

# Moments *for* You

Volume 61, Number 3

Theme: Joy

A GOOD RECIPE FOR JOY:

TRUST JESUS

SERVE OTHERS

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

## THE GOSPEL OF JOY

*“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11).*

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of joy. Never forget that the Bible describes it as “good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people” (Luke 2:10). Have you believed the glad tidings? Are you rejoicing in eternal life?

Make no mistake: the gospel does not make people happy in their sins. It makes them happy by delivering them from their sins. There must be freedom before there can be joy.

When the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, announced His mission, He said He was come to “preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18). His salvation is a mighty deliverance. It overcomes the world, sin, and Satan, and makes believers free in the Lord. You know real joy if this deliverance is your experience!

The world tells you that if you get converted to God you will cease to enjoy life. But the truth of the matter is that you can only begin to truly enjoy life when you receive God’s salvation. The world knows nothing about true joy. If someone has not known the joy of redeeming love, how can he compare it with worldly pleasure?

Would you like to be free from sin—free from its power and punishment? There is only one way. Jesus Christ laid down His life as a sacrifice for your sin and mine. He bore the penalty our sins deserve on the cross of Calvary. Now He is risen from the dead and offers forgiveness and

eternal life to all who put their trust in Him.

Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ to wash your sins away? God commands all sinners to repent—to turn from our ways to His way. Call out to God today, admit your need of a Savior, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and experience true joy!

—Adapted from Echoes of Grace.

## THE PURSUIT OF JOY

Men have pursued joy in every avenue imaginable. Some have successfully found it while others have not. Here are a few examples to describe where joy *cannot* be found:

- **Not in Unbelief:** Voltaire was an infidel of the most pronounced type. He wrote: “I wish I had never been born.”

- **Not in Pleasure:** Lord Byron lived a life of pleasure if anyone did. He wrote: “The worm, the canker, and grief are mine alone.”

- **Not in Money:** Jay Gould, the American millionaire, had plenty of that. When dying, he said: “I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth.”

- **Not in Position and Fame:** Lord Beaconsfield enjoyed more than his share of both. He wrote: “Youth is a mistake; manhood a struggle; old age a regret.”

- **Not in Military Glory:** Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept in his tent, before he said, “There are no more worlds to conquer.”

Where then is real joy found? The answer is simple: in Christ alone.

—The Bible Friend, Turning Point, May, 1993.

## CHRISTIAN JOY

What is Christian joy? It is difficult to put emotional experiences into words. But let me try to at least point in the right direction and show how we can have more of it in our lives.

### CHRISTIAN JOY IS NOT AN ACT OF WILLPOWER

Christian joy is a spontaneous, emotional response of the heart. This is true of all joy, whether Christian or not. When Peter speaks in 1 Peter 1:8 of rejoicing with “joy unspeakable” in anticipation of our final salvation, he is not describing a decision; he is describing an explosion. You can decide to brush your teeth, but you cannot, in the same way, decide to rejoice.

You can decide to do things that may bring you joy—drive to the country, visit a friend, read a psalm—but whether joy actually happens is not in your own power. That is what I mean when I call it spontaneous. You can prepare for it—like lifting your sail on a still ocean. But you cannot make the wind blow. The Spirit blows where it wills, and Christian joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

### CHRISTIAN JOY IS NOT SUPERFICIAL AND FLIMSY

This is why people like to distinguish it from happiness and pleasure, which seem too superficial. Of course we must be very careful here. The Bible also speaks of “pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11), and it says: “happy is that people ... whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 144:15). So the words happiness and pleasure don’t have to be superficial. They can mean the very same thing joy does.

But it is true to say that Christian joy is deep and firm rather than superficial and flimsy. The reason we know this is that the Bible describes Christian joy as flourishing right

in the midst of pain and suffering. 1 Peter 1:6 says, “Ye greatly rejoice ... through manifold temptations.” 1 Thessalonians 1:6 says, “Ye ... received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.”

In 2 Corinthians 6:10 Paul describes himself as “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” Christian joy is clearly a very peculiar emotion that not only endures, but seems to even flourish in affliction.

### CHRISTIAN JOY IS NOT NATURAL

Christian joy is spiritual. This distinguishes it from all other joys. When something is called spiritual in Scripture, it means that it comes from the Holy Spirit and has the character of the Holy Spirit. Don’t ever make the mistake of thinking that something is “spiritual” simply because it has to do with the human spirit, or that something is natural simply because it has to do with the body or with material things.

Pride is natural, but resides in the spirit of man. Envy is natural, but resides in the spirit of man. So it is with jealousy and anger and strife and self-pity and resentment and bitterness and covetousness and hatred and selfishness. These all come from the inner spirit of a person, but they are called natural in the Bible, because we produce them by our own nature.

Galatians 5:22 says, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,” and so on. Romans 14:17 says that “the kingdom of God is ... righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Christian joy is not the mere product of the human spirit in response to pleasant circumstances. It is the product, or fruit, of God’s Spirit. And it is not just a human joy; it is the very joy of Christ fulfilled in us.

### A WARNING AGAINST FALSE JOY

This is important to know because there can be natural joy even in spiritual things. For example, from the parable of the four soils Jesus gave this interpretation of the seed sown on rocky ground: “he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (Matthew 13:20-21).

Here is a joy in the word of God that is not a spiritual joy or evidence that a true conversion has taken place. It is not the work of the indwelling Spirit of God. It does not have the character of Christ’s joy. False joy vanishes like the dew when the hot sun of affliction rises in the sky.

### GOD COMMANDS US TO REJOICE

Philippians 4:4 says, “*Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.*” Even though joy is not controlled by our willpower, and even though it is a fruit of God’s Spirit and beyond our natural resources, nevertheless we are commanded to have this experience! How do we obey God’s command to rejoice? How do we fight for joy in the ups and downs of everyday life?

First, let us acknowledge that by nature we are sinners and helpless to become the kind of people who rejoice in the glory of God rather than our own glory. Second, let us cry out to God that He would send His Holy Spirit and pour the love of God into our hearts. Third, let us set our minds on the biblical expressions and evidences of God’s love for us.

Now we can put the pieces together: the love of God chooses us and calls us and justifies us and guarantees for us a share in the glory of

God. Then, the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts so that we recognize it and cherish it. Then, out of this deep experience of the love of God grows an unshakable hope even in the midst of suffering. And finally, in this hope we rejoice.

—Condensed from “The Fruit of Hope: Joy” by John Piper.

An old man was asked what had most robbed him of joy in his lifetime. He replied, “Things that never happened!”

## A JOYFUL HEART

I once went to my father and said, “I’m not happy, Dad.” He patiently sat and listened to my woes. After a nice chat, he sent me on my way, feeling much better than when we started. The next day, I was back: “Dad, it didn’t work, I’m still not happy.” He listened again and, once more, I left feeling better. We continued this process for several days, and then he wisely looked at me and said, “Scott, the happiest people in the world never think about whether or not they are happy.”

My father helped me to see that the core of my struggle was my focus. My selfishness was spoiling my joy. I have found this to be true many times in my life. A godly woman once sent me a quotation: “*Occupation with self brings distress; occupation with others brings discouragement; occupation with Christ brings delight!*” It was a loving and helpful rebuke.

I wonder if perhaps you have been robbed of joy by a focus that falls short of setting your sights on things above (Colossians 3:2). If so, confess it and be restored to the joy of focusing on Him! The Lord wants gladness for His people. Psalm 4:7 says, “Thou hast put gladness in my heart.” What has

the Lord given us that our joy may be full?

### HIS PRESENCE

*“In Thy presence is fulness of joy” (Psalms 16:11).*

I recently read a statistic that was a bit shocking. A survey of evangelical Christians showed that less than 25% of them reported to read the Word daily. No wonder we lack the joy of an overflowing heart—we are not spending time in His presence!

I have a friend whose mother spends an hour a day alone with the Lord. This has been her habit for many years. Some time ago, she let the busyness of life crowd this away and the dryness she noticed in herself quickly convinced her that she had chosen poorly. She went back to her time with the Lord and to a heart that was filled with Him! Are you spending time with Him or are you missing out on the day-to-day enjoyment of the best that life has to offer?

### ABIDING IN CHRIST

*“Your joy might be full” (John 15:11).*

After teaching His disciples that they should abide in His love, the Lord Jesus states that the result will be full joy! The emphasis in John 15 is abiding through obedience. The Lord Jesus is teaching that a lifestyle of communion with Him will result in a heart that is overflowing with joy!

The most joyful people I know are the ones who consistently commune with their Savior. Does your experience show this to be the case? Are you obeying His commands? Are you fellowshiping with and serving Him? How is your joy? If there is a lack, perhaps abiding is the answer!

### ANSWERED PRAYER

*“Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).*

Prayer is one of the greatest privileges of the Christian life. To ask of

God and see His hand at work in our lives is one of the greatest joys I know! The Lord has given us free and constant access to His presence. Do you need more grace? Go and get it!

Do you see the hand of God moving in your life as a result of prayer? Many Christians do not. If a husband does not treat his wife correctly, if we seek to consume God’s blessings on our own lusts, or if we are walking distantly from the Lord, we should not expect answered prayers (1 Peter 3:7; James 4:3; Psalm 66:18).

We were recently on a college campus to share the good news with students. It was supposed to rain all day, so we prayed, asking the Lord to make it possible for us to share His truth. We were out there all day and never got wet. I wish you could have seen the joy on our faces when we learned that it had poured around the campus all day, but the Lord held off the rain for us!

### FELLOWSHIP OF SAINTS

*“Greatly desiring to see thee ... that I may be filled with joy” (2 Timothy 1:4).*

The Lord has given us a wonderful blessing in the family of God. Getting together with believers is to be a time that fills our hearts with joy. Do you look forward to getting together with the saints, or is it a chore for you? According to 1 John, this is a good test of how we are doing spiritually. Are you loving the saints, investing in the saints, seeing the Lord work in the saints, and, as a result, having a full heart of joy when you see and speak with them?

Dear reader, is your heart filled with joy? Let us press into His presence, abiding in Him, praying earnestly, and fellowshiping with His people that we may honor Him with a heart full of joy!

—Scott DeGross, ULOOK magazine.

## THE JOYS OF JESUS

Jesus has been called the Man of Sorrows—in the Old Testament (Isaiah 53:3). Does a careful reading of the New Testament reveal anything about His joys? Let us study His Person, His words, and His ways.

### THE JOY OF SINLESSNESS

Of this joy you and I know nothing. The one fact, common to us all, is that we have sinned. We have all come to the hour of rest with the burden and shame of sin weighing down our hearts. We have all awakened in the morning with the gnawing of remorse. We have all felt a hot blush at the recollection of iniquities. We all still know how, at times, impulses of rebellion rise within us. And at all these times our joy is quenched.

But when we have known ourselves purged from our iniquities, when we have cast out some lurking sin, when we have overcome and have put some temptation under our feet, then we have known the ministry of angels, and we have stood at the edge of Christ's joy.

But how poorly do these experiences compare with Christ's joy in His unspotted righteousness! Think of a conscience which had no accusing voice; of a spirit which had no burden of personal guilt; of a heart that never hungered after shameful wrong. Think of a soul that lived in the unclouded sunshine of the presence of God—so that no tears of shame for sin ever stained His cheek, and no broken, penitent prayer was ever on His lips. Now try to conceive the deep joy of a sinlessness like that. The happy, laughing innocence of a child, compared to it, is but a world of shadows broken by light. He could say, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29).

### THE JOY OF SERVICE AND SACRIFICE

It is in the hour of consecration to holy service, in the days of heroic self-denial, in the doing of the deed in which life itself is laid down that we experience true joy. When Jesus tells His disciples how their service and sacrifice, wrought out in sorrow, will yield them joy, He has no higher image than a mother's joy in her sacrifice for her child. "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (John 16:21).

Has not your own experience brought this home to you? When you have accepted the burdens of your home; when you have gone to the help of the needy, the sick, the poor, and the dying; when you made that sacrifice that left its mark on your life, you found a wellspring of joy which has been a solace for almost every sorrow. Think, then, what must have been Christ's joy in His holy service, in His great sacrifice. In every deed by which He made the children glad, or wiped away the tears of those who mourned, or healed the sick who were brought to Him; in every step forward towards His goal, He entered into His deep delight in spiritual things.

In one way, the day of the cross is the darkest, saddest, most tragic in the world's history. Yet it was the day of Christ's highest joy. As He went up the way of weeping—spent, forsaken, marked for death—women of Jerusalem lamented Him. He turned and looked upon them, and the triumph-song broke from His lips, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me" (Luke 23:28). He was going to the deed which crowned His life; He was accomplishing the purpose of

His heart; He was on the threshold of His highest service and sacrifice, and His joy was almost full.

If you have ever felt the deep joy of making some poor heart glad; if you have known the leaping of the spirit when some abandoned life has been saved from shame; if you have known the thrill when you have led some child to Christ, you can begin to realize what must have been the spiritual delight of the Son of God in that day when He died to set His people free.

The source of Christ's joy, I suggest, was His deep delight in the spiritual attainments of others. It is renewed today when He sees our faces turned toward Him; when He sees us laying aside all malice, and all guile, and all hypocrisies, and envies and evil speaking; when He sees us overcoming by faith. This is "the joy that was set before Him" (Hebrews 12:2) for which He endured the cross and despised the shame.

### MAKING HIS JOYS OURS

God "giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17), and ennobles all the pure joys of earth. But He continually tells us that these are not the highest joys possible to the spirit of a man. The highest joy—the joy He would have remain in you—is a deep delight in spiritual things.

As guilty, sin-stained people, we cannot have the joy of sinlessness. But we can possess the joy which corresponds to it—the joy of pardon, of peace with God. We can have the joy of service and sacrifice, of complete surrender to His will. The world around us is stretching out its withered hands to be healed, its empty hearts to be filled. We can have that purest, holiest joy, into which no subtle selfishness enters, by ministering to the spiritual well-being of others.

As we enter into this joy of Jesus we shall find it quenching all desire for worldly and degrading pleasures, preparing us for solemn hours of trial, satisfying our spirits in the years when all other delights may fade, and fitting us for that hour of awakening in His presence. It is a blessing which makes rich and adds no sorrow, a foretaste of the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore.

—W. M. Clow, adapted.

## OUR JOYS

The greatest anomaly in the world is an unhappy Christian! Expressions of joy are the language of the renewed soul. Here are some examples:

### THE JOY OF SALVATION

*"When they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39).*

This was one of the earliest missionary triumphs of the Christian church. A high-ranking official from Ethiopia had been to a feast in Jerusalem. He was returning to his home in North Africa when a stranger, Philip, approached his chariot. Philip had been preaching in Samaria, but the Holy Spirit commanded him to leave the evangelistic meetings to share the word of God with this one man.

To most observers, it was a mistake to leave the overwhelming opportunities among the Samaritan people. But while Philip had reached a city in Samaria, through the convert in the desert he influenced a continent. Religion brought the eunuch to Jerusalem, but Christ returned with him to Ethiopia.

It is significant that North Africa became one of the strongholds of the Christian faith during the second century. The eunuch, who only met

the preacher once, “went on his way rejoicing,” and returned to his home to evangelize his people.

### THE JOY OF SECURITY

*“Rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).*

The disciples were ecstatic! They had just completed their first evangelistic tour, and the results exceeded their expectations. Until now, they followed behind their Master, but this tour was different—they were on their own! Whatever fears filled their souls were dispelled by the success of their mission. Even the evil spirits had been forced to obey their commands.

It is thought-provoking that these ordinary, uneducated fisherman possessed treasure of incalculable worth. The combined wisdom of Solomon, wealth of David, and knowledge of the prophets could not provide the happiness which the disciples possessed. The disciples of Jesus were not always sure where they would sleep at night, and there were occasions when their future appeared bleak. They had left their homes; they no longer had a regular income. Yet God knew them by name; He watched their progress, and had ordered their names to be indelibly inscribed in His book of life. Christ had promised that nothing in time or eternity would pluck them from the Father’s hand (John 10:28-29). That was a cause for continuing thanksgiving.

### THE JOY OF ADORATION

*“Jesus ... stood in the midst ... Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord” (John 20:19-20).*

Webster’s dictionary defines adoration as “the homage paid to one in high esteem, profound reverence, great love and respect; to love

greatly.” It would be very difficult to describe the emotions of the disciples when they saw the risen Lord. Their night of frustration and anguish had been long and bitter; with the death of Jesus, all for which they had hoped and worked seemed to end in failure. Then came the resurrection when the astonished disciples saw with awe and wonder the face of their Lord!

The closed door of the room in which they sat indicated terror had gripped their souls; they feared the possibility of capture and punishment. Yet, when they saw the wound-prints in the Savior’s outstretched hands, their fear vanished. Perhaps they did not yet comprehend what had happened, but the fact that He was standing before them was all they needed. They worshiped Him and joy began to change their outlook. There was no need to anticipate heaven; it had arrived! It was sufficient to see and worship Him. Jesus was the “altogether lovely” one.

When we contemplate the Savior, and our assurance of eternal salvation through Him, what joy should fill our hearts!

—Adapted from *Bible Nuggets* by Ivor Powell.

## LASTING JOY

*“The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).*

Perhaps in that word “of” lies the whole secret of lasting joy. This joy is not merely joy *about* the Lord, or even joy *in* the Lord. It is *His own* joy flowing into the soul. Jesus prayed that His followers “might have *My* joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13). Let us seek not the stream but the fountain; not primarily the joy but the real and living union with Jesus by which His joy becomes ours.

—Frances Ridley Havergal