

Joy in the Morning

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*For his anger lasts only a moment,
but his favor lasts a lifetime:
weeping may stay for the night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning.*

Psalm 30:5 (NIV)

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Introduction

Welcome to this study! How I wish we were sitting across a table from each other. I would love to look into your heart and watch it grow as you open the Bible and find encouragement in the study. It is a joy in itself just to read and digest God's Word together. That is what we will be doing in the next few weeks.

All of us want joy in our lives, but it can be elusive. Daily living, mountains of problems, and an uncertain future can obscure the joy God has given us. Yet, the Bible refers to this joy as if we can be assured of it. We will look at God's history with His people to find the joy others experienced.

You may be studying alone in your quiet moments, or you may be completing the lessons to discuss in a class. Either way, I hope you will find joy even in the study.

Please take time to complete one day at a time if possible. Each chapter has five days' worth of material. If you follow that plan, you will not be overwhelmed with the amount of material. As you go along, make notes in the margins if anything catches your attention. It might be a new thought, a question, or a reminder of things you already know. If you are meeting with a group, refer to those notes in your discussions.

The lessons are arranged in biblical chronological order. That will help you keep the story line of the Bible in front of you.

Remember that the Bible is ONE STORY from Genesis to Revelation. It is a love story—the story of God’s love for the people he created.

This study is designed to lead us to God’s Word for today’s experiences. We will study ***real people*** of the Bible to see how they found joy in all kinds of situations.

Let’s get started. I’m so pleased we are on this joy-filled journey together.

Joy

What Is It?

She stood on the south rim of the Grand Canyon for the first time since she was a small child. Suddenly her eyes filled with tears. It was so, well, *grand*. Overwhelming. God's work in technicolor.

Her husband understood and put his arm around her. Her children were concerned. Why was Mommy crying? How do you explain to young children that tears and joy can exist together? Quietly she tried to tell them that she was just amazed at this demonstration of God's power.

It was an emotional time in her life. Her family was in the process of moving to a new state where they knew no one and into a house she had never seen. As her husband began a new job, she would be in charge of settling the children in school and in church. When would she have time to settle herself and make new friends? Besides, it was summer in Arizona and everyone stayed indoors. Where would the children find playmates before school started?

It was also an exciting time. There would be new places to explore. Hiking trails and other outdoor activities beckoned (as soon as the weather cooled). She loved the brightness and the sunshine of this state. She and her husband intended to make family time a priority during this new period in their lives.

Is that not life in general? Tears and amazement. Fear and excitement. New beginnings. Waiting for God's leading.

Times like these can be overwhelming. But if we remember the joy God has promised, we can face life's changes expectantly.

As we begin this study please keep in mind the difference between *joy* and *happiness*. *Hap* is the Old Norse and Old English root of "happiness", and it means luck or chance. *Joy* is from Old French *joie* and means "rejoice." It is a sense of well being. For our study I want to include the biblical idea (which we will find in the following lessons) of joy based not on circumstances, but rather abiding deep within us and springing from God's love for us. Joy can be unchanging within us because it comes from God who is unchanging. Thus it is the never-changing joy of the Lord.

Day One - Biblical Description

The Bible is full of references to joy. Bible Gateway (biblegateway.com) lists 242 times *joy* or *joyful* is used. Add to that the 154 times *rejoice* is found. I don't know if that is an exhaustive number. Those lists don't even contain other words like *mirth*, *gladness*, and *happiness*. You can see that joy is a major theme of the biblical literature.

Give some reasons why you think we don't feel joyful more often.

I believe we lack joy because we have not delved deeply into God's Word to find His source of joy. We allow circumstances to obscure and smother it. We want instant happiness and believe it will substitute for abiding joy. We don't comprehend the infinite gifts God has given us.

So what is biblical joy?

Various words used in the Old and New Testaments are translated *joy* or *joyful*. We won't do a Hebrew and Greek study although you may want to pursue one on your own. For our understanding, listed below are a few of the alternate meanings for *joy* or *joyful* found in the Bible:

Gladness _____

Mirth _____

To be bright _____

To shine _____

Leap _____

Exult _____

Rejoice exceedingly _____

Shout _____

To be excited _____

Looking over the words listed above, write a thought that comes to your mind beside each one. (An example might be: Mirth—children laughing.)

Which meaning from that list might be found in each of the following passages?

1 Chronicles 29:22 _____

Nehemiah 8:10 _____

Esther 9:22 _____

Psalms 4:7 _____

Psalm 47:5 _____

Ecclesiastes 8:15 _____

Isaiah 35:6 _____

Matthew 13:44 _____

God and joy

God rejoices over His work and over His people. Does it surprise you that God finds joy in you? He delights in His creation. He rejoices in our love. It gives Him pleasure when we come to Him.

What do these verses say about God's attitude toward you?

Genesis 1:31 _____

Deuteronomy 30:9 _____

Isaiah 42:1 _____

Micah 7:18 _____

Psalm 35:27 _____

Psalm 104:31 _____

Zephaniah 3:17 _____

Joy as a response to God

There is unfathomable joy in encountering God. Joy is the natural response of humans throughout the Bible when God revealed Himself to them (after their fear was assuaged!). We will look at

just a few more verses to see various situations when God's people rejoiced in Him.

What do these verses say about mankind's response?

Exodus 15:1 _____

Leviticus 9:24 _____

Psalms 21:1 _____

Psalms 66:1-4 _____

Psalms 118:24 _____

1 Peter 1:8 _____

You get the idea. Joy is a part of being God's man or woman. We will look more fully at the things that bring us joy as we work through these lessons.

Reflection

Were you ever taught about the joy that is available to you as a Christian?

Spend some time praising God for all the things that bring you joy.

After your time in praise, did you begin to feel the "joy of the Lord"?

Day Two - Called to Joy

Do you feel called by God to be joyful? In dealing with the Nation of Israel throughout most of the Old Testament, God repeatedly called them to celebrate, to experience joy. He set up festivals that lasted a week or more. He encouraged weekly celebrations. He called for rejoicing in their worship. He expected His people to be filled with joy in His presence. As long as they remained in His presence, they experienced this complete happiness.

Parties and more

Do you like parties with close friends? Or intimate dinners with just a few special people? Do these times lift your spirits? There is nothing more refreshing to me than sitting down with those who share my spiritual values and discussing how God has worked in our lives.

God made us that way. He also made us to want to be in His presence for celebrations and meals.

Let's look at some of the festivals/feasts/celebrations He established for Israel.

Sabbath - Read Exodus 20:8-11

One of the reasons we are not joyful is our hectic lifestyle. We believe we cannot take time for frequent celebrations. We are overburdened, and we are tired.

Although the Sabbath was a day of rest rather than one of feasting for the Israelites, it was an important step in this matter of joy. Regular rest does wonders in promoting a merry spirit. Most of us do not get enough rest. I am not referring only to sleep, although that is extremely important. I am also talking about taking time to step away from the relentless schedule of our days. God knew we needed to take breaks from our daily work so that we may experience the greater wonders of His person and His creation.

*Do you take regular times away from your schedule?
What do you do to rest and rejuvenate?*

Passover (also called Feast of Unleavened Bread)

Passover was established so the nation could remember the time God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. He did so in miraculous ways. He demonstrated His power so dramatically that, for a while, they put their trust in Him. When they began to forget His salvation, they also started to grumble and to follow other

gods, who were merely idols. This annual feast took place in the spring and called them back to God.

Read Deuteronomy 16:1-7. Why and how were they to celebrate this feast?

The feast culminated in the Passover Meal on the seventh day of the celebration. It was a joyous time, a time for recounting God's goodness and His salvation.

What special events in your life do you celebrate annually?

Feast of Weeks (also called Harvest or First-fruits or Pentecost later in Israelite history)

This festival came seven weeks after Passover, putting it in late spring. It came at the time of the wheat harvest, the first harvest of the year. Like Passover, this sacred week calls for sacrifices to God. After the sacrifices were made, it was customary to celebrate with music, food, and praise. I call that joyful!

Read Deuteronomy 16:9-12. How and why was this feast celebrated?

Feast of Tabernacles (also called Booths or Ingathering)

The feast was a reminder of the 40 years the Israelites had to wander in the wilderness because of their lack of trust in God. They lived in booths made of branches either on the ground or on their roofs. The festival occurred in the fall when the final crops were harvested.

Read Leviticus 23:33-36 and 39-44. How and why was this feast celebrated?

What was the mood of the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:13-15)?

Living under branches seems a strange way to celebrate. Some of us would call it a hardship, not a joy! But for God's people in the Old Testament, it was an exhilarating and memorable time.

What are some unusual ways you celebrate? If there are none, spend some creative time brainstorming how you can make celebrations more memorable.

Other feasts were also scattered throughout the year. However, God seems to prioritize these three.

What ordinance did God state in Deuteronomy 16:16, 17?

Day Three - Jesus Brings Joy

Though it may be hard for us to completely understand the Old Testament feasts, we must remember that Jesus celebrated them. In fact, the timeline of Jesus' life is based on those feasts and the number of times they appear in the gospels.

Jesus Himself brought joy while on earth. And His life was full of joyfulness. Children came to Him, some of His parables were quite humorous, and He enjoyed a good meal. My favorite mental image shows Him with sparkling eyes, laughing out loud. Yes, He faced sorrow, ridicule, and eventually torture and death. But through it all, He lived fully and looked expectantly to a joyous end.

Jesus' birth

Let's look at how people reacted when learning of Jesus' birth.

Tell who rejoiced in these instances.

Luke 1:39-45 _____

Luke 1:46-48 _____

Luke 2:8-14 _____

Luke 2:15-20 _____

Luke 2:25-35 _____

Luke 2:36-38 _____

For thought: What was the common theme of their joy?

Jesus' baptism

It has always been ironic to me that Jesus—the one person who had no need of forgiveness—was baptized. John's baptism was for repentance of sin, but Jesus had no sin. John also found this curious and protested against baptizing Jesus.

Jesus' baptism, though, marked the beginning of His ministry and of His journey to the cross. It was also when God showed His approval and showered His blessing on Jesus.

Read Matthew 3:13-17. Tell the story in your own words. Do you see the joy?

Jesus' ministry

Throughout the ministry of Jesus, you see times of celebration apart from special feast days.

What was said about or by Him?

Mark 2:18-20 _____

Matthew 11:19 _____

Luke 10:21-24 _____

John 15:9-11 _____

John 17:13 _____

If Jesus expressed and bestowed joy throughout His difficult life, why do we have such a hard time maintaining it? Perhaps we

do not regularly stay in touch with Jesus and His life. We do not understand what He has given us. This will be addressed in the following lessons.

Jesus' death

Great sorrow accompanied Jesus' death. He was moved to desperation in the Garden of Gethsemane before His crucifixion. His disciples and friends were grief-stricken and enormously disappointed. However, that period of mourning did not continue for long. His resurrection and triumph over death gives joy to us, even in times of grief and sorrow.

How did Jesus view His coming death (Hebrews 12:2, especially 2b)?

For reflection

How does Jesus' attitude and the joy He bestowed on His followers help you maintain joy?

Day Four - Joy of Early Christians

In the Book of Acts, we find the early church rejoicing at the fulfillment of the promised Savior. For centuries they had been looking forward to a time when a King would come to call them. Of course, they misunderstood the nature of that kingdom until after Jesus' death. However, they did rejoice in His coming. They were even more joyous after His resurrection when they began to understand what He had done for them.

The church as a body

The followers of Christ, or Christians as they were to be called, celebrated together daily, but even more regularly on the First Day

of the Week, the day Jesus arose. We find them meeting together in mutual support and rejoicing and in remembering the death and resurrection of Jesus.

How did Jesus' followers behave after His resurrection?

Acts 2:42-47 _____

Acts 4:32 _____

Acts 5:41,42 _____

2 Corinthians 8:1, 2 _____

1 Peter 1:8, 9 _____

Today's church

Do you find joy and celebration in meeting with other Christians today? Do you seek out times to meet other than scheduled worships?

When we moved to a new town a few years ago, we visited many churches trying to find a new spiritual family. One of the main reasons we chose the congregation we now attend was the joy they found in one another's company. We did not see jealousy, fighting, gossip, or many other behaviors often found in today's Christian assemblies. This was a body that loved to be together. Not only were worship and study groups scheduled, there was also a monthly meal together. And people met together in one another's homes. Sound familiar to Acts 2 that you read earlier today?

Describe your church's expressions of joy.

What would you change?

How can you make a difference?

Day Five - Eternal Perspective

As we saw from Jesus, an eternal perspective gives meaning to and redeems any difficulty on this earth. Remember the statement in Hebrews 12:2, “*who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame.*” The first part of that verse tells us “*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.*” We can have the same attitude as Jesus, looking forward to the joy promised for our future. Thinking about that future brings joy in the present time.

Are you exhausted from this week’s study? I’ll make it a little easier today so that you will have some time to absorb it all.

Again, what is joy?

Joy can be defined as “feeling pleasure over a promise or an anticipated event, enjoying a current circumstance, or rejoicing over some unexpected experience or knowledge.” Many things bring me joy, such as when I am studying and find a new fact or concept or in watching children laugh. Mostly I feel joy in anticipating eternity.

What brings you joy?

Another description of joy in a spiritual sense might be “extreme pleasure when thinking of salvation and eternity.”

Note your thoughts on reading these verses

Psalm 16:11 _____

Psalm 32:11 _____

Psalm 97:12 _____

Psalm 121:7, 8 _____

Isaiah 35:10 _____

We could spend weeks just studying the subject of joy as expressed in the Psalms. It is a major theme throughout the rest of the Bible, too. God gives joy as a reward to those who believe in Him. Even joy in secular things such as food and entertainment points to God's goodness toward His people.

For reflection

Write out your eternal perspective.

