The Joy of the Lord is my Strength

Nehemiah 8:10 (NKJV)  

Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

How long do you believe you could smile, and keep on smiling, without stopping? How long could you hold a smile on your face? Do you know what the Guinness World Book of Records is?

A little lady named Lisa Lester, a little girl, smiled for 10 hours and 5 minutes, without breaking that smile. She broke the old record of 7 hours and 32 minutes. And then, she had to stop smiling. And, that is illustrative of what I'm talking about, dear friend. I'm going to be talking to you, today, about joy that goes far beyond a smile. A smile is outward. Joy is inward. A smile, at its best, can last a few hours. Joy is eternal.

As a matter of fact, do you know what the shortest verse in the Bible is? You say, "Oh, I know that. It's 'Jesus wept' (John 11:35)." You're wrong. "Jesus wept" (John 11:35) is the shortest verse in English, but not in Greek. In Greek, the shortest verse is 1 Thessalonians 5:16, which says, "Rejoice evermore" (1 Thessalonians 5:16). Not 10 hours—"Rejoice evermore."

I want to talk to you, today, about how to have fullness of joy. I'm going to remind you that joy is an inside job.

I. The Identity of Joy

What's the difference between happiness and joy? Happiness depends upon what happens, and, therefore, we call it happiness. But, if you put your trust in happiness, then you're going to be a victim of circumstances, because they will change. But God never changes. The Bible doesn't tell us to rejoice in circumstances. The Bible says, "Rejoice in the Lord" (Philippians 3:1). And, therefore, since He never changes, the Bible says, "Rejoice evermore" (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

Now, happiness is like cosmetics. Joy is like character. Happiness meets surface needs. Joy meets your deepest needs. Happiness is like a thermometer—it registers conditions. Joy is like a thermostat—it regulates conditions. Now, happiness, many times, evaporates, and disappears, in times of suffering. But, joy frequently intensifies, in times of suffering.

So, it's cruel to say to people, sometimes, who are in sorrow, "Smile, and be happy." The Bible says of Jesus "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). And, yet, the Bible spoke of the joy of the Lord.

II. The Importance of Joy

A. Joy is important to your witness

Did you know that we have nothing that is more winsome and more attractive to bringing people to Jesus Christ than the joy of the Lord? A cold, dry faith has no appeal.

David, the man who wrote the Psalms, got out of fellowship with God, and he lost his joy. And, when he lost his joy, he stopped being a soul winner. And, he prayed, in Psalm 51:12-13, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee". What is David saying? David said, "When I get my joy back, I'll be a soul winner."
B. Joy is important for your walk

The Bible says we are to "serve the LORD with gladness" (Psalm 100:2). Serve Him with gladness. As Nehemiah said, "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). It is joy that lubricates life. I can tell you from personal testimony that there are times when I get weary in body, and weary in mind, and I begin to praise the Lord, and His joy floods my soul and my body, and it literally energizes my physical frame—that the joy of the Lord is strength. When I remember that God is in control and my burdens were lifted at Calvary, I am strengthened.

III. The Investigation of Joy

Do you have the joy of the Lord in your life right now? If not, why? Where did you lose it?

Psalm 42:5 (NKJV) 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance.

What stops my joy from happening? Frustration comes from an obstacle blocking our goal.

Where did I lose my joy? “Oh soul why are you so cast down?”
- Was it when I did something that was sinful?
- Was it when I did not get what I wanted?
- Was it when I was let down by something or someone?
- Was it when I departed from God at one time in my life?
- Where was that place or that event that took your focus off the goodness of God?

IV. The Ingredients of Joy

Now, there are three ingredients to joy. I want you to turn with me to Romans chapter 5 and I want you to see what I consider to be the three qualities of life that bring joy.

Psalm 51:7-15 (NKJV)

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
8 Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice.
9 Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.
10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.
13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.
14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.
15 O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

A. Cleansing (v.7-10)

To be clean and to be pure before God, to know that you know that you know that you know there's no sin between you and God, causes indescribable joy.
Now, watch this—Romans 5:1, 2: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice".

What he's saying is, faith brings justification; justification brings peace; and peace brings joy to know that your sin is forgiven.

Now, what is justification? Remember, when God justifies you He takes all of those things that you've done, and He takes them off this side of the ledger, and He puts them over here on this side of the ledger, on Jesus' side of the ledger. Then Jesus writes across all of those sins, "paid in full," with the crimson blood of Calvary. And, all of those things are transferred over to that side of the ledger. But, justification is not finished yet. Then, God takes all of the righteousness, the holiness, and the purity of Jesus Christ that is inherently His, and He takes that, and He puts it on this side of the ledger, on your side of the ledger.

Luke 10:20 "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven".

Now, what I'm trying to say is this: If somebody comes up, and spits in my face for preaching the gospel, that can't take my joy. That takes his joy. In fact, it could only increase my joy. The Bible says, when men persecute you, to do what? "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad" (Matthew 5:12). But, if my reaction is bad, that takes my joy. Friend, there's only one thing that can take your joy out of your heart. It is sin, and only one kind of sin. Yours.

You see, we are justified. When we're made right, then that burden of sin is gone. There's nothing between us and our Lord. And, that's where the joy begins to come. We are going to have to be like David, and say, O Lord, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (Psalm 51:12). The most miserable man on earth is not an unsaved man. The most miserable man on earth is a saved man out of fellowship with God, who has lost the joy of his salvation—more miserable than an unsaved man.

B. Communion (v.11-13)

You see, dear friend, communion with our Lord. You remember, the Bible says, "The fruit of the Spirit is... joy" (Galatians 5:22). You see, you rejoice in the Lord. It's the fruit of the Spirit. Joy is not found in circumstances; it's found in a person.

Just jot these verses down. Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4). John 15, verse 11—Jesus said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you" (John 15:11). John 17:13—Jesus is praying, and He says to the Father, "And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13).

Friend, when you commune in the Lord Jesus Christ, "He is the vine, you are the branch" (John 15:5); and, when you commune in the Lord Jesus Christ, His joy comes into you. Not an imitation of his joy—it's not your joy; it is His joy. And, you rejoice in the Lord, and you rejoice through the Lord, because joy is the fruit of the Spirit.

As I commune with Jesus I grow in confidence. A Christian knows that, no matter what happens to him, "all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28)—are worked together, by God, for good, for God's glory.

Did you know the Apostle Paul said, "I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation" (2 Corinthians 7:4). This joy is lasting in losses. That's what the writer of Hebrews said: "For ye... took joyfully the spoiling of your goods." (Hebrews 10:34) What if you came home from church, today, and found out your house had been broken into and everything was gone. Would you still have joy? Well, if you got your joy from your house, you wouldn't still have joy. But, if you got your joy from the Lord, and you still have the Lord, you'd still have joy.
You see, the Bible never says, "Rejoice in your house." The Bible never says, "Rejoice in your furniture." The Bible never says, "Rejoice in your automobile." It says, "Rejoice in the Lord" (Philippians 4:4). And, therefore, it says of these Christians, they "took joyfully the spoiling of [their] goods" (Hebrews 10:34).

You know, Steve Green's a great Gospel singer. "I was listening to my Steve Green tape, as I frequently do, and in particular, to the song, 'That's Where the Joy Comes From.'" And then, she quotes a line from that song:

Thieves may try to rob my treasure
But they don't hold the key
That leads into the sanctuary

Where God's Spirit lives in me. (John Elliott)

Soon after I arrived at work, one of my sons called to tell me that, when he drove to our house about 10 a.m., he found all of the doors open, and the house terribly ransacked, and quite a lot of our belongings stolen. Right then, I realized that the Lord had been preparing me for this that very morning. I thought of the words of the song, and what you had said in your message, that came so clearly to my mind.

When I got home, I saw the awful sight. I never even felt like shedding a tear. It took us all afternoon to straighten up the mess the burglars left. And yet, this feeling of joy kept popping out. I want you to know that day is a day I will never forget—not because of the burglary, but because of the way that God spoke to me, and prepared me through your message. And, the fact that I really saw, today, that thieves may rob my treasures, but they don't hold the key that leads into the sanctuary where God's Spirit lives in me."

Then she says, "Glory!"—with an exclamation point—"Even if the thieves come back, how great to know that my joy is protected!"

C. Celebration (v.14-15)

F. B. Meyer is one of my favorite authors. Our bookstore has a lot of books by F. B. Meyer. He was an Englishman, a Britisher. He's dead now, in Heaven. He's not dead; he's really kicking up gold dust. But, friend, he is there rejoicing in the Lord. But, he didn't always have joy. F. B. Meyer, in one of his books, told about the secret of his joy, and how he found joy. And, I want you to listen to what he said. I'm going to read it to you. He said:

"Joy began in my life one solemn night, when I knelt before Christ, and had the holy light of His Spirit turned upon one thing in my heart that was filthy. I had accumulated it there, and I hardly knew it. I had been living a very unsettled life for some time, when a young fellow came and spoke in my church, which led me to feel that he possessed the secret which I did not have myself. I came to him the next morning at seven o'clock. I said, 'You will excuse my coming, won't you? The fact is I am very unhappy. I am a Christian minister, and my people expect a great deal of me. But, my heart is full of evil, and I cannot deal with it. Will you please give me your secret?' 'Have you given yourself entirely to Jesus Christ?' he asked. I replied, 'In a general way, I have.' 'If you have not done so entirely, go get alone with God, and settle it.'"

F. B. Meyer said, "That night, I knelt by my bed, with the door of my room locked, and resolved that I would not sleep, until I had settled the matter, and surrendered everything to Jesus. It seemed as if Jesus Christ were standing at my side, and as if I took from my pocket a large bunch of keys, which I generally carry, when I am at home."
I took from that bunch one tiny key, which I kept; and then, held to Jesus the bunch with one key missing. And, I said to him, 'Here are the keys to my life.' He looked at me sadly, and said, 'Are they all there?' 'All but one tiny one to a small cupboard; it's so small that it could not possibly amount to anything.' He replied, 'My child, if you cannot trust me with everything, you cannot trust me with anything.' Satan whispered to me, 'You can't give that thing up. Besides, if you let Christ have His way, no telling what He'll ask next. Don't give it to Him.' At last, I said, 'Lord. I can't give you the key. But, at least I'm willing for You to come and take it.' And, He said, 'It was as I expected.' I seemed to hold out my hand, and He came, and opened my fingers, and took that key from me. Then, He went straight to that cupboard, unlocked, and opened it. And, I saw there a thing that was terrible and hideous. And, He said, 'This must go out, and you must never go this way again.'

Then, F. B. Meyer said, "At that moment, He took the thing from me, and He took the desire for it out of my soul, and I began to hate it. Then, I yielded myself absolutely to Him, and said, 'From this night, Lord, I want You to do as You will with my life.' The next morning, I expected a sort of a hallelujah feeling. But, I was as calm and quiet as I am now. I only had a delightful sense that I did belong to Jesus Christ. And, a hundred times that day, I said to myself, 'I am His! I am absolutely His.'" He said that was the secret of his joy.

**Conclusion**

Now, I'm finished; but I want to tell you something else. To rejoice is a choice. That's the reason the Bible tells us, "Rejoice in the Lord" ([Philippians 3:1](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=philippians+3%3A1&version=NIV)). That means you don't have to, or the Bible wouldn't command us to. It's not automatic. It's a choice that begins with choosing Jesus, knowing Jesus.