

## Topic 14: Joy & Peace

### Life as God Meant for It to Be

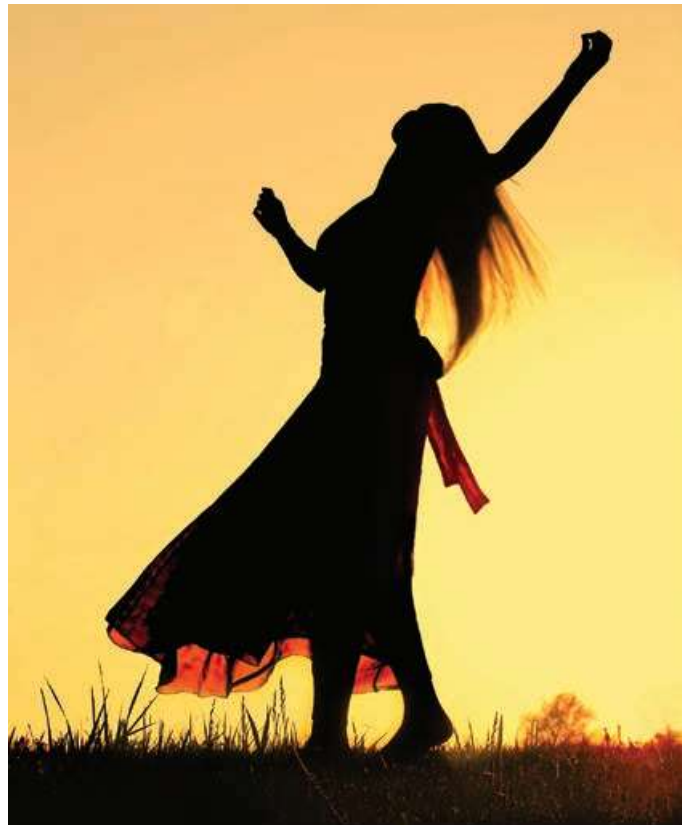
“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

—Romans 15:13



When we think about the *qualities* that mark a follower of Jesus, two rare and beautiful virtues that come to mind are *joy* and *peace*.

- ▶ Bob is a guy who goes to church regularly. He would quickly tell you about his faith in Christ. But if you watched him for very long, you’d soon see he doesn’t have a ton of joy in his life. Most days he’s tense and fretful—not free and full of peace. There’s a heaviness about him that, frankly, is painful to be around.
- ▶ Tricia on the other hand has a serene and lighthearted quality about her. She doesn’t just smile, she’s radiant. You know that old hymn “It Is Well with My Soul”? Tricia could be a walking advertisement for that idea. Just being with her is a delight and a comfort.



“Joy is the mark of a true Christian.”  
—William Wilberforce

## Bible Study

### Joy: What Is Joy?

The Old Testament Hebrew word *simha* and the New Testament Greek word *chara* convey a deep internal gladness that both comes from and culminates in external expression. In other words, joy is both a condition or quality and an action.

We practice it (rejoicing) in order to possess it (joyfulness).

True joy inevitably leads to heartfelt rejoicing, and vice versa.

Expressions of joy can be individual or corporate, private or public, reserved or exuberant, quiet or noisy. As such, feasting, singing, shouting, dancing, bowing, praying, laughing are all valid expressions of joy.



### Where Does Joy Come From?

1. Take a moment and read Nehemiah 8:10; John 15:11 and 1 Thessalonians 1:6. What strikes you about these verses?

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Phrases like “the joy of the Lord” (Nehemiah 8:10), verses where Christ refers to his joy (Luke 10:21; John 15:11; 17:13), and references to the joy of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6) remind us that *our Triune God is joyful*. When we list his attributes, we are quick to mention how he is holy, just, gracious, omnipotent, loving, sovereign, etc. Not many of us think often about the truth that “God is joyful!” But in addition to the verses above, consider Zephaniah 3:17, “The LORD your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”

“Joy is the serious business of heaven.”—C. S. Lewis

Ultimately just as the Lord is the source of all true love (see “Topic 13: The Hallmark of a Follower of Jesus”), so he is the source of all authentic joy. And because he lives within us by his Spirit, infinite joy is readily available to us even in the midst of hard times. “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).



### How Do We Cultivate Joy?

The fact that we are told, “Always be joyful” lets us know that joy is not exclusively a feeling (1 Thessalonians 5:16, NLT). Rather than being an emotion that comes and goes, joy is a quality that we can cultivate. It is something we can kindle, fan into flame—or, to switch metaphors, harvest: “But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . joy” (Galatians 5:22, NASB).

In the Bible, gladness is always tied to God (see Psalm 32:11; 64:10; 104:34; 126:3; Joel 2:23). At least forty verses connect the act of rejoicing with the state of gladness. In other words, joy comes from looking beyond temporary circumstances to the unchanging person and promises of God.

In the Bible, we see joy when people:

- ▶ Receive an invitation from Jesus (Luke 19:6)
- ▶ Hear the news of God’s salvation in Christ (Luke 2:10–11)
- ▶ Discover the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:44)

- ▶ Encounter the truth of the empty tomb—Christ’s resurrection (Matthew 28:8)
- ▶ Hear the teaching of Jesus (John 15:11)
- ▶ Experience answers to prayer (John 16:24)
- ▶ Spend time with the people of God (Acts 2:46)
- ▶ Understand and believe the gospel of Jesus (Acts 8:39)
- ▶ Get to be part of spreading the truth of God (Acts 13:38–42)
- ▶ Write about and remember their experience with Jesus (1 John 1:4).

### Happiness or Joy? What’s the Difference?

The Bible doesn’t draw a sharp distinction between happiness and joy. In fact, it seems at times to use the words synonymously. But what our culture calls happiness and what the Bible describes as happiness are indeed two different things. Read Psalm 13 (it’s short) and then study this chart:

Worldly Happiness	Heavenly Joy
More of an emotion	More of a virtue or character quality
A fickle feeling of giddiness	A settled stance of gladness
Determined by human circumstances	Determined by Godly realities
Gathered from worldly events	Given ultimately by God
Destroyed by difficulties	Shaken but not destroyed by difficulties
Found on the surface of life	Stems from the depths of the heart
Comes and goes	Resides within the hearts of disciples
Something people hope to find	Something people can cultivate



2. How does Psalm 13 illustrate the real possibility of joy despite tough circumstances?

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3. What would you say about joy to a friend who battles with ongoing depression?

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It's worth noting that a number of the psalms are—well, not the sorts of upbeat, peppy “songs” you’d hear in many church services. These raw and honest expressions speak

“Joy is a continuous, ‘defiant  
Nevertheless’”—Karl Barth

about painful realities and disturbing situations. They *don't* deny the truth that life is often hard; they *do* represent an attempt to remember that in the hard times God is always good and in control.

By holding this tension, the psalms show that joy isn't the result of fickle feelings, but from the choice to put hope in eternal certainties. The psalms teach us that while we don't rejoice *because of* tragedy, we can still be glad *in the midst of it*. How? By trusting that we are held by a God who is with us, who one day will dry every tear.

Rejoicing (the action) is an expression of this faith; it's an exercise in hopeful surrender to God and a refusal to treat temporal circumstances as the final word.

Because of all this, we can experience a kind of quiet confidence—even when life is unpleasant. We don't have to go through life despairing, full of gloom and doom. It seems impossible, but we can grieve current hurts even as we rejoice in future hopes.

As we better understand God's purposes and more willingly embrace them, we can learn and practice gratitude instead of grumbling (James 1:2). Instead of ranting at the world, we can rest and rejoice in God's sovereign care.



### 31 Simple Ideas for Cultivating Gladness

This weekend declare that it is “Celebration Saturday.” Then . . .

1. Loudly say “Amen!” in church.
2. Reflect on God’s character—who he is.
3. Review God’s works—what he’s done.
4. Remember God’s promises—what he pledges he will do.<sup>2</sup>
5. Celebrate “little” things: “Madison hit a home run!” “Josh made his bed.”
6. Celebrate “big” things—birthdays, anniversaries, promotions, etc.
7. This week, buy or bake a dessert for no reason or for any and every reason.
8. Throw confetti.
9. Celebrate in small groups.
10. Have a festival: a barbecue, potluck, neighborhood block party, etc.
11. Cheer more often for the little blessings of life.
12. Notice God’s creation. Shake your head in wonder. Stop and marvel.
13. Don’t be so serious! Lighten up! Be silly!
14. Joke around more. Let your playful side come out and play.
15. Smile more often.
16. Find and hang out with joyful people.
17. Look back at family pictures and old videos.
18. Become a better laughter. Chuckle. Giggle. Laugh. Belly laugh. Guffaw. Cackle. Hoot. Snort. Roll on the floor.
19. Give high fives and fist bumps.
20. Cry tears of joy at God’s goodness.
21. Lead others in giving three cheers.
22. Throw spontaneous dance parties.
23. Play the thankful game.
24. Pray for a cheerful attitude.
25. Ask God’s Spirit to grow the virtue of “joy” in your life (Galatians 5:22)—then work with him to harvest it.
26. With an accountability partner, remove the habit of grumbling from your life (see Philippians 2:14).
27. Embark on a mission to stop being pessimistic and focus on the positive.
28. Buy or borrow some praise CDs.
29. Sing. Sing loudly. Sing like you mean it.
30. Think about the words you’re singing when singing worship songs.
31. If you’re a hugger, hug someone.

<sup>2</sup> “God’s Bible Promises,” *Bibleinfo.com*: <http://www.bibleinfo.com/en/topics/bible-promises> (accessed August 8, 2016).



4. Which of these things do you do? Not do? Which ones will you choose to do this week?

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## Peace: What Is Peace?

5. Take a moment to ponder this verse:

“You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!”  
(Isaiah 26:3, NLT)

a. What’s the promise here?

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The most common term for peace in the Old Testament is the well-known Hebrew word *shalom*. It is used more than 350 times, and it is an unbelievably rich word, with a wide range of connotations.

Depending on the context *shalom* can refer to **wholeness** and **intactness**, **health** and **well-being**, or **security** and **prosperity**. *Shalom* speaks of **blessing** and **joy**, **vitality** and **fruitfulness**, **community** and **harmony**. And if all that weren’t enough, it’s **neighborliness**, deep **satisfaction** and **rest**.

Look at those words in the definition of *shalom*. Ponder them. *Shalom*, God’s peace, means so much more than “things are okay.”

Real peace, God’s peace, isn’t just the *absence* of visible tension and conflict, it is the *presence* of deep wholeness and joy. *Shalom* is “life to the full” (John 10:10). *Shalom* is what we get when we experience life rooted in a right relationship with a good and holy, all-powerful, all-wise God.



b. Where is your life marked by God's *shalom*? Where is it not?

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The reason God's offer of peace is so beautiful is because we live in world that is shattered by sin, not permeated with *shalom*. The good news, the gospel, tells us that Jesus, "the Prince of Peace," came to bring *shalom*! Let's look briefly at three kinds of peace we can enjoy as followers of Jesus:

### **Eternal Peace**

6. Read Luke 2:14. What was the angelic announcement to the shepherds about the birth of Christ?

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Many Christmas cards render this verse "peace on earth, good will toward men," but the most literal translation of the angelic announcement is "peace to men on whom his favor (grace) rests." In other words, peace with God. A right relationship with God. Acceptance. Forgiveness. Salvation, by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Someone has said that in the birth of Christ, God offered the world a peace treaty. And in his death at the cross, Christ signed that treaty in his own blood.

Do you feel a need for such peace? The assurance that you are right with God? If so, review "Topic 4: Assurance of Salvation."

### **Interpersonal Peace**

7. Consider the meaning of this verse: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18).

a. How would you explain this verse to a child?

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b. When is it not possible to have peace with others?

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Because God has taken the initiative to make peace with us, we can follow in the footsteps of Jesus—and take the initiative to move toward our “enemies” and seek peace.

8. How are things going in your life with having peace with others? Look at the scale below and plot your key relationships right now—with a spouse (if married), parents, children, coworkers, neighbors, friends, fellow church members, etc.

**A Relational Peace Scale**

war		enmity		conflict		mistrust		tension		neutrality	civility		cordiality		harmony		trust		love	
-10	-9	-8	-7	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

a. Which of your personal relationships need work? And what specifically does that “work” call for on your part?

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## Internal Peace

9. Read Philippians 4:6–7. What do these verses tell us about how to experience internal peace; the peace of God within our own hearts and souls?

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Because God is the source of true joy and real peace, followers of Jesus can experience these realities, and see them grow in our lives. We can be different when we work with the One who works in us!

## Take-Home Reflections

<b>Trouble-ometer</b> Indicate how much difficulty you are experiencing right now in the following categories—the lower the number, the greater the trouble.	Things are hopeless!	Continual crisis	I'm paralyzed by fear.	Constant high stress	Significant problems	Moderate unease	Bumps in the road	Minor heartburn	No real complaints	Total peace and joy!
My relationship with my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My marriage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The welfare of my children	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My job/career situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My financial condition	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My physical health	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My closest friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My neighbors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My teachers/administrators	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My coworkers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My academic situation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My overall emotional state	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My connection with God	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
My overall feeling about my life (where I'm headed, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



## Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God's truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you've learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our verse, Romans 15:13.

“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.”

2. Using a concordance, survey all the Bible verses that contain the words *joy* and *peace*. What additional insights does this quick study give you into these virtues?

3. Do you have conflict with another person that you can set aside and “agree to disagree” in order to have peace?

4. Wrestle with one or both of the following:

- ▶ Look at the chart on page 141. What can you do to experience God's peace and joy despite your current difficulties?
- ▶ Read and ponder 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20; 3:9 and Psalm 16:3. How do other believers contribute to our joy? How have you seen this in your life?