

***Bringing You
Closer to God
His Love and Peace
And Eternal Life***

**Celebrate Christmas by Experiencing the Joy That
Surpasses All Understanding and Only by Relating to the
One Who is the Son of God – Jesus Christ**

***Discover the
Joy of Christmas
Found Only in
Jesus Christ***

Bible Verses About Joy: 20 Uplifting Scripture Quotes

Joy may remind you of a song from your childhood —♪♪♪ *I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart ... ♪♪♪*. Once that song gets into your heart you will be singing it all day! True joy can only be attained as part of the fruit of the Spirit: *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy....* (Gal 5:22). It is that overwhelming sense of comfort and contentment that floods one's soul. It is the thing that we have when we are walking with the Holy Spirit and mortifying the deeds of the flesh: *For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.* (Rom 8:13).

True Joy comes only when we are focused upon walking with the Lord and esteeming others: ³*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,* ⁴*not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.* ⁵*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.* (Phil 2:3-5). Since Joy is fruit of the Spirit it is a special gift that only the believer has: ¹²*in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.* ¹³*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,* ¹⁴*who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.* ^{4:30}*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* (Eph 1:12-14; 4:30). Here are twenty uplifting Scripture quotes about joy.

Joyous Celebrations

Nehemiah 8:10 - *“Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”*

Deuteronomy 16:15 - *For seven days you shall keep the feast to the LORD your God at the place that the LORD will choose, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.*

Nehemiah 8:10 - *Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”*

Esther 8:17- *And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.*

Ecclesiastes 9:7- *Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.*

Isaiah 9:3 - *You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.*

Singing with Joy to the Lord

Psalms 5:11-12 - *But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you. For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield.*

Psalms 47:1- *Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!*

Psalms 63:5-7 *My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.*

Psalms 96:11-13 - *Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

Isaiah 12:6 - *“... Shout, and sing for joy..., for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”*

Joy in Others

1 Samuel 18:6 *As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments.*

Luke 15:7 *Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Jesus speaking in the parable of the lost sheep)*

John 16:21 *When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.*

Philippians 1:3-5 - *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.*

Philemon 1:7 *For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.*

Hope and Joy

Proverbs 10:28 - *Hope of the righteous brings joy, but the expectation of the wicked will perish.*

Romans 15:13 - *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 - *Since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.*

1 Peter 1:8-9 - *Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

2 John 1:12 - *Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.*

Christian Quotes About Joy

“The out-and-out Christian is a joyful Christian. The half-and-half Christian is the kind of Christian that a great many of you are~~~little acquainted with the Lord. Why should we live halfway up the hill and swathed in the mists, when we might have an unclouded sky and a radiant sun over our heads if we would climb higher and walk in the light of His face?” ~ Alexander Maclaren

“The men whom I have seen succeed best in life have always been cheerful and hopeful men, who went about their business with a smile on their faces, and took the changes and chances of this mortal life like men, facing rough and smooth alike as it came.” ~ Charles Kingsley

"It is His joy that remains in us that makes our joy full." ~ A. B. Simpson

"What I am anxious to see in Christian believers is a beautiful paradox. I want to see in them the joy of finding God while at the same time they are blessedly pursuing Him. I want to see in them the great joy of having God yet always wanting Him." ~ A. W. Tozer

"Joy is the serious business of Heaven." ~ C. S. Lewis

Bible Verses About Joy

(English Standard Version [ESV])

1 Peter 1:8 - *Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,*

Galatians 5:22 - *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

Romans 14:17 - *The kingdom of God is...of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

Nehemiah 8:10 - *...Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

3 John 1:4 - *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

Philippians 4:4 - *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.*

Romans 8:28 - *...For those who love God all things work together for good.....*

John 15:11 - *...I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

Habakkuk 3:17-19 - *¹⁸I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.*

Jude 1:24-25 - *²⁴To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.*

1 Thessalonians 5:16 - *Rejoice always.*

1 Thessalonians 1:6 - *You received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,*

Philippians 2:13 - *It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

Philippians 2:2 - *...Joy (is) by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*

Romans 15:13 - *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

Romans 5:11 - *...We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

Acts 2:28 - *You have made known...the paths of life; you make me full of gladness with your presence.*

John 16:22 - *...Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.*

John 15:16 - *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*

John 15:10 - *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.*

Luke 2:10 - *The angel said... "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."*

Jeremiah 15:16 - *Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts.*

Isaiah 35:10 - *The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come...with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

Isaiah 1:18 - *Let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.*

Proverbs 4:23 - *Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*

Psalms 68:3 - *The righteous shall be glad...shall exult before God...shall be jubilant with joy!*

Psalms 32:11 - *Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ... shout for joy, all you upright in heart!*

1 Samuel 2:1 - *And Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.*

Joy may seem elusive, mysterious and intractable, yet we are all commanded to be joyful. We must be deliberate about joy. If we are not living joyful lives, we are actually living in sin, and this is indeed our own fault. Through ignorance and selfishness we miss out on God's design, and resign ourselves to lead drab and joyless lives, or even bitter and despondent ones. But once we understand joy, what it is and how God has designed us to respond to Him in joy, how God is the ultimate fulfillment of every conceivable human desire, then we can purpose to walk in it.

In 1 Peter 1:8 it is written: *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.* This text states a fact: believers in Jesus Christ may live lives of extreme joy. Not merely happy lives, not merely joyful lives... God says that you can live a life of unspeakable joy... a joy so incredible we cannot fully describe it.

Does a joyful life seem like a dream? That you and I, just ordinary people, could ever reach a state of nearly constant joy?

Most of us lead very joyless lives and we have no idea why. The pressures and cruelty and passions of life steal our joy and we don't know what to do about it. We'd not live this way by choice, most of us anyway.

It is the purpose here to change all that for you. The truths presented here have changed many lives. They will change yours too, if you are brave enough to let them. If your life doesn't change for the better after you read this, it is the intent that this will be your choice, and no one else's.

Let this be plain, though, from the outset: There are no tricks or gimmicks to offer, nor any Joy Pill to fix all our problems, nor a switch to flip that will make us all happy. The following shares with you a pathway, a journey. It is nothing new, but a re-discovery, a finding again of what has been lost to many of us. All offered here is a fresh perspective on something very basic to the Christian life. The concept is simple and practical, but not easy. We need God's help to do this. Basically, we need to change... or more accurately, to be changed.

It may come as a shock to learn that it is actually a sin to be joyless. God has commanded us to rejoice in Him... always: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* (Phil 4:4) Joy is not optional, for anyone, any time. When God repeats Himself, He is emphasizing. God is demanding that we live this way. He loves us way too much to make this optional. To miss joy is to miss all. Change your mind about it: do not be content to live another joyless moment.

It is not only God's will that we be joyful, in His characteristic manner He has made a way for us to find joy. We were made for this, designed to live a joyful life. There are three basic things one needs to apprehend:

1. What joy actually is, its definition and nature.
2. The essence of human design, how God has designed us.
3. Who God is and what He is like.

Surprisingly simple, is it not? Joy should not be complicated. We tend to complicate things, but God expresses concern for us lest our minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2 Cor 11:3) Joy is not just for clerics and theologians. No, if joy is for anyone that has ever lived, then it is for you. No matter where you are, what you have done, or what has happened in your life... Joy is God's gift to you. You can get there from here.

From the onset then, purpose to resist the enemy's lying discouragement that joy must be something beyond your reach. Joy is, in fact, quite within your reach. You might be comfortable with dullness, misery, bitterness and despondency, but it's no excuse to keep on living that way. That is exactly what the enemy wants for you and me, and he will certainly try his best to keep us there. Resist him; it is not God's way.

So, what is joy ? The dictionary starts us. Joy is defined as follows: The emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying; keen pleasure; elation.

Very simply then, **joy is a wonderful experience of feeling.** We are talking about an emotion: an intense feeling in the heart, soul and mind.

As a feeling then, joy is something that we experience on a spectrum, as a matter of degree. This experience is not like a switch, an "on or off," or Boolean kind of experience, but it is on a scale: joy is a "more or less," or a continuum kind of experience.

On the lower end of the spectrum, the less intense end, we call this emotional experience gladness or happiness. This is the kind of emotion we experience in response to the common, daily pleasantries of life. But happiness and gladness are not what God is talking about here. He is talking about joy, an experience at the other end of the spectrum.

At the upper end, the more intense end of the spectrum of emotion, we are looking at something that makes you want to shout, or dance, or cry... and sometimes all of the above at once. Joy is the kind of emotion that takes your breath away. You get all choked up, and you may feel like you are going to explode if you don't do something to express it. This is joy ... but, in fact, that's still not what God is talking about.

The word of God talks about ***unspeakable joy***. Unspeakable means, exceeding the power of speech; unutterable; inexpressible; indescribable. On the spectrum of emotion, joy is at the intense end. What we are talking about is something on the intense side of intensity. We are talking about extreme joy, something that we can't even fully describe. Suffice it to say, this thing we are after is wonderful beyond description, too marvelous for words.

You want this, you need this, you were designed for this, and it is available to you.

Joy is also, as one can see in the definition, a response **TO** something or someone. As is seen in Philippians 4:4, we are to rejoice in the Lord. Let us explore this carefully.

The first mistake we might make in the pursuit of joy is to think that we are to rejoice about things in general, or perhaps about nothing in particular while we are in the Lord. While it is true that we are as believers in Jesus Christ, in the Lord, the thought here is that the Lord Himself is the Object of our joy, and about Whom we are to be rejoicing. The exceptionally good and satisfying

thing that is **the cause of true joy is a Person, a divine Being**. We are not to rejoice in an abstract way, simply experiencing emotion apart from any context or particular thought. We are to be reacting in joy to our thoughts about God and our relationship and interaction with Him.

This is a critical point to grasp: joy is not just a feeling floating by that happens to reach out and grab us, making us feel good for no apparent reason. We aren't considering a bi-polar kind of emotion, where we happen to have a mood swing in the happy direction. No, pursuing that is nonsense, an empty pipe dream... resulting in the kind of sloppy, flapping chaos that goes on in some religious circles, where folk get all worked up by music and shouting and chanting. Make no mistake, such emptiness is a very real experience, it is just a very shallow and transient one. Such emotional manipulations can be, and often are, turned on and off at a whim, being nothing more than emotionalism. This is not what God is talking about. The kind of intense emotion we are talking about is rooted in a rich context. We are to experience the emotion of joy in reaction or response, caused in us by something that is incredibly wonderful, excellent and beautiful.

So, from the definition of joy we can see that we are trying to describe an emotional response to something or someone... outside of ourselves. This is the final point to understand from the definition of joy: joy is outward facing, not inward facing.

The Outward Perspective: You can experience happiness and gladness, emotions on the lower end of the spectrum of passion, by looking at how things affect you. When you consider yourself to be the center of all things, you react to things outside of yourself with an inward focus. You observe your circumstances and notice how they affect you. When your circumstances are favorable to your earthly comforts and affections they make, you feel glad and happy. On the other hand, when your circumstances aren't so favorable, you become worried, anxious, troubled, depressed and angry. If you are like most, you have lived your life this way for a long, long time -- for too long, in fact. You have lived at the mercy of your circumstances, with yourself on the throne, trying to reign at the center of your universe.

You probably didn't do this deliberately, on purpose; it's just the way we are all born. You may not even be aware that you are doing it. It may take some real shaking in your life to expose it, but this self-centered orientation is present in every one of us. The sooner we recognize it for what it is the sooner we can begin to deal with it. It is this self-ward, self-centered orientation that is at the root of what the Bible calls sin, and it is the enemy of true joy.

In order to experience joy the way God intended, we need to develop a whole new way of looking at the world. In other words, we need to repent, or to change our minds, alter our world view, get a new perspective. We need to begin to understand that we are not the center of our world. Our kids aren't the center, or our husband or our wife, or our family or friends, or our job or country, or our church or religion.

Something else, or more accurately ... **Someone** else, is at the center of **all** things. When we are looking inward we can only taste the pallid joys of self-serving prides and pleasures. When we quit pretending to be the center of the universe and get off of the proverbial throne of our life, something wonderful can begin to take place. We can begin to function as God designed us to function, as a responder rather than a creator, as a channel rather than a source.

We have been trained by a culture, one corrupted by the god of this world, to think of our self as the center of the universe. We have been trained to think that joy comes through circumstances that bring us earthly comfort and physical pleasure. Nothing could be farther from the truth. This is the enemy at work to steer you into the shadows of existence and hide its reality from you.

We are not the center of the universe. Life is not about us, not at all. Until we begin to develop an outward orientation we can never experience the unspeakable joys of which we read about

in Scripture. It is not until we are re-oriented by God to begin to look outside of ourselves into the Excellency of Another, Jesus Christ, that the deeper joys He has provided for us is known.

To get the point across, we might use our physical size to illustrate where and how we fit into the grand scheme of things. God has created us to be a certain size in relation to Himself and to His creation in order to help us understand our individual significance apart from Him. By ourselves, on our own, how important are we ... really?

To start, you and I are merely two of over seven billion people living on planet Earth. Let's look at Earth for a bit then, and ponder things somewhat more from God's point of view. Here is our beautiful planet, with America right in the center. See yourself down there? How about your neighborhood? Your city, or your state? From a little distance, even our own perspective begins to change a little. The interesting thing about beginning to see life from God's perspective is that what seems important to us as individuals probably isn't such a big deal in the grand scheme of things. Life isn't about us. A joyful life is about Someone else.

In fact, if we were to step out a bit farther, we might get an even clearer picture of God's perspective. Consider a photograph of Earth taken in 1990 by the Voyager 1 spacecraft as it traveled past the edge of our solar system, nearly 4 billion miles away from us. Voyager, having begun its journey in 1977, had been traveling at about 38,000 mph for 13 years.

You will strain to see our tiny little planet from so far away. The photo is called the Pale Blue Dot photo for a reason, because Earth is a light blue spec. Earth happens to be in the midst of a yellowish band of light, a coincidental optical interaction between our sun and Voyager's camera lens. This stunning photo evoked the following elegant response from astronomer, Carl Sagan.

"Look again at that dot. That's here, that's home, that's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam ... Our posturing, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light."

Dr Sagan has nicely summed up what the prophet Isaiah said many years ago. "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing ." (Isa 40:15) It cannot be said any better than that. We are nothing compared to God.

This helps us see how amazing and wonderful our God really is, but it is important that we grasp a critical point about joy: we can't experience the joy that God intends for us until we get over ourselves. But, as we all know, this is easier said than done.

To get over our pettiness and self pity, we need to get a good look at God, and a good look at things from God's perspective. When we do we might just forget all about ourselves for a while. This would not be a bad thing; it would be a very good thing. This is what we were made for.

Hopefully we begin to grasp that joy is actually A Grand Design. Now let's move on to another key idea about true joy: how we human beings are designed.

To begin with, in trying to understand why and how to experience true joy a opposed to emotion, we need to understand something very basic about ourselves. Is the fact that God has designed

us to respond to exceptionally good and satisfying things with the emotion of joy. It is perfectly natural for us, when we hear an excellent piece of music, or behold a beautiful person, or a brilliant sunset, or taste an exquisitely pleasurable morsel ... to react. We respond with delight, with elation. The emotion springs from us naturally, organically, instinctively. This response is inherent in our very nature, and it is a wonderful thing. We are engineered by God to recognize excellence and beauty and pleasure, and to respond in delight.

However, as everyone knows, none of these earthly experiences last very long. There is an initial excitement when we first experience any one of these wonderful things, but the emotion soon wears off. The new purse, the beautiful girl, the shiny new car, the new home... they all grow common to us over time. The initial wonder and pleasure and excitement doesn't satisfy us indefinitely. The emotion eventually dulls, and we are off to find something else to renew the happiness, to give us another faint taste of joy.

There is a reason that earthly experiences don't fully satisfy us. These pleasures aren't necessarily wrong, we are simply designed in such a way that they can never fully satisfy us. Temporal pleasures are not supposed to permanently satisfy us... that is not their purpose. Our longings, our loves, our appetites, and our cravings... they are all shadows, they are mirrors pointing to something beyond the physical life.

Everything we enjoy in the physical realm, every single thing one can possibly enjoy in this earthly life, is a mere reflection of something greater. The pleasures of this life are by comparison tasteless shadows. Earthly pleasure and excellence and beauty are all designed by God and provided by Him in order to remind us of one thing: **Himself**. The purpose of earthly pleasure is to remind us why were made.

There is ultimately one extremely beautiful thing which we, in our very nature, are designed to behold. There is one incredible pleasure that we are inherently designed to enjoy. There is an absolute excellence which we are designed to delight in. There is an ultimate Lover, over Whom we are designed to swoon. It is this ultimate One that will satisfy us permanently in every conceivable way, and to which all other joys and pleasures point. They are all clues, hints of something vastly greater.

God has designed each person to respond to Himself with indescribable delight. Everything you enjoy in this life is merely an echo of this design, a reminder of this reality. When you see something beautiful, marvelous, awe inspiring, the ensuing emotional response is just a faint taste of what God has designed into you, the capacity to become absolutely enraptured with the most beautiful and amazing Being in all existence: **God Himself**.

Finally, we come to our most significant point, and it is again, quite simple: God Himself is the ultimate fulfillment of every possible human passion and desire. God has designed us to enjoy Himself. He is the most complete, perfect, excellent and beautiful Being in existence.

God created beauty and beautiful things because that is what He is, and all that He has made is a form of His self-expression. Can the Creator of beauty be anything else? God not only created beautiful things, God IS beauty! He designed into each one of us the ability to appreciate beauty so that we might appreciate Him. God not only created excellence, He IS excellence! Not only is He loving, God is love itself (1 John 4:8). Jesus Christ is wisdom itself. (1 Cor 1:30) God is Himself, very virtue, very excellence, very beauty.

When you hear a beautiful piece of music, a truly excellent piece, one that stirs your heart into ecstasy, until you feel your very soul being caught up into the realm of the spirit, feeling connected with all that is excellent and amazing and wonderful and awesome ... this is just a sliver, just the faintest taste of what awaits those who pursue the face of the living God. He is the ultimate source of music, and of excellence itself.

Wonderful physical pleasures are just a faint hint of the pleasure of being intimate with God. *You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.* (Ps 16:11) The rapture that He has designed into the undiluted experience of His face by one set free from the pollutions of this world makes them pale in comparison.

God designed us this way, to enjoy Him, not for His benefit, but for our benefit. *And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.* (Ac 17:25) God is perfectly happy and content and joyful, in and about Himself, and He has always been that way. He has created us so that He might share his beauty and excellence with us, allowing us to feast on Him. He has designed us so that what we long for is what we need, and what we need is Him: what satisfies us is God Himself. As C.S. Lewis so aptly said, God is the fuel on which the human machine is designed to run. (Mere Christianity) Nothing can ever satisfy us like God. Ultimately, only God Himself can satisfy the longings of our hearts. That is the way He has made us, and it is a very good design.

Take a moment now for a spiritual checkup; take stock of where you are in joy.

What brings you joy? Anything? When was the last time that you choked back the tears and were speechless about anything? What was it? When was the last time that you bit your tongue to keep back the shout, the amazement, the exuberance, the joy? What were you, specifically, rejoicing in? Have you ever danced for joy? Or sung for pure joy? Where is your joy? Do you have any idea?

More specifically, when you think of Christ, what really springs from your heart? What happens inside when you ponder Jesus Christ, or God your Father? If this activity doesn't immediately result in a joy so intense that it nearly takes your breath away... then something is wrong, something is broken. This is not how God designed you to function. Something is amiss and it needs to be corrected. What is it?

What Happened? You've have been lied to and you have believed the lies. That's what happened.

Putting it very plainly, the enemy has stepped into our lives and lied to us about the nature of God, Who is the ultimate and real fulfillment of every healthy human desire. Satan has suggested to each of us in a thousand different ways that God is dull, lifeless, boring, unfair, untrue, unfaithful, selfish, distant, uncaring, capricious, condescending and cruel. He has then suggested that you look to something else to give you joy. His very first lie, way back in the Garden of Eden, was just like this: Satan lied to Eve about the nature of God, and about what would fulfill her... and he's been lying to us all about the same things ever since.

When Satan tempted Eve to eat the fruit in the Garden of Eden, he said: ⁴*"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman.* ⁵*"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* (Gen 3:4-5) In this lie Satan made two fundamental assertions that comprise the root of nearly every joyless life:

1. God will not satisfy you.
2. Something else will.

Satan, an incredibly intelligent and gifted being, starts with an understanding that we humans are looking for fulfillment. He knows that humans have built into their very nature a desire, a longing, a searching, a pursuing tendency. We are not fulfilled in and of ourselves, we seek fulfillment outside of ourselves. This desire is a gift to us from God and it is very good, given to us to cause us to pursue God, to find Him, and to be completely fulfilled in Him. Satan understands this, and he knows that he cannot actually alter our fundamental design. However, through his lies, Satan can try to convince us that God cannot satisfy us. If he succeeds on this

one point, then it is relatively easy for him to leverage the strength of our desire to turn us away from God in order to pursue something else, anything else. Once our strength is spent chasing after this second lie, he can then let that one go, and convince us that nothing at all can satisfy us. This kind of dynamic is the root and cause of every single joyless life.

Satan's first claim then is that God Himself cannot -- or perhaps will not -- satisfy our desire, that God does not have our best interest in mind, that He cannot be trusted, that He is hiding something good from us. From there, it is an easy step to get us to pursue something other than God to satisfy our desire. Satan follows with more lies about the purpose of earthly delights, and with lies about ourselves. He says that the shadow itself is what will bring us ultimate joy, and that we can be fulfilled apart from God. From the very beginning then, the enemy has been inviting us to pursue the shadows as if they were the reality, to take them out of context, pervert them, and pursue them headlong. For Eve, it started with a piece of fruit. What has it been for you?

The devil tantalizes us with the pleasure of the shadow while lying to us about the reality behind it. This way Satan convinces us, at some point and to some degree, that we need to enthrone ourselves in the center of our lives, take control, and make the best of life by chasing after whatever can gratify our dulling senses, worrying over our circumstances, fretting over life's ups and downs.

Then, as we should expect, after taking us down this road a while, the enemy often does something even more insidious to some of us: when we come up empty pursuing the shallow pleasures of this life, he convinces us to give up pursuing anything at all. He allows us to see through the second lie above, that something else other than God will satisfy us. He enjoys watching us come to the ultimate realization that nothing else can satisfy us, so long as the first lie is firmly entrenched. In this, he manages to kill what little zest we have for life, persuading us that our very design is corrupt and that we ought to give up pursuing anything, so that we pursue nothing. We become convinced that personal satisfaction of any kind is impossible for us, and we simply give up, resigning ourselves to bitterness. We just exist, and suffer, enduring this calamity called life until it's over. This is his ultimate triumph: a bitter, angry, despondent soul.

This is where the battle for your joy lies: in order to walk in joy you must re-discover, or discover for the first time, who God is and what He is like.

Taking Stock is to know how effective the enemy has been in stealing your joy through his lies. It is likely quite stunning. Perhaps there are some earthly things that have brought you moments of joy in the past. Perhaps you felt real joy shortly after your conversion to Christ. But what about walking in continual joy now? Unspeakable joy that does not fade away? Do you know this as a present reality in your life?

The enemy has done his job quite well in all of us. No wonder he is called the "father of lies." He is very good at what he does.

When did he accomplish this in you? Do you remember some big event where he stole your joy? Probably not. We seldom see him coming, or see him present, setting up shop in our lives. No, he does this in nearly all of us without our slightest notice. The insidious dulling of our senses, the stirring of our lusts and hatreds, the darkening of our thoughts and motives, the perverting of our affections... this all happens in us as we receive and respond to his lies. We seldom notice what is happening. Before we know it, our joy is lost... and we don't even know where to begin.

But if you could, right now, see Jesus Christ as He really is, see Him with the heart He has designed for you, a heart set free of all of the deceptions and lies of the enemy... you would never again, by comparison, desire anything else or anyone else with any real intensity. In fact, if the truth be known, if this were to happen completely right now, you would probably not live through the experience at all; you would probably actually die from the overwhelming intensity

of true joy. Your affections for this world and for all that it has to offer would vanish in comparison with your desire for Jesus Christ. It might be kind of like someone offering you a dime after you had just won the lottery. It would be a chuckle at best.

However the reality is that, right now, between you and your source of true Joy, Jesus Christ, crouch a thousand lies about Him. His nature, His purpose, His character, His heart ... all hidden through lies sown very strategically by the enemy in every single human being. This is his triumph: a heart grown cold and hard against the bright and morning Star ... the very jewel of the universe, counted as a shame, a wearisome burden, a drudgery, a bore. Only when dressed up in ritual and pretty music does such a heart stir in even the slightest. Such a heart is bound up in a vast web of lies... and has believed them. The proof is in a joyless life. It is quite simple.

The enemy has had his way in this long enough ... drawing us after the shadows of reality to have us grope here and there to find a crumb of pleasure in the darkness. He has leveraged a powerful design, the fact that we are created by God to respond to excellence and beauty and perfection with joy, to turn us from the reality of God and have us chasing after scraps, fighting over the hints of God's beauty and perfection rather than pursuing and finding and enjoying God Himself.

The enemy has trapped us, each one God's lover by design, in our ignorance and our selfishness, turned our thoughts inward, and has thereby largely defeated us, disarmed us, and alienated us from the only One who can satisfy us. What an amazing liar! What an awful distraction he has been to us!

Enough! Let us arise, and go to Jesus. While we yet breathe, it is not too late to discover Him.

A Baby Step: The first step toward true joy is to ask God to do in you what He has already sent His Spirit to Earth to do: glorify Jesus Christ by revealing Him to you. *"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. (John 15:26) He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. (John 16:14)* When you ask God to reveal Jesus Christ in you, you can be sure of one thing: He is willing to do so. A simple prayer like, "God, so reveal Jesus Christ to me that I respond in joy." It's that simple to get started.

Now, as with all of God's commands, there are two facets to this. When we start after God in a new way we must bring along with us two things: *Anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Heb. 11:6)*

First, there is the initial realization of our need, a surrender, an admission that we need God to help us, and an earnest asking for His help. There is faith, to some degree, that God is indeed with us and that He is willing to help us. Then there needs to be an understanding that God rewards those who pursue Him. In other words, we have a decision to make: we can prayerfully open our Bible... or turn on the TV.

In other words, we can't just keep on doing the same old things we've always done and expect to get different results. That's the definition of insanity, right? Something basic needs to change about how we think and how we live. The fight begins in earnest the moment we pray for God's help.

Here is the question: "Now that I've asked God to reveal Christ to me, will I do whatever I can to put myself in a position to receive God's help?" I might not be able to do very much, but whatever I can do, am I willing to do that? If I really want God to reveal Christ to me, somehow I'll start studying Christ, and meditating on Him.

But if I want to hang on to my joyless life, I can: I just keep on doing what I've always done. My lazy little prayer won't help much, if at all.

Toward A Journey: This first step in a new direction can be a glorious one, but every case will be unique. Some may immediately begin to experience fullness of joy, while others may find only a taste to start off with. Only one thing is for sure, upon taking this first step we all must take another, and yet another in this same direction: it is the pursuit of God. It is not complicated, but it is continuous. It is as Paul said, even after living a very full and productive life: *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* (Phil. 3:12)

Our ultimate goal is to know Him: *I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,* (Phil. 3:10) but we will never know all there is to know about God. The riches of Jesus Christ are unsearchable, unfathomable, for *in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* (Col. 2:3) We can certainly "find God" in pursuing Him, and begin to enjoy a rich relationship with Him, but we will never get to the place in this life where we are now, close enough to Him. There will always be more to discover and rejoice in. What an exquisite pleasure... even the pursuit of God itself!

This first step puts us on a journey, it starts us on an adventure; we find ourselves in a kind of race. There are challenges ahead: the enemy will never quit lying to us about Jesus, and he will never quit trying to discourage us. The world and all its enticements and entanglements will ever lurk by the way, and the enemy will leverage them to tempt us as much as the Father allows. But, Jesus continually says: *I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.* (John 16:22) Your joy lies in seeing Jesus, and in continuing to see Him, and no one can take this away from you – except you, of course. ¹ *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* (Heb. 12:1-2) We must keep on going in this direction in order to walk in joy.

Sanctification: Continuing in this way of joy leads us to, the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, ⁴ *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.* (2 Cor. 10:4-5) In taking away the lies, God must, of necessity, begin to show us many things about ourselves, as well as about Christ, that we don't yet know. Most all of the things He will show us about ourselves will likely be very unpleasant things. As He shows them to us we must be willing to yield to His correction and refinement, which may include suffering. He may need to take us through the fire for a bit, to burn some selfishness and pride off of us so that we will begin to look beyond ourselves, to consider the needs of others as if they were our own, and to be free enough to behold beauty and excellence wherever it is.

To get us where He wants us, the Spirit may also need to target our very understanding of Who Jesus really is, and this may, at times, shake the very roots of our theology. It is God's intent that we see Him clearly so that we can begin to really apprehend the beauty of Jesus Christ.

Every lie that you believe, every single one, is in some way a hindrance to joy: every single one of them must be held with open hand ... if held at all. He'll show you all you need to know about Him to abound in joy, if you are only willing to receive it. Let God deal with each topic as He will, in His timing. Let Him have His way.

Once you purpose to *hang* on to a lie, you limit your enjoyment of God and of His ways, you set yourself up for a good spanking: ⁹ *Moreover, 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 spirits and live!*

¹⁰ *They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. (Heb. 12:9-10), and you open the door again to the enemy to steal, kill and destroy in you: The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10) Be sure that the enemy will design just the right circumstance to put such a lie squarely between you and Jesus. This is his relentless objective. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. (James 1:16) Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. (Pr. 4:23)*

As God removes the lies so that we can behold and enjoy Him, consider also what God says about how we become like Jesus Christ. *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Co. 3:18)* When you behold Jesus, when you think about Him, you not only move your soul to rejoice in Him, you engage in a behavior by which the Spirit of God actually transforms you from one level of Christ-likeness (glory), to another. We not only find our joy in beholding Him, but our growth in the wholistic fruit of the Spirit is linked to this focus as well.

True Joy is Fruit of the Spirit: Joy is certainly not a switch we turn on and off, but rather evidence of a transformation that encompasses the entire person: the mind in its beliefs, the heart in its affections and the will in its choices. Emotions are the out flowing of who we are, so joy is perhaps the chief barometer of how we are doing. Yet it is not joy itself that we seek, it is simply a measure of how much of Him we have truly found: joy is the barometer of our apprehension of Him.

In this transformation then, do not expect joy to appear by itself; we must remember that joy is a fruit of the Spirit. ²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. (Gal. 5:22-23a)* Notice that the fruit of the Spirit is not expressed in the plural fruits but the singular fruit. As we grow in likeness to Christ, as we mature in wisdom, in peace, in goodness... joy will naturally be more and more a part of our lives, just like all of the rest of the nature of Christ. This change comes organically and supernaturally as we behold and enjoy Christ, and this practice of beholding Him is actually itself the means by which we are transformed.

Spiritual Warfare: This brings us to a place where perhaps the motive of our enemy in fighting our joy is more obvious. Why is the enemy so bent on stealing our joy? Perhaps it is because he is terrified of us becoming more like Jesus. He hates Jesus Christ, and we are the only living beings through whom Jesus Christ has chosen to live. If you or I get hold of Him, and His joy begins to flow through us, and we are in this way transformed into His very nature... then the enemy must deal with two Christs, as it were, rather than one.

Filled with joy, you are a terror to the enemy. Every last one of us could be the key to the next great revival, and the enemy wants to see to it that Jesus is dishonored and vilified through our lives instead. One of his greatest weapons is the joyless Christian. No wonder he fights us so.

The battle for joy is certainly a spiritual one; we must learn to fight for joy, to contend for it as we pursue Him, the One Who is the Truth. This fight must be sustained by a continual reviving of our hearts by God's Spirit. ³ *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. (2 Cor 10:3-4):* The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. Pulling down the enemy's lies requires the omniscient, strategic power of the Holy Spirit, constantly prompting us to return to the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph. 6:17)* as we stand against the devil's wiles.

But, in order for the Spirit to have any Word to work with in our hearts, we must hide His Word in our hearts on a regular basis that we might not sin against Him. *I have hidden your word in*

my heart that I might not sin against you. (Ps 119:11) Memorize God's Word systematically as a defense of joy. Once we have hidden God's Word in our hearts, God's Word is then constantly available to us to meditate on, by the prompting of the Spirit, which the Spirit will then use to renew our minds in the truth. *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.* (Rom 12:2) When and where He is pleased to do so, one lie at a time. It is from this position, soaking in the Word of God day and night, that we are prepared to quote it when the enemy comes after us, like he did our Master in the wilderness:

¹ *Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.* ² *After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.* ³ *The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."* ⁴ *Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"* ⁵ *Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.* ⁶ *"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.""* ⁷ *Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"* ⁸ *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.* ⁹ *"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."* ¹⁰ *Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"* ¹¹ *Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.* (Matt 4:1-11).

Be sure that he will come after us for the same purpose. So, too, ought we to follow His steps in our response: *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.* (1 Pet 2:21)

Meditations on Christ: Having laid a good foundation, I pray, let us come now to the favorite part: meditating on God. What a vast wonder He truly is! Let us consider some basic things about Him to whet our tongues.

Creator: Think of it, that there was once a day, no doubt, in which you could have knelt down beside a little Boy playing the sand, Who had made this:

This is the Whirlpool galaxy. It takes light 100,000 years to cross it, and it contains 160 billion stars. Its center, with a span of 5 light years, contains the equivalent of 40 million of our suns. If our solar system, from the edge of which the Pale Blue Dot photograph was taken, was reduced to the size of a quarter, the nearest star to our sun would be two soccer fields away, and this galaxy would be the size of the this continent! Jesus Christ made this galaxy, with its fury and splendor, just by speaking it, and it is just one of billions more. He made all of them with ease.

It is said that astronomers have trouble with the size of the universe, as if someone said that the universe was made merely as a home for Earth. The skeptic's challenge leads us to reconsider God's purpose in making the universe so immense: Why did God make the vast stellar spaces, with all of their remarkable grandeur? *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.* (Ps. 19:1) God did not make the universe merely to house us, but to give us some idea what He is like, to reveal His magnificence and splendor.

When you think of Jesus Christ, do not think of Him anymore, if you ever did, as a pale little stick figure with a drawn face, a soft wrist, and scrawny wisps of hair. He can certainly appear as He wishes, and He did, in fact, come the first time such that He had no form nor comeliness; and ... no beauty that we should desire him. *He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.* (Is. 53:2) But don't be misled by this display of apparent weakness.

It had its purpose. But God has chosen to declare His glory, the glory of Jesus Christ, through spectacles like the Whirlpool galaxy. As amazing as they are, they can't begin to fully declare it.

His Appearance: The true appearance of Jesus Christ would overwhelm your senses to the point that you would lose consciousness, if you could live through it at all. If He does not transform you, and enable you to bear the weight of His glory in some way, the experience will most certainly kill you. John went through such an experience, and described Jesus Christ as follows: ¹⁴ *The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.* ¹⁵ *His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.* ¹⁶ *In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.* (Rev. 1:14-16)

Try to imagine being at the base of Niagara Falls, the thunderous roar of the water crashing down about you. This is somewhat like His voice. Now imagine staring into the sun, this is somewhat like His face. Finally, try to imagine the power of a category five tornado bearing down on you during a massive earthquake. This is a faint hint of His vast power. You would be, like John was, absolutely terrified. Is it any wonder that our Bible says, Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him? (Ps 2:11-12)

His Endurance: An incredible scene on which to meditate, breathlessly depicted in The Passion of the Christ, is Jesus carrying His cross toward Golgotha. While He is stumbling along under the weight of the heavy cross beam, He functions. In the movie He looks up. One eye is swollen shut, the other is simply stunning: clear, solid, almost joyful. In the Bible Jesus speaks as He stumbles, "*Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children."* (Luke 23:28) Jesus Christ bore the ultimate in suffering with an incredible clarity, an incredible endurance.

This can also be seen during His interrogation of Pilate. That's right. Have you ever noticed that every time Jesus was put on trial that He asked the questions? What an amazing Being this is! Pummeled, whipped, bruised, gashed, dehydrated... He stood before them as if they were on trial! *Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.*" (John 18:21) "If I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" (vs 23) "*Is that your own idea,*" Jesus asked, "*or did others talk to you about me?*" (vs 34) The pattern is very consistent. Actually, His accusers were on trial before Him and He acted accordingly. He was never intimidated, He never wavered. What a divine model in suffering He has provided for us!

His Wisdom: Study the Gospels and just marvel at the wisdom of Jesus Christ! One can see it at every turn. Once, in John 8, the Pharisees dragged an adulterous woman before Him, taken in the very act. They tried their best to trap Him: " ⁴ *and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.* ⁵ *In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"* ⁶ *They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.."* (John 8:4-6) Had Jesus agreed with Moses in that circumstance He would also have violated His obligation to respect civil authority: the Romans were in power and it was unlawful for Jews to carry out capital punishment. *Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."* "*But we have no right to execute anyone,*" they objected. (John 18:31) Had He disagreed with Moses and told them to ignore the Law, that would have been extremely misleading: Moses was not the author of the Law -- it was God's Law, given to Moses by Christ Himself! What a predicament!

Jesus stoops down, writing something on the ground. They continue pressing the issue. He stands up, facing them all, and says, "*Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*" (John 8:7) A little turn of events for sure! If you aren't a sinner then supposedly

you aren't subject to lawful governmental authority, and God will certainly be pleased to intervene and rescue you when the Romans come to lock you up. Do you really want to go there? They all, one by one, left on their own accord.

Know for certain that there isn't a human being that can make up stories like this! Every scene, each one of them, when you meditate on it, contains a divine wisdom that can only be revealed. This Jesus cannot be contrived by the wittiest imaginations of Man. We do well to ponder His every word, His every move, and worship unto joy!

Christ's Love: Much has been written about the love of God; any attempt at it is certainly daunting. But the love of God is so incredible we must give some time to capture it. Considered from an outward perspective, rather than focusing on How much He loves me, it is amazing to ponder who God loves, how He loves, and how much He loves.

First, God doesn't just love good people. He certainly would love good people if there were any... but there aren't any good people, really. Jesus Himself observed that there is none good but one, that is God: "*Why do you ask me about what is good?*" *Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."* (Matt 19:17) We could certainly understand how God would love good people, but that doesn't get us very far.

To get a grasp of God's love, we need to see who He loves. God loves sinners, people who are so broken and corrupt that they despise goodness itself. That is what we are, that is who we are. That is, God loves the villain in every movie, the pervert, the criminal, the terrorist. Think of the very worst of humanity. That is what we all are in God's story. The differences between us down here in our self-evaluation pale in contrast to His evaluation of us all. From the perspective of holiness we are all pretty much the same: broken, rotten, wicked, selfish. In order to grasp the mystery and depth of God's love, we must realize from the very outset that it is very much different than our own kind of love.

How does God love? He does not admire us, for there is nothing admirable about us. He does not seek anything from us, for we have nothing to offer Him, and He has need of nothing. It is difficult to find a parallel in our minds to which we can relate. We must try.

God's love contains, at its heart, the concept of jealousy: *You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate m.* (Ex. 20:5). This is not a love for a decent, reasonable person, but for an out of control, arrogant and treacherous one.

It is not half-hearted love, but a love that gives all. And after giving all, has no less to give. It is not offered with the wish to force any inherent distance either, but with a call to deepest intimacy. It is a love born of design and truth and purpose. It is a completely different kind of love than we know naturally, or that one can even really grasp without His help. It is an entirely selfless love that is willing to cross the seemingly impassible chasm between Himself and fallen persons, and then to radically transform us.

God's love is of One Who is perhaps, as C.S .Lewis thought, in a kind of eternal joyful dance with Himself, and Who has created us all so that we might enjoy Him, participate in this dance, and fellowship with and in the Godhead. We are made for this, and we are invited by Him to come into Him so that we can enjoy Him as He enjoys Himself. It is a mystery, for sure.

God's Wrath: Look at **who** and **how** God loves, that we may begin to grasp the love of God, and to grasp it unto worship. Yet it is here in this focus that we also unveil the fury of God... unto worship. Are we to worship... in response to God's wrath? How so? This is challenging indeed. We don't think much about God's wrath anymore; most avoid the topic at any cost... or speak of it only in apologetic, timid tones. We certainly don't sing about it much... much less worship and

rejoice in it. For sure, the Jesus being preached today is not one to be feared. Yet, even in the paleness of God's first earthly appearance, as much as they felt His love for them, there were times when the disciples were afraid of Jesus: *They did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.* (Luke 9:45)

And Jesus, while He was here, spoke often of Hell. Do you suppose He did so with love and joy? Do you suppose that He was moved to worship at the thought? If He was, would you have been afraid of Him too?

Is there anything about the Father in which Jesus does not rejoice?

How can we mortals ever understand Hell, viewing it from such an earthly perspective?

But there must be something sharply clarifying about being in heaven, because the saints up there are singing about God's wrath. An amazing scene unfolds in Revelation 15 to show us this, a scene that blends worship and wrath in an amazing way.

¹ I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed. ² And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God ³ and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways King of the nations. ⁴ Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you for your righteous acts have been revealed." (Rev 15:1-4)

Those present before God in that amazing day will worship as none have ever worshipped here, and it will be in delightful response to the unveiling of the judgments of God. The worship team itself will comprise those who've been directly persecuted by the anti-Christ, and the rest of us circling about will doubtless join them in perfectly glorious wonder. Perhaps we could learn a little, looking into how these perfected saints worship.

The first thing they point out to us is that God's works are, indeed, amazing! All of His works, even those revealed in the destruction of His enemies, are truly awe inspiring. An endless parade of His ways calls to us to ponder them. We ought not to neglect any of them; in order to change our own dark orientation we must ponder those we fail at first to fully enjoy ... such as God's judgment of the wicked.

Another focus of their worship is God's justice and perfection: "just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints ." There is utter perfection, an absolute trueness in every act of God, in His response to every situation. Even when God does not appear to respond, He always being perfectly just in every conceivable way, all the time, in every circumstance. If we find a problem with something God says or does, or perhaps when He does not say or do as we think best, it's time to reprogram, time to be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we can say from the heart that every one of God's ways is good and perfect. *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.* (Rom 12:2)

Finally, the saints exclaim how unreasonable it seems to them that anyone would not fear God and glorify Him, because He is so holy! They expect all nations to come and worship before God as He makes His judgments known. What is it that they see, that we have somehow missed?

What is evidently hidden from us, as we behold the wrath of God with anything less than glorious worship ... is who ... and what ... has enraged our King. It would seem that we have not yet seen our King as He is, nor ourselves and others as He has.

Perhaps, in seeing God more as He is, we'll finally begin to realize how awful sin is, how dreadfully wicked it is to be self-oriented and proud. Perhaps we'll have some real grasp of the extent to which God has gone in giving up His Son as an offering for sinful men. Perhaps we will finally comprehend that every single human being outside of Christ was aware of God and His gift in some real and tangible way while on Earth. We will see that the wicked have willfully neglected God's offer of salvation, and have despised Him in it. We will see that the wicked have chosen to be – and continue to choose to be – outside of Christ, and we will behold them, even in judgment and death, continuing to do so ... even beyond death, and out into eternity.

Perhaps then we'll realize how reasonable it is for God to be deeply enraged at every single human being outside of His Son. Perhaps then we'll see the beauty and perfection of God's fury toward sinners ... *His perfect hatred of them: The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong.* (Psalm 5:5); and understand in the deepest places of our being that any other response is unthinkably dreadful.

In Summary: Such is the pursuit of Joy. It is the disruption of our darkness, of our apathy ... a wrenching of ourselves out of our selfish, seemingly safe, comfortable dullness, into His marvelous light. It can certainly be an upheaval, but what a glorious one!

The pursuit of joy is really the pursuit of God Himself. Please take this pursuit, with God's help, from here. Continue pursuing Him. Get connected with others who are willing to walk this way with you, and together seek the Holy Spirit's revelation of God until you overflow with worship and adoration and joy in every thought of Him. Do this with every breath, until He takes you home.

In pursuing Jesus Christ with our whole heart, may we all be transformed more and more into His image. May the reality of the kingdom of God so shine forth in our faces, voices, words and deeds that God may be glorified in us all. Amen.

Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory

A benefit of moving from a house is that you can get rid of things that you've been storing for years and years and years and don't need any more! You know what things are ...in your closets, under your bed, in your attic, in your garage, in the trunk of your car! One of the benefits of moving is that you can get rid of some of those things that you don't need anymore. Another benefit of moving from a house is that you find family treasures that you haven't seen for years. But they are priceless to you and your family as they may likely be a form of love note.

God has also sent a Love Note to us. That love note also reveals the essence of His thoughts and feelings toward us. But unlike other love notes, God's love note to us is not written on a Hallmark card or on parchment with pen and ink, or even on stone with His own finger. God's love letter to us is sent in a Person. Who is God's love note to us? That's right! Jesus!

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Jesus, the Son of God came to reveal the essence of the Father's thoughts and feelings toward us. And the message was as simple as it is precious: God loves you. God loves you. God loves you.

In the letter to the Philippians the apostle Paul speaks of God's love so perfectly and absolutely revealed in His love letter to us, the Lord Jesus Christ. This portion of Philippians is one of the most profound passages of Scripture in the entire Bible. Many scholars believe that it is actually an early Christian hymn because it is written in carefully chosen phrases which have a clear rhythm. Reading this early Christian found in Philippians 2:6-11. Talking about Jesus, the apostle Paul has this to say:

- ⁶ *Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;*
- ⁷ *rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.*
- ⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*
- ⁹ *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,*
- ¹⁰ *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*
- ¹¹ *and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

What an amazing picture of the love of God in action! Why was Jesus willing to empty Himself, to make Himself nothing? Why was He willing to stoop so low for wretched sinners like you and me? Can you answer that question for me?

The answer is simple: Because He loves us. And He came to reveal the Father's love. The Father loves you! That is the message written in bold print in God's love letter to us. God loves you! God loves you! God loves you!

And the apostle Paul appeals to the Philippian believers, and also to us to embrace that love and to allow that love to transform our lives. Notice his admonition to the Philippians at the beginning of the second paragraph of his letter:

"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort in his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:1-4).

And what was the attitude of Christ Jesus? Very simply this: His life was so filled with the love of God that He loved the Father with all of His heart and He loved God's children more than life itself. Let me say that again. Jesus was so filled with the love of God that He loved the Father with all of His heart and He loved God's children more than life itself.

And the apostle Paul's admonition is clear. Let your attitude, let your approach to life, be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Let the love of God so fill your heart that you will love Him with all your heart and love those around you more than life itself. And that's a miracle of God's grace. You can't work up that kind of love. You can only open your heart to receive it as a gift from God.

Paul told the believers in Rome that God's love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given to us. And when your life is filled with the love of God, you will have the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus. When your heart is filled with the love of God, you will love God with all of your heart and you will love those around you more than life itself.

And when you receive God's amazing love note through Jesus Christ, you will not only love God with all of your heart, which is the first great commandment, you will not only love those around you more than life itself, which is the second great commandment, but you will be filled with glorious and inexpressible **joy!**

The apostle Peter speaks of this joy in his first epistle. He speaks of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, God's love letter to us: ⁸ *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,* ⁹ *for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.* (1 Peter 1:8-9)

Jesus experienced that glorious and inexpressible joy as He loved God with all of His heart and loved us more than life itself. We read in Hebrews 12:1-2; ¹ *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,* ² *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

And that joy is not just a future joy. It was a present joy. Luke records in Luke 10:21 that Jesus was full of joy by the Holy Spirit!

And you can know that joy today. That glorious and inexpressible joy when you receive God's amazing love note to us, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When you receive Him, you will not only respond by loving God with all of your heart, and loving those around you more than life itself, you will be filled with a glorious and inexpressible joy!

The old gospel song is true. I'm not sure than I can remember all of the words. But it goes something like this:

*If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy
let Jesus come into your heart.
If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy,
let Jesus come into your heart.
Your sins He'll wash away
Your night He'll turn today
Your life He'll make it over anew.
If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy,
let Jesus come into your heart.*

And Paul says, when that is your experience, when you receive the love of God poured out through Jesus Christ, when you love God with all of your heart and love one another more than life itself, "you will make my joy complete." Literally, you will fill up my joy.

God loves you no matter what you've done or where you've been. God loves you no matter where you came from. God loves you whether you're rich or poor. God loves you whether you're pretty or ugly! God loves you and He has sent you a love letter in the person of His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Won't you open your heart to His love to perfectly and completely revealed in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord? When you do, His love will so fill your heart that you will love Him with all of your heart, you will love those around you more than life itself, and you will experience a glorious and inexpressible joy!

You will still face challenges in life. You will still face difficulties. But like it says in the song that our children sing, "This joy that I have the world didn't give it to me. This joy that I have the world didn't give it to me." The world didn't give it and the world can't take it away.

Is there anyone who needs to experience that glorious and inexpressible joy? It won't come with more money or more friends or more stuff. That glorious and inexpressible joy comes when we receive God's love note to us, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Is there anyone who needs to trust Jesus completely as Savior and Lord and be filled with glorious and inexpressible joy? It is joy unspeakable and full of glory, full of glory, full of glory.

The Joy of Obedience

By Charles F. Stanley

In times of disobedience, we become spiritually weak and unable to discern right from wrong.

Obedience can be a challenge, especially when tempted to believe that we know more about our lives and circumstances than God does. However, obeying God is essential to testing.

In fact, there is never a time when obedience is unimportant to the Lord. Though it may seem easier to obey Him concerning situations that have been clearly defined in His Word, God requires our obedience in every circumstance of life.

Telling a so-called white lie can be just as detrimental to our spiritual well-being as yielding to a greater temptation like adultery or stealing. When God commands us to obey Him, He is giving us a principle by which to live. He also is setting a framework around our lives that forms a hedge of protection from evil.

Can you remember the last time you were tempted to do the opposite of what you knew God desired you to do? Deep inside, you probably understood what was right, but a struggle ensued within you. The question arose: Would you obey God and please Him or disobey Him and hope that He would not notice?

When we choose to obey God, we choose the way of wisdom. It also is the way to blessing.

When some people think of obedience, their thoughts turn to their children or some other young person. They surmise that others, especially today's youth, need to learn how to be obedient. However, obedience is crucial at every level of maturity. And as we grow in our walk with the Lord, obedience becomes a cornerstone to fellowship with God. If we obey Him, He pulls us closer to Himself and teaches us more about His precepts and His personal love.

Sometimes as we grow older, however, we find ways to remove the sensitivity surrounding God's commandment to obey Him. We reason that we have learned how to live obediently before God, and, therefore, we do not need to dig deeper into the issue of obedience. We assign to others the commandment to obey God while dismissing it from our own lives.

This is what the nation of Israel did in the book of Judges. The Bible says they did what was right in their own eyes. (Judges 17:6) In other words, Israel did as it pleased.

The Israelites forgot the Lord and served other gods. They made their own decisions, lived immoral lives, and refused to worship the God who, years earlier, had brought them out of Egyptian bondage. Their lives were marked by disobedience, and they sank into an even greater bondage than the one their forefathers had experienced at the hands of Pharaoh.

Disobedience sends a message to the Lord, declaring the fact that we know better than He does when it comes to our lives and the circumstances surrounding them.

God's concern for us is one of deep love and devotion. He commands our obedience not because He is a strict taskmaster but because He knows the effect disobedience and sin will have on our lives. Satan, however, has his own goal in mind when it comes to the believer. He seeks to tempt him or her to disobey God.

This is the enemy's goal in the Garden of Eden, and it remains his central focus today. He knows that if he can entice us to sin, our actions will dishonor the Lord and bring sorrow God's heart.

Disobedience has fierce repercussions. Feelings of guilt, shame, and worthlessness are just three of the emotional consequences of disobedience. Broken lives, destroyed marriages, and bitter disputes also result from disobedience and sin. While sin cannot change God's eternal love for us, it certainly disrupts our fellowship with the Savior because it alienates the believer

from God's blessings. This alone is enough to cause us to sense the Lord's rebuke, which is God's way of saying, "What you are doing is not right. Turn away from it and return to Me."

In times of disobedience, we become spiritually weak and unable to discern right from wrong. We sink deeper into sin's grasp instead of being able to reverse our sinfulness on our own.

However, God does not leave us hopeless. The apostle Paul writes, *"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it"* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In Psalm 139:15-16, David says: *"My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me"* God is close to us and is personally involved in all we do. He understands our deepest needs and our heart-felt longings.

The book of Deuteronomy chronicles Israel's preparation to enter the Promised Land. God knew Israel would be tempted to stop worshiping Him and worship the gods of other nations. But in Deuteronomy, He makes His will very clear to the people of Israel and to Joshua, who is the one to lead the nation into the Promised Land.

"See, I am setting before you today a blessing . . . , if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 11:26-27).

In chapter 28, the Lord says, *"Now it shall be, if you will diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God . . . "* (vv. 1-2).

The rest of this chapter spells out the blessings that came as a result of Israel's obedience. This same principle is at work in our lives. Obedience leads to blessing while disobedience leads to disappointment, sorrow, and brokenness.

As we begin to apply the following principles to our lives, we will begin to live a life of obedience and blessing:

- Trust God with your life and all that concerns you. There is no way to go wrong if you place your hope and trust in God. He created you, and He loves you with an eternal love. Therefore, you are His greatest concern and the apple of His eye.
- Wait on the Lord for an answer to your problem or situation. When in doubt, refuse to move ahead unless you know that God is leading you.
- Meditate on God's Word. When you saturate your mind with the Word of God, you gain God's viewpoint. When a temptation comes, you will know right from wrong and can act accordingly. Never underestimate the power of God in your life.
- Listen to the Holy Spirit. God continues to speak to His people today. He speaks to us through His Word, the Holy Spirit, and through the words of a pastor or trusted Christian friend. The way we become sensitive to the Spirit of God is to seek Him through His Word and by spending time with Him—praying and studying the principles written in Scripture.
- Be willing to wait or walk away when the way before you is not clear. Obedience to God will require you to be firm if you desire to please God above all others. If you do not sense clear guidance for your situation, ask God to confirm His will to you in His Word. He never will go against Scripture. His will for your life always lines up perfectly with what is written in the Bible.

- Be willing to experience conflict. Israel entered the Promised Land, but it had to face enemy opposition. God rarely empties our lives of trouble and conflict. If He did, our dependence on Him would fade. He allows enough difficulty to keep us turned toward Him.
- Leave the consequences to God. Obedience may not be viewed as being popular. But it will put you in a favorable position before God, and just as He promised to bless the nation of Israel, He will do the same for you. Therefore, be obedient and leave the rest to Him.
- Accept God's discipline with thanksgiving. The story told by Jesus of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) is especially significant. In it we read of God's unconditional love and forgiveness.

Perhaps you have made a wrong decision. You wonder what the outcome will be. Apart from God, the outcome always is one of sorrow and grief.

However, God does not want this for your life. He may not remove all the heartache and pain your decision has caused, but He can and will forgive you.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that when we turn to Him in repentance, He washes sin's dark stain from our lives so that we become white and pure as snow.

If this is your desire, perhaps the following prayer is one that will bring rest to your troubled heart.

Father, thank You for Your grace, love, mercy, kindness, patience, and goodness. I have faltered many times and fallen deep into sin. However, You always have picked me up and placed me back on the right path heading in the right direction. I pray that Your Spirit of obedience will find a home in my life. I choose to walk obediently before You knowing that when I do, I will receive **joy** which is a greater blessing than anything this world has to offer. Give me Your discernment to know right from wrong in every situation I face. Amen.

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