

PRINCIPLES FOR JOY

John 15:11

INTRODUCTION

There is something that we all do, whether we are little babies or senior adults, that doctors say is such good medicine that it relieves stress and it is called laughter.

Laughter is good for you, and laughter is healthy. Solomon knew that. He said, "*a cheerful heart is good medicine*" (**Prov 17:22**).

But as you know, we don't always feel like laughing. The reason we laugh, generally speaking, is because something makes us happy, but we don't always laugh because we are not always happy.

A child laughs 400 times a day on the average, while an adult laughs only 15 times each day, which is puzzling since laughter feels so good and is so good for us!

Laughter is so beneficial for your body that it is like "inner jogging".

It is a natural stress reliever. You cannot maintain muscle tension when you are laughing!

A Jewish proverb:

"What soap is to the body, laughter is to the soul."

"Life may make the world go 'round, but laughter keeps us from getting dizzy."

But there is a delight, a gladness of heart, a rapture in the soul, that goes beyond and above happiness. It is called joy.

A. WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JOY AND HAPPINESS?

- You cannot be happy without being joyful. But you can be joyful without being happy.
- Happiness is external. Joy is internal.
- Happiness tends to be based on circumstances, while joy often comes in spite of circumstances

*"Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will joy in the God of my salvation" (**Habakkuk 3:17-18**).*

Joy will carry us beyond all our circumstances.

- Happiness tends to lift the emotions, while joy lifts the soul.
- Happiness often seems to "just happen," while joy is a choice.
- Happiness tends to focus on objects, while joy focuses on a person.

- Happiness is more often connected with receiving, while joy is connected with giving.
- Happiness tends to look at the visible, while joy focuses on the invisible.

Psalms 118:24 “*This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*”

The word "happiness" comes from an old English word 'happy', which literally means "chance." it corresponds to the Latin - Fortuna, which means luck.

You see, if things happen the way we want them to happen, then we are happy. But if they don't, then we are unhappy.

Happiness is temporary and fickle. Joy is permanent and settled.

One of the greatest and most attractive qualities both a church and a Christian can have, is joy.

We want our church to be known as "the fellowship of joy" because we want people to find joy when they come to this church.

Unfortunately, the world has caricatured Christians as being primarily purveyors of doom and gloom, prophets of sadness and sorrow, who condemn any fun as being sin.

Well, I want you to know that Christianity is to be nothing less than a festival of joy.

C. S. Lewis said: "joy is the serious business of heaven."

We should be in joy, and we should enjoy joy all of the time.

The words 'joy' and 'joyful' are used 250 times in the Bible.

The word 'rejoice' is used 200 times in the bible.

Thus, over 450 times we are told to be joyful and rejoice.

We should so rejoice that we can rejoice over our rejoicing.

If you get around God at all, you're going to be full of joy, because "*in his presence is fullness of joy.*"

The psalmist said: "*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.*" (Ps. 5:11)

Remember a joyless Christian is a slander against Jesus Christ.

Billy Sunday said: "if you have no joy in your religion, there is a leak in your Christianity."

Do you know why Jesus said all that He said, and why Jesus taught all that He taught?

He said in **John 15:11**, "*these things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*"

You see, when you get Jesus... you get joy... joy inexpressible and full of glory.

The Almighty God has said all along that a JOYFUL heart is good medicine! He's given us a PRESCRIPTION for JOY.

B. WHAT DOES CHRIST TEACH US ABOUT JOY?

- *Joy can be obtained by hearing, receiving and accepting the word of God.*

Notice what Jesus said, "These things have I spoken unto you that your joy might be full."

God's word is a source of joy.

- *It is possible that a person can lose their joy or they may not be full of joy. They may be half full.*

Jesus said, "that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full." Notice the words 'might remain' and 'might be full'.

They suggest that it is possible for a Christian to have some joy but yet not be full of Joy.

It also suggests that a Christian can have joy and then lose it.

- *Only God is the source of true and ultimate joy.*

Notice that Jesus said, "That MY JOY might remain in you" and as a result your joy can be full.

Nehemiah 8:10 says, "The joy of the LORD is your strength.

The Devil does not want you and me to be filled with the joy of the Lord because he knows that God's joy is the source of our strength.

When you are filled with God's joy, God provides you with the needed strength to get through any situation and overcome the Devil.

- *It is God's will that you be filled with joy all the time - in the bad times as well as in the good times.*

Jesus said in **John 10:10**, "*The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.*"

Think about that.

God wants you to have life in all its fullness.

In the King James Version it is called abundant life.

So why don't we have it?

As Christians we must understand that the Devil wants to still, kill and destroy your joy in life.

C. WHAT CAN WE DO TO HAVE JOY?

Jesus pointed out 3 things that will lead to your experiencing joy the way He intends.

1. We must understand our position.

In **verse 1**, Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.” Then in **verse 5** He says, “I am the vine, ye are the branches...”

There it is.

God the Father is the husbandman. It is He who owns it all and controls it all.

Jesus is the true vine, and we as believers are the branches.

What a great truth! Jesus is the true vine, and we are merely the branches!

By making this statement, Jesus implies that there are other vines, yet He is the true one.

If we’re going to have life, the kind of life we find in **John 14:6** and in **John 10:10**, then we’ll only find it in Christ, the true vine.

Jesus isn’t speaking about salvation here – he’s addressing people who profess to be saved already. He’s telling these saved people how to go about finding life.

What are some of the other vines to which people try to connect themselves?

Some try to stay connected to popularity for joy and fulfillment, others try riches and fame.

Folk try to find it in marriage or other relationships, in recreation, in work, and most all men and women try religion of some flavor.

We are branches. That’s it.

As children of God we are not the husbandmen, nor are we the vines.

Our place in Christian living is to stay connected to the vine and to allow Him to bear fruit through us. That’s it! That may not sound too thrilling, but regardless of our personal feelings about our position in life, the reality is that we as believers are completely and utterly dependent upon God through Jesus Christ.

Our place in the scheme of things is to be branches.

We are servants, not the master.

We are slaves, not the owners.

We are the creation, not the Creator.

The first thing these disciples had to know—and the first thing you and I need to know is what our relationship with the Lord really is.

It is exemplified by the relationship of a branch to the vine.

The branch has no life of its own. It is dependent upon the vine for its life.

The branch cannot produce fruit by itself. The vine produces the fruit through it.

The relationship between the branch and the vine can be summed up in one word: dependence.

I am dependent upon Jesus as the vine to supply His life flow in me so that what is produced is a fruit of his life flow rather than a work of my carnal efforts (no matter how well intended).

My life is simply an extension of His life.

We must think according to that truth. We must act according to that truth. Our whole lives must be lived in the light of that truth.

In contrast to what Jesus is teaching here, most of us try to live

our lives as if we were the vines and Jesus is an attachment to us—a kind of support to help us do what we want to do.

We have our goals, our desires, our work, our play and we attach Jesus to our lives.

But Jesus wants us to understand something.

He is not an attachment to our lives. We are an attachment to his life (Grafted into Him).

He is not dependent upon us. We are dependent upon him.

Also, we are dependent upon the Father as the vinedresser to prune the things in our lives that are robbing us of fruitfulness.

Obviously sin blocks the flow of life in me and robs me of fruitfulness.

There are cares of this life, distractions, worldliness that may not be evil but are superfluous and need to be cut away.

There are attitudes in me that He deals with—outgrowths of fleshly ambition, jealousy, pride that need to be cut out of my life.

Based upon that relationship, Jesus tells us to do one thing.

2. We must submit to God's pruning work in our lives.

Verses 2-3 say,

“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.”

While the King James text uses the words “purge” and “clean,” the meaning is to prune.

Remember that Jesus is speaking to saved people. The lost are not under consideration.

So when we read that there are some branches that aren't bearing fruit that will be taken away, John's not talking about God separating lost people from among the saved.

He's talking about removing those branches that are useless and are taking up space, taking up the valuable resources that could be better used for those branches that are producing fruit. He says that the branch, the soft, flexible and pliable portion of the vine, that does not bear any fruit – he takes it away.

It's not just discarded, but it's placed among other dead branches.

The gardener (God) takes the dead branches away.

And those branches are taken away because they are dead – they don't produce any fruit.

You can understand that.

God makes perfectly good sense here.

- *Dead branches take up good space.*
- *Dead branches don't give praise.*
- *Dead branches waste time.*
- *Dead branches don't go to Sunday school.*
- *Dead branches don't tithe.*
- *Dead branches complain all the time.*
- *Dead branches talk during preaching.*
- *Dead branches walk during a sermon.*
- *Dead branches are a stumbling block to someone else.*
- *Dead branches gossip all the time.*
- *Dead branches talk holy and walk unholy.*

Dead branches need to be removed, but it's not the job of the other branches to do the removing – that's the work of the gardener.

Hebrews 12:5-11

*“And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.’
7Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?”*

8If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

9Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

10Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

11No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

The writer of Hebrews told his readers to lay aside every weight that hindered them, and when we recognize those things, we ought to lay them aside, but very often we don't recognize the sin in our lives.

We have blind spots and areas of our lives that keep us from growing and producing fruit, so God goes to work to prune out those things.

Whatever distractions are keeping you from serving the Lord, God says for His own sake, I've got to prune or clean your branch.

But we are being pruned – not for our pain, but that God would receive glory.

When God gets finished pruning on my life, He will receive the glory.

And when He gets finished with me...my life will give Him glory, my ways will give Him glory, my songs will give Him glory, my prayers will give Him glory, and my giving will give Him glory.

And I will experience joy in my life because of God's pruning work like I've never experienced it before, not because the pruning was pleasant, but because it was necessary in order for me to be more productive for the Master.

3. We must abide in Christ.

Jesus said in **verse 4**,

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.”

Abide in Christ!

That sounds real spiritual, but what does it mean?

The word 'abide' comes from a word that means 'to continue', 'to stay' or 'dwell'.

Perhaps one of the simplest ways to think about it is just to ask you this question, “How does a branch get the sap it needs without staying connected to the vine?”

The answer to that question is the answer to our question of how we are to abide in Christ.

You see, we are to stay connected to Christ, to stay hooked up with Him, to dwell in Him, to continue in Him.

Ways to stay connected to Christ:

Jesus mentioned a few things in **verses 7-10** that will help us to do this.

- ***We must allow the Words of Christ to remain in us (vs. 7).***

In other words, we need to get into God's Word on a continual, regular basis.

We need to have a consistent plan of regular Bible

- reading,
- study,
- memorization,
- meditation, and
- application in our lives.

We need to allow God's Word to get into our lives and allow it to influence everything we think or say or do.

It is to be the filter through which we view all of life and the standard by which we live it.

- ***We must maintain an active prayer life (vs. 7).***

Jesus mentioned asking what we will of the Father.

He's speaking about a habit of prayer – a habit that is all too often lacking in the believer's life.

How in the world can we expect to experience the joys of Christian living, of abiding in Christ if we fail to do the simplest of things such as prayer?

Believers need to be praying people – because people who aren't praying are just playing.

- ***We must continue in love for others (vs. 9).***

Jesus plainly taught that this was the second greatest commandment; second only to our love for God the Father, our Husbandman. If we are going to experience joy – if we are going to be satisfied in this life, then we are going to have to love people, but it is not a forced love as in "I don't like them but I have to love them." This is the love that flows from maintaining the right love relationship with our source of love. It is about staying connected to the one who provides us with all our resources.

It is clear that on our own we lack the capacity to love the unlovable, but in Christ we can love all people, regardless of who they are or what they have done. We can only love others as we rightly love the Lord.

- ***We must be obedient to the Word of God (vs. 10).***

This may sound like a repeat of the first thing mentioned earlier, but it is not.

How often we find believers who can quote the Bible and who know the doctrines of the Lord's Word, yet they struggle in their application of that Word.

If we are going to experience what good things God has in store for us, then we need to not only know the Word, but also obey the Word.

We need to do the things we are told to do and not do those things that are forbidden in the Scriptures.

D. WHAT CAN STEAL OUR JOY?

In Philippians, the Apostle Paul identifies 4 thieves that can rob us of our joy.

- **The first thief of our joy is Problems.**

If we are honest with ourselves we will confess that when things are going our way, life is much better and easier to live.

When things are going smooth, we are happier and easier to get along with.

If we depend on a problem-free life to be happy and joyful, we will be a miserable people.

If we wait for ideal circumstances to be full of joy, it will never happen.

You and I have an enemy that wants to make life miserable for us.

The fact is the Word of God teaches us that all those that will live godly lives will have problems.

John 16:33 *"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."*

2 Timothy 3:12 *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."*

When Paul wrote the book of Philippians he was facing what seemed to be overwhelming problems.

He was in prison for preaching the gospel. He wasn't certain of his relief or death.

He was isolated from most of his friends. Yet, he had a friend that would stick closer than a brother.

Sometimes we may feel like the man that said, "I have so many problems that if a new one comes, it would be next week before I could worry about it."

Most of the problems in life are beyond our control. We have no control over the traffic, the weather over what people say and do.

The one thing that we do have control of is how we respond to the problems we encounter each day.

We can respond in fear or in faith. The choice is ours.

What about the things that we have control over. Make the necessary changes and go on with life.

- **The second thief of our joy is People.**

People can rob us of our joy if we let them.

It could be people in the church, people in your family, people on the job, or just people in general.

People can say and do things that can rob or destroy you of your joy.

Someone once said, “There are two kinds of people in the world - those that bring joy when they come, and those that bring joy when they leave.”

Someone else said, “To live above with Saints we love will be glory, but to live below with the Saints we know, well that's another story.

We have to live, work and worship with people; we cannot isolate ourselves from people and live to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

We need other people to be fulfilled in life.

Philippians 1:15-16 “Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds”

There are some people who look for ways to make us miserable.

These people tried to make Paul miserable by preaching with the wrong motives. But all Paul was concerned with was that the gospel was being preached.

- **The third thief of our joy is Possessions.**

How many people do you know that are killing themselves trying to get more things?

They say, “If I had a bigger house I would be happy. If I had a new car I would be happy. If I had a better paying job I would be happy. If I could marry the right person I would be happy.”

These people are looking for happiness in their possessions.

Luke 12:15 “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”

Abraham Lincoln was walking down the road with his two sons, who were crying and fighting.

A friend asked him, "What's the matter with the boys? Abraham Lincoln replied, "The same thing that is wrong with the whole world. "I have three walnuts and each of the boys want two."

The secret of having joy without possessions is to be content with what we have.

If we have the basic necessities in life; like food, clothing, a place to live and transportation to get about, then, we should be content.

- **The fourth thief of our joy is Pressure (Worry).**

How many people do you know that have lost their joy as a result of the pressures and worries of this life.

The word 'worry' means 'to be pulled in different directions'; 'to strangle'; 'to pull to pieces'.

When we allow the pressures of life to get to us, it cause us to worry and as a result we lose our joy. Many people worry about things that they cannot change.

The fact is studies have shown that only about 2% of what we worry about actually ever happens.

That means that 98% of what we worry about never happens.

Luke 12:22-31(CEV)

²⁵ *I tell you not to worry about your life. Don't worry about having something to eat, drink, or wear. Isn't life more than food or clothing?*

²⁶ *Look at the birds in the sky! They don't plant or harvest. They don't even store grain in barns. Yet your Father in heaven takes care of them. Aren't you worth more than birds?*

²⁷ *Can worry make you live longer?*

²⁸ *Why worry about clothes? Look how the wild flowers grow. They don't work hard to make their clothes.*

²⁹ *But I tell you that Solomon with all his wealth wasn't as well clothed as one of them.*

³⁰ *God gives such beauty to everything that grows in the fields, even though it is here today and thrown into a fire tomorrow. He will surely do even more for you! Why do you have such little faith?*

³¹ *Don't worry and ask yourselves, "Will we have anything to eat? Will we have anything to drink? Will we have any clothes to wear?"*

³² *Only people who don't know God are always worrying about such things. Your Father in heaven knows that you need all of these.*

³³ *But more than anything else, put God's work first and do what he wants. Then the other things will be yours as well.*

³⁴ *Don't worry about tomorrow. It will take care of itself. You have enough to worry about today.*

Someone once said “Worry is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do but gets you nowhere.”

Jesus gave us 2 reasons not to worry:

- a) Since we are of more value than the birds of the air, we can trust God to take care of us and provide for us the things we need in life.
- b) We have enough to deal with today without taking on tomorrow’s responsibilities along with today's.

CONCLUSION

The four-fold mindset that we need to have in order to have joy:

- **Single-Minded**

James 1:8 tells us that a double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Many Christians are robbed of their joy because they are not sold out to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many Christians are like thermometers.

A thermometer registers the temperature, or it's surrounding. The thermometer goes up or down depending on its surroundings.

What we need are more Christians that are like thermostats.

Thermostats change their surroundings. The thermostat's job is to keep the temperature at a constant and consistent setting.

Christians that do not have a single-minded devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ are up and down. They are in and out.

They are controlled by their problems, by people, by their possession and the pressure and worry of the world.

Philippians 1:21 *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”.*

- **Submissive-Minded**

In chapter 1, it is Christ First and in chapter 2 it is others second. That means I am last.

Philippians 2:3-5 (CEV) *“Don't be jealous or proud, but be humble and consider others more important than yourselves. Care about them as much as you care about yourselves and think the same way that Christ Jesus thought.”*

One of the reasons we have problems with people at times is because we can't have our own way.

The Christian with the submissive mind is not looking for someone to serve them. They are looking for someone to serve.

Submissive-minded Christians consider the good of others to be more important than their own desires.

- **Spiritual-Minded**

The spiritual mind wants to know Christ and become more like Christ.

Paul points out in chapter **3:19** that most people mind earthly things.

You may have heard that saying about spiritual-minded Christians - They are so heavenly-minded that they are no earthly good.

Well, let me tell you about the earthly-minded Christians - They are so earthly-minded that they are no heavenly good.

The Bible instructs us to set our affections on things above and not below.

Jesus said “where your treasure is that's where your heart will be.”

We need to be spiritual-minded.

- **Secure-Minded**

Some Christians are insecure in their relationship with God. They live their lives in fear rather than enjoying the blessing of God.

We need to learn to rest in the love of God for His children.

We need to be secure in our relationship with God.

Philippians 4: 7 (CEV) “*Then, because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel.*”