

HOW TO BE JOYFUL IN DIFFICULT TIMES



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Author of *The Power to Rejoice: 21 Days to Victory Over Your Problems*

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1.

DISTINGUISH BETWEEN HAPPINESS AND JOY

The terms “joy” and “happiness” are often used interchangeably. Many believe they are the same. However, there is a difference in the Bible between happiness and joy.

Happiness depends on your outward circumstances; if everything is going well, then you are probably happy. However, if things are not going well, then you are probably unhappy. But even when things are not going well, you can still be joyful.

Always be joyful. (1 Thessalonians 5:16) Notice that Paul did not say “Always be happy”.

Here are nine ways to distinguish between happiness and joy:

Happiness	Joy
Is “because” of life’s circumstances (My team won, my political candidate won, I got a promotion at work, I got a clean bill of health).	Is “despite” life’s circumstances (My team lost, my political candidate lost, I lost my job, I have been diagnosed with a serious health issue).
Comes from worldly sources (achieving a goal, receiving praise, enjoying pleasurable experiences).	Comes from God (exists despite failing to achieve a goal, there is no praise or pleasurable experiences).
Is a reaction to life.	Is an approach to life.
The world can rob you of happiness.	The world cannot rob you of joy. (No one can rob you of joy. (John 16:22)
Is a state of mind.	Is a state of the soul.
Cannot exist with sorrow.	Can exist with sorrow. Paul says he is sorrowful, but always rejoicing. (2 Corinthians 6:10)
Is based on my ability to control the details of my life.	Is based on God’s assurance that he is in control of all the details of my life and that He is working every detail for my good.
Is temporary, fleeting.	Everlasting, permanent.
Comes and goes with the ebb and flow of life’s circumstances.	Remains the same because it flows from my unshake connection with God.

2.

DECIDE TO REJOICE

I wish I could be joyful, but....

- » I have too heavy a workload.
- » I can't get promoted.
- » I have money problems.
- » I have an interpersonal conflict with my spouse/friends/kids/co-workers.
- » We want to have children but have been unable to do so.

These or similar statements can steal your joy.

1. THE SOLUTION IS TO DECIDE TO REJOICE.

The word “Decide” comes from the Latin word *decidere*, which means “Cut Off”. So, when you decide to rejoice, you are cut from not rejoicing.

We see this decision to rejoice illustrated in the book of Philippians.

At the time he wrote the book, Paul had been incarcerated for well over two years and was facing possible execution. He had good reason to be angry and depressed at the treatment he was receiving. But instead, he said:

But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.
(Philippians 1:18)

You must decide to rejoice every moment, despite your circumstances.

I read a story about Christians being like “cheerios in milk” – utterly unsinkable.

Have you ever tried to sink a cheerio in milk? Every time you push it down, it pops back up to the top.

Or imagine jumping on a trampoline. The harder the bounce, the higher you soar.

When life presses you with pain, suffering, trials, hardships, or difficulty – that added pressure should only cause your joy to leap all the higher.

There is a classic illustration of the toothpaste tube. When you squeeze a tube of toothpaste, why does toothpaste come out? Answer: Because that is what is in the tube. The issue is not WHETHER you will be squeezed by problems, the real question is WHEN you are squeezed, what will come out of you?

Imagine choosing to be so joy-filled that the harder you are squeezed, the more joy comes out.

That describes the life Christians are commanded to choose to lead.

As Dr. Caroline Leaf, author of *Switch on Your Brain*, said: *The process of thinking and choosing is the most powerful thing in the universe after God.*

2. RECOGNIZE THAT JOY IS NOT OPTIONAL IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

Joy is commanded throughout the Bible. Examples from the Old Testament:

Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King! (Psalm 149:2)

Let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad. (Psalm 14:7)

Rejoice in the Lord. (Psalm 97:12)

Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!
(Psalm 32:11)

Examples from the New Testament

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. (Philippians 3:1)

Rejoice always. Again I say rejoice. (Philippians 4:4)

3. RECOGNIZE THAT REJOICING IN THE LORD ALWAYS IS NOT PRIMARILY A MATTER OF FEELING, BUT OF OBEDIENCE.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (Philippians 4:4)

This is a commandment, which is repeated for emphasis, that you must choose to obey, despite difficult circumstances. The choice to rejoice often must go deliberately **against** how you feel. When you go through trials, you are faced with a decision: Will you obey this commandment to rejoice in the Lord or will you allow yourself to be controlled by your feelings?

4. RECOGNIZE THAT REJOICING IN THE LORD ALWAYS DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU WILL NEVER FEEL SAD.

Interestingly, the shortest verse in the Greek New Testament is, “Rejoice always” (1 Thess. 5:16) The shortest verse in the English New Testament is, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35)

They are not contradictory! Our Savior could weep and yet have the fullness of joy, even as He faced the cross.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11)

5. RECOGNIZE THAT REJOICING IN THE LORD ALWAYS DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU DENY YOUR FEELINGS OR THAT YOU STOICALLY ENDURE YOUR TRIALS BY IGNORING HOW MUCH YOU HURT.

Psalms 13 is a great example of David crying out to God to acknowledge his difficulties, yet in the end, he was encouraged:

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD because he has dealt bountifully with me.

6. RECOGNIZE THAT REJOICING IN THE LORD ALWAYS IS AN ATTITUDE OF CONTENTMENT AND HOPE THAT TRANSCENDS CIRCUMSTANCES.

Though your heart may be heavy with sorrow or grief because of trials, beneath the surface is the abiding confidence that your life is in God's hands and that in all things He is working for your good.

Paul said: *I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.* (Phil. 4:11)

7. DRAW ENCOURAGEMENT FROM DAVID'S EXAMPLE OF DECIDING TO REJOICE INSTEAD OF WISHING.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)

David's use of the word "will" indicates that he has made a decision.

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