurt, but she heard a voice say, "In everything give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (NAS, 1 Thessalonians 5:18). Upon awakening, she told me of the dream and said she felt it meant more medical trouble was ahead. That very day we ended up back in the emergency room. As each subsequent wave of ever-intensifying trials later came, we both spoke of that broken limb dream and the Lord's word and we thanked him in obedience and by faith. I am continuing to do that now in her absence. It was a good word from our good Lord.

Joy is . . . the determined choice to praise God in every situation.

Conclusion

How are we to grow in joy when the valley is deep?

1. rejoice is a choice
2. rejoice *in the Lord*
3. rejoice always
4. pray without ceasing
5. give thanks in all circumstances

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 alright, and
- the determined choice to praise God in every situation.

A visit to the doctor revealed the chemo had quit working and that Sandra's cancer was growing out of control. Several infusions of a new chemo were tried, but every day Sandra got visibly worse. Through it all we continued to give thanks by faith in obedience and despite unpleasant circumstances. After just a few weeks, the doctor said there was no use trying any more chemo. Medically, it was a hopeless situation.

Sandra's decline the following week was dramatic. It surprised even her: "It was just so fast." She developed trouble breathing as her lungs filled with fluid, had to sleep sitting up, lost her appetite, was in near constant pain, grew so weak she could not walk, and said how bad she felt. Along about her last day, she said she could at last understand how people would give up. For the first time ever, she said she was ready to go.

That evening she went to bed early. After a while, I went back to check on her. She said she wanted to go. I said where? I thought she meant from the bed to back the recliner or the couch. She said, "Why don't you let me out?" (as if I had her locked in the car). Then she said, "I want to go through that door" and she pointed to the wall (no door). Pretty soon she fell asleep.

That morning I woke up at 5:15. I got up and checked on her, then got back in the bed. I lay there a moment, listening to her labored breathing on two oxygen machines (which seemed to embody all the trials and suffering she was going through). Many times in the past she had grown really sick, but each time had bounced back. This time it seemed there would be no coming back. My sister, a nurse, said she could linger for weeks. Miserable for her, I prayed silently for God to end her suffering if He was not going to heal her. Immediately she quit breathing. There was no struggle; it was as if a candle had quietly been blown out. I believe God woke me up so I could be with her when she went home. Perhaps God caused me to pray so that He could answer my prayer.

Joy is . . . the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life

My attitude has been that expressed by Job so long ago when he said, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21b).

John Piper’s counsel has been immeasurably helpful to me: “Occasionally, weep deeply over the life you hoped would be. Grieve the losses. Feel the pain. Then wash your face. Trust God. And embrace the life He has given you.”

I was not glad, but I had the joy of the Lord.

ESV 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 . . . do not lose heart . . . this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

I’ll close with the words of a song that meant a lot to Sandra:

“It’s easy to sing When there’s nothing to bring me down
But what will I say When I’m held to the flame . . .
I know You’re able and I know You can Save through the fire with Your mighty hand
But **even if** You don’t My hope is You alone

They say it only takes a little faith To move a mountain
Well good thing A little faith is all I have, right now
But God, when You choose To leave mountains unmovable
Oh give me the strength to be able to sing *It is well with my soul*

I know the sorrow, and I know the hurt Would all go away if You’d just say the word
But **even if** You don’t My hope is You alone
You’ve been faithful, You’ve been good All of my days
Jesus, I will cling to You Come what may
My hope is You alone It is well with my soul
It is well, it is well with my soul”¹⁶

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NTRF.org
Revised 02/02/2020

¹⁶ “Even If”