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Is the Character of Joy working in you?

Here is how you can find out. Take a careful look at this character and fruit of joy from God's most precious Word by examining the passages below. Now ask yourself:

1. How do I exhibit joy in my daily life?
2. What can I do to develop a more joyful attitude?
3. What blocks joy from working and being exhibited in me?
4. How can I make joy function better, stronger and faster, even in times of uncertainty and stress?

Joy is our focus on Christ as Lord; this allows us to enjoy our relationship with Him, His creation, and others, regardless of our circumstances, with an expression of delight and real, authentic happiness that comes from and with harmony with God and others. *Joy* in James refers to declaring our situation as happy and fulfilling, even when it is not. It is to change our mindset and focus. It is realizing the sovereignty of God and that He is in control, even when life seems to be turned upside down and inside out! Joy helps us understand God's perspective and gives us the confidence and patience to endure anything. Joy is not happiness, because we may not be content and pleased with it; rather, joy is hope. It is our real hope. It is not a meager wish; rather, it is the unshakable confidence of our future in Christ. Our pleasure comes from knowing He is in charge and caring for us!

(Psalm 32:7-9; 34:1-8; Proverbs 15:13; John 15:11; 17:13; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Thess. 5:18; 1 Peter 4:13-19; Hebrews 10:34; 12:2; James 1:1-4)

Distress, Sorrow, Despair and Regret are the opposites! Despair limits us like a ball and chain from growth and the enjoyment of life because we become consumed with our circumstances. Regret is when we have lost control of our attitude and response. Distress cuts us off from relationships, leaning, experiences and God. Not adding joy in our life leads to depression that cuts us off from seeing hope and purpose and what life and eternity are all about!

In the OT, joy was an expression of excitement that was experienced with personal triumph, or celebrating a good harvest or military victory. Often feasting, the offering of sacrifices or blessings and dancing were tied with joy (Deut 12:12; 1 Sam 18:6; Ps 31:7; 96: 11; Isa. 56:7; 60:15; 61:3 ff; Joel 1:16;).

In the NT, Joy comes from the Holy Spirit. It is associated with receiving or the telling of God's redemptive love. It also is associated with the enjoyment of life, such as eating, drinking, feasting and even suffering (Matt 5:11-12; Luke 12:19; Acts 7:41; Gal 5:22; 1 Peter 1:6).

Joy helps us see that life and purpose is all about who God is, and not who I am (Psalm 15; 101; 2 Thess. 1:12; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1). Joy is indispensable for sharing love, it is being confident in our faith. It is not just what you know; it is Who you know. He is Christ. Your love of Jesus is the picture other people need to see so they can better see Him (Joshua 1:8-9; 2 Cor. 1:24)! When we know we have the Good News, we will know Jesus, not just as a Savior, but as LORD (Luke 6:46)! He is to be all things to us. Is He Lord of your life, too? Joy helps us understand God's perspective and gives us the confidence and patience to endure anything! This realization impacts and fuels us to endure the toughness of life and to proclaim Jesus to others. Because we are confident in His power and impact, we will live in Him and show Christ to others. I know that in my life, my effectiveness is

directly correlated to my walk and my prayer life. How much I trust and obey becomes the power that helps me get through life when it seems dark and foreboding, and Joy will help you too.

We need to realize that we have no control over what happens to us at times, whether it be trials, suffering, setbacks, injury, sickness, or death of a loved one. We only have control of our attitude and response. We are called to choose to declare our situation joy! We cannot change our circumstances; however, we can accept them by learning and growing from them (Isa. 26:3). It does no good to complain, to fret, or to be angry or bitter, as these things do neither others nor us any good. All that complaining, just escalates the situation and blinds us to our ability to be better and not bitter! Real, authentic, Christian maturity will grow as a result of our problems. They will strengthen us and make us better, stronger, and able to get over things faster and get on with our lives. Then, we will be able to be of better use to God and to others.

Joy is not happiness, because we may not be content and pleased with it; rather, joy is hope; it is our hope. It is not a meager wish, rather the unshakable confidence in our future in Christ. Our pleasure comes from knowing He is in charge and caring for us (Psalm 34:1-8; 1 Thess. 5:18)! So we can look at whatever situation we face and say *this is good, this will better me, or this will help me. I may not understand it, but I can trust God; He is there and He will carry me through it!* We are called to declare our situation, whatever it may be, as joy! Because, it is not a question of **if** we have problems, but **when**, as we all will face them. We will face problems; they are inevitable, unavoidable, and unpredictable, and no one is immune! How we deal with them is crucial for our contentment and faith. There is no escape living in our corporeal bodies and in a sinful world (Gal. 3:26; Col. 3:1-4)!!

For us to survive suffering and grow in maturity, we must have a real, authentic faith. Our eyes must be on Him as well as our trust and faith. God must have us in Him, all of us—every aspect (Phil. 3)! Why do we need to allow ourselves to surrender to Him? We cannot deal with them effectively without Christ as Lord! He gives us the attitude of joy and the ability to persevere! This attitude of joy is also a key attribute for an athlete in order to excel on the field as well as for a Christian to grow in the Lord. What will you do? Surrender to Him or live unto yourself (Job 14:1; Psalm 34:14; John 3:30; 2 Cor. 4:7-12; Gal. 2:20-21; 1 Peter 4:12)?

The key is for us to look to Christ, not to our situation, and declare our circumstances as joy. We are to be content and satisfied, to face them, and then learn and grow from them. This does not mean giving up and do nothing; it means to refocus our energies into productivity and faith—not questions and bitterness. It is to have our convictions and fulfillment in Christ, not circumstances. So, when something very difficult comes upon us, we will have the great comfort that God is in control and will not allow us to carry more than we can tolerate. Our joy and purpose in life is Christ, and our relationship in Him! Will you allow yourself to become less, and Him to become more (John 3:30)? If not, what is in the way?

Reflection

Joy recognizes that Christ will lift us up in His time; it sees the hope to come because He is the Hope, and takes delight in the moment even in times of harshness. It must be declared and seen even when it is not visible. The joy we are to have is His. It must carry us through all of our experiences and situations. It must rule our character and response, it must set the tone of how we engage and respond to others, whether it is prosperity or adversity, whether we are in the oval office or living in the streets.

Remember to place Joy in all aspects of your life and expectations. If you are having problems take a serious look at despair and where it will get you, because there can be no delight without joy! You can have no true confidence without joy. What we suffer through, what we go through, what we give up is in no comparison to what we gain!!!! Christianity and suffering is the ultimate in delayed gratification!

- Here are positive examples from Scripture (Ex.14: 1-21; 1 Sam. 1:19; 2:10; Luke 10:17-21; 15:22-32; Acts 16:19-34)
- Here is are negative examples from Scripture (Ruth 1:19-21; Job 3:1-19; John 11:17-44)

Further Questions

1. How would you define joy? Are you a grouchy person when you get up?
2. Read James 1:1-4, what does it mean to you to *Count it joy*? How does self-pity counteract joy?
3. Look at Phil. 4:4, considering that Paul was in prison suffering greatly, how does your practice of love compare to Paul's excitement even in suffering?
4. Can you give an example of Joy from your life? When have you been filled with joy the most?
5. Why is Joy indispensable for sharing Christ's love? How is joy a fruit from being confident in our faith?
6. In what situation did you fail to have joy in which you should have?
7. What issue is in your life that would improve with more joy?
8. Think through the steps you need to take to put joy into action in a specific instance. Such as a counteracting the attitude of self-pity, or not letting your circumstances get in the way of your joy? Have you allowed Christ to introduce joy to you? Check out Psalm 48 and John 15:11 How can apply Joy in your life help you endure suffering, setbacks, injury, sickness, or a death of a loved one?