

# JOY TO THE WORLD

A 7- DAY BIBLE STUDY ON GOD'S GIFT OF JOY

## *Day 1: The Fruit of Joy*

**"THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS AND SELF-CONTROL. GALATIANS 5:22-23" (NIV)**

Often when we think of joy, we think of an emotion. We have been conditioned to think that joy is a response to something good that has happened, or the result of a favorable set of circumstances. Because we believe that joy is an emotion, we make the mistake of thinking it cannot be controlled. We assume that when things go right in our lives- when God has answered all our prayers, and we are celebrating our victories, joy will come automatically. We tend to believe the opposite is true as well- that if we are in the midst of pain or hardship, or if we are waiting for God to meet a need, that it is impossible to be joyful during that season.



The enemy has convinced us that joy is completely out of our control, and dependent on our circumstances. He has managed for us to regard joy as something out of our reach unless everything in our lives falls into place. And he has deceived us into thinking that unless or until we get what we want we are resigned to a season of sadness, incompleteness, or frustration. Yet, through the verse above, we learn that God's interpretation of joy is very different. His word doesn't describe joy as an emotion \_ something fleeting, temporary, or fickle.

# *Day 1:*

## *The Fruit of Joy*

It is something good for us. And, most importantly, it is something that can be produced in us. Just as you can produce fruit when there is none, and that fruit can nourish your physical body, the Holy Spirit can produce joy in your heart that can nourish your soul \_ even in the darkest of circumstances.

The word of God reveals a simple truth that the enemy would never want us to know. And that truth is that God, the creator of joy, did not place joy out of our reach or make its presence in our lives dependent on our circumstances. Instead, He benevolently created the nature of joy (as well as love, patience, goodness, and all the other fruits of the spirit) to be a product of our relationship with Him. That is why you can see people living the most amazing seasons of their lives and still lack joy, while others experience the driest, most painful seasons and somehow remain joyful. The latter have learned how to grow the fruit of joy in their lives through the help of the Holy Spirit. They don't wait for their circumstances to change, telling themselves they will be happier when they get what they are waiting for, or that joy is unobtainable. They have learned to cultivate joy, and therefore enjoy its sweetness during every season of their lives. Joy, like any other fruit requires intentionality. There has never been a farmer who accidentally reaped a harvest. Any farmer, gardener, or cultivator can tell you that every fruit requires thoughtful planting, and must be intentionally produced. In the same way, we can not expect to accidentally stumble upon joy, or for it to blow in with the wind of the events in our lives. In order to reap it we have to make a conscious decision to do so. Just as a farmer works all year long to ensure the health of his land, and then carefully, diligently sows his seed, we too must ensure that we have healthy hearts that will allow God to make something grow in them. The fruit of joy will never grow in a heart full of bitterness or malice. Neither can it thrive where there is lack of forgiveness or unwillingness to let the past go.

In order for joy to grow, we must be willing to bury our past, our disillusion, and our toxic emotions. In Psalm 126:5 the same word that teaches us that joy is a fruit, calls our pain the seed:

# *Day 1:*

## *The Fruit of Joy*

Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy carrying sheaves with them.”Psalm 126:5-6 (NIV) One of the greatest lessons I have learned in my life is that pain, in God’s eyes, is not the final product. Pain is meant to be the seed that we sow, that with His help blossoms into joy in the right time. As we let go of our past, and our despair, we make room for a harvest of joy. Often the reason why we see no growth of joy in our hearts is because we are unwilling to let go of our seed. We harbor our pain and sadness and cling to our depression or anxiety. The first step in a journey towards joy is giving those things to the Lord and allowing them to die in order to bring new life. Look at how it is described in the book of John: “Truly, truly, I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a seed; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”John 12:24 (Berean Study Bible) As you read these words, think about what you are doing to work towards producing joy in your life. Have you been waiting for circumstances to bring you joy? Have you come to regard joy as something distant and out of your reach? Have you been holding on to things that steal your peace? Consider what the word says of the virtuous woman: “She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks.”(Proverbs 31:15-17 NLT) Although this scripture isn’t referring specifically to joy, it teaches us that a wise woman leaves nothing to chance. She is fierce and strong, and rises early to make sure her needs are met. In the same way, we are each responsible for vigorously working towards planting a vineyard of joy in our own hearts. We cannot expect this task to fall to anyone else, and we cannot expect it to happen by simply wishing for it.

Many of us have allowed ourselves to become victims of the circumstances in our lives. We have believed the enemy’s lie that joy is for some but not for others. But, if this were true, God would be an unfair God. So, of course, that is not the truth. The truth is that we all have the choice to allow the Holy Spirit to cultivate joy in us. The spirit is the water that brings the growth to our joy and makes it possible. This takes time and effort, and it requires us to be active rather than passive. In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote, “I plant the seed, another watered it, but God has made it grow.” In the same way, there will be many times in our lives when we will need to begin the process, and plant the seed, so that God can grow the fruit of joy in us.

# *Day 1:*

## *The Fruit of Joy*

Today I ask you: are you willing to rise early, and work passionately to provide for your spiritual need of joy? Many of us have been hungry for joy. So much so that we feel we cannot go on, or won't make it another day, but still haven't done our part to ensure that fruit is produced in us. The wise woman, however, plants an entire vineyard of what she needs, so that she will never hunger again. Have you ever considered planting a vineyard of joy for yourself? Not waiting for it to fall into your lap, but actually taking steps to develop a relationship with God that will give fruit?

### **Thoughts for Meditation:**

**Have I considered joy to be out of my reach?**

**Do I believe joy is available for me if I want it?**

**What does this tell me about my view of God and His character?**

**Have I been waiting for joy to come to me without doing my part to cultivate it? What can I do to cultivate joy in my life?**

**What seeds can I plant? What weeds need to be pulled out so that my heart can become fertile soil?**

**Are there roots of bitterness, jealousy, or anger keeping me from obtaining joy?**

### **Prayer:**

**Holy Spirit, I believe that you are the producer of joy, and I long for you to make my heart fruitful ground, so that I may have joy to nourish my soul, as well as bring joy to others. Make me able to plant a vineyard of joy in my heart. Teach me to do my part, and to plant seeds of joy, and bring growth as you water them with your Spirit. Uproot anything that hinders the growth of my harvest. For joy is your promise to me, and from this day on, I receive it.**

## *Day 2:* *Where Joy is Made*

**"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."Psalm 16:11(NIV)**

I grew up in church. Some would even say I was born with a bible in my hand. My parents were pastors, and taught my siblings and I about God from the very beginning of our lives. So I grew up with knowledge of certain truths. The verse above, for example, I knew by heart. Whether it was because of the songs we sung in church, or memorizing it in Sunday-school, I knew that there was supposed to be joy in the presence of God. I knew these things as sweet and pleasant words, but not much more. It's easy to read a verse or sing a worship song and forget that the words in them are meant to be more than decoration in our cluttered lives: they are truth. And the word says that truth has the power to set us free. Many of us however, remain in bondage, because we don't live by the truth. And spending time in the presence of God is one of those principles: one that people seem to believe but never practice, and therefore are often unable to be free from their sadness, anxiety, or fear.

Like I said, I knew that joy was supposed to come from God. I was supposed to be living life in abundance\_ hadn't that been what I was taught my whole life? Yet, I suffered with depression and anxiety for years. I remember being in the sixth grade, and calling my mom to come pick me up because I couldn't stop crying in the bathroom, not knowing then that I was experiencing a panic attack. I remember going through my teens struggling with loneliness and depression even though I knew of God, believed in Him and loved Him. The problem was, the presence of God wasn't a place I went very often. Although I believed in God, I didn't spend any time with Him. I had a religion, and a title, but not a relationship with God. I lived shackled in a loop of depression and anxiety because I didn't ever go to the place where joy is made; the place where there was power to set me free. It wasn't until I began to seek the presence of God that things began to change in my life. I finally realized that the title of "Christian" is not enough to heal your heart or get you through difficult circumstances. In fact, the title does nothing at all.

## *Day 2:* *Where Joy is Made*

"If you want to see changes in your life: if you want to be healed, be free, and have joy, you'll need to actually spend time in the presence of God. Religion doesn't bring joy to your life. In fact, from the beginning of the word of God, He's been telling His people that what is in our hearts has always been infinitely more important than following the rules. To be clear, I'm not saying that the rules don't matter, or that we shouldn't obey the teachings of our faith. Only that if we do those things and our hearts remain far from God, they are of little value. Look at what the Lord says to his people in Hosea 6:6: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

Steadfast love. That's what matters to God. That's what makes the difference in our lives. The word steadfast means unchanging and consistent. When we learn the importance of honest, consistent, unchanging love for God, we begin to experience more than just religion, but relationship. In Hosea 6:6 it also says He desires for us to have "knowledge of God" – He wants us to know Him. He wants us to learn about Him as we would a friend or a loved one with whom we've spent time. How do we get to that place? When we talk to Him, and spend time around Him. It's in our private devotional time. Look what happens during this time according to the psalm we are focusing on today: "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy" Relationship with God brings knowledge of the path of life. The more time we spend with Him the less confused and worried we will be. The more confident we will be in our decisions. The more insight we will have on the situations occurring around us. Because He knows what's next, and He knows what's best for us. And He shares these things with us when we go to Him and spend time in prayer and meditation on His word.

Equally important, relationship with God brings joy. So many of us pray for joy but refuse to go to the source: the presence of God. Many of us spend years seeing small flashes of joy in church services, but find that it disappears when we go home. This is because it is made in His presence. In our last chapter we learned that joy is a fruit: it is the product of the Holy Spirit. We also learned that fruit is always produced on purpose. In the same way, if we don't intentionally spend time in his presence, we will never experience fullness of joy. In this passage, the word "fullness" means complete, whole, and lacking nothing.

## *Day 2:* *Where Joy is Made*

It means that when we learn to seek the kind of joy that is found in nearness to God, we begin to experience full joy, not just fleeting happiness. There are so many people, even Christians who do not know this kind of joy even though it's available to them. That was my case for many years. Laziness, busyness, and distraction kept me from finding fullness of joy until I decided to intentionally spend time with God on a daily basis. Not because of rules, religion, or being afraid to go to hell. Because I discovered that it gave me the happiness I desired but had been missing for so long. I heard this saying once: "joy is not the absence of trouble, but the presence of God." We often think that conditions need to be perfect in order for us to feel joy. In reality, it's not our condition that needs to change, but our position. When we are far from God, we will experience lives that lack all the things God brings (as we read in the last chapter: love, joy, peace, etc.) But as we draw near to God, we reap the rewards of being in His presence. The word of God says:

"...whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who [diligently] seek him." Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

Those who draw near to God must be more than just "card-carrying" Christians. It takes more than a church membership. We are rewarded when we diligently seek Him (New King James Version). Here we see another reference to being steadfast, consistent and unchanging. I want to challenge you to spend time in God's presence as you read this book. My prayer is that you would go beyond the title of Christian, and become one who diligently seeks God and reaps the benefits of His presence. Reading books and watching sermons are great. But if in the end you don't learn to diligently seek God on your own, you will never learn how to live joyfully. As you go through this devotional, take time to pray, journal, and meditate in the presence of God. Find a quiet place to talk with God and pour out your heart to Him. It is in these moments where joy is made, and your heart will be renewed day by day.

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## *Day 2:* *Where Joy is Made*

### **Thoughts for Meditation:**

**How often do I seek joy in other places, but fail to go to the presence of God?  
Have I been steadfast and diligent in my devotion to the Lord?  
how can I ensure that I make time to find joy in His presence?**

### **Prayer:**

**Lord, teach me how to find fullness of joy in your presence. I'm sorry if I've offered you religion, but have never offered steadfast love and devotion, and have never gotten to know you. I realize now that I am in need of a relationship with you. Teach me how to seek you in a way that is consistent and diligent so that I can reap the rewards of knowing you. Make known to me the paths of life, and show me who you are, so that I will never depart from you.**

## *Day 3:* *Joy Conquers Anxiety*

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Philippians 4:6**

One of the reasons joy is so difficult to obtain is because we live in a stress-saturated world. Our culture demands that we be efficient, proficient, and fast paced. Our own expectations drive us to be perfectionists and control-oriented. Even our family and friends demand that we be the perfect balance of loyal yet un-clingy. We strive to reach perfection. We want to be everything for everyone, all the time. And, you know what? That's okay. It's okay to want to be great, successful, and well-liked. What isn't okay is thinking we can do so all on our own. God never meant for you to reach success using only your own ability. He knew you wouldn't have time for it all and that you would slip up and need help along the way. In fact, when we really think about it, our lack of joy often comes from the anxiety of having to face life's difficult situations using only our own strength. I think we all subconsciously know that we don't have enough strength to handle painful and challenging circumstances on our own. So, our brains go into overdrive producing alerts, trying to warn us that the situation we are facing is too heavy for us to carry. That is where stress comes from, and it's one of joy's strongest and most successful rivals.

In a single swoop it can cause health issues, unhappiness, and fear, that in turn only cause more and more stress. It's a virus that picks at our joy, making it impossible to cultivate. But I love Philippians 4:6 because, to me it simplifies stress. It reassures what our hearts already know deep down: we need God's help. We need His protection and guidance in order to conquer the pain that life brings. And the great news is that if we are in a season where we are anxious, or unsure, we can take it to Him and let Him sort it out. I consider this a win-win. After all, I can't handle the unknown and I really don't know what's best for my life anyway. Why not, then, just hand it over to the one person who does: God? This verse tells us we don't need to make sense out of the mess we may find ourselves in, we don't have to be perfect, or find a way to make sure everything turns out ok—that's God's job. All we have to do is let Him know what we're going through and be grateful in advance that He'll hear us and supply our need. The way I see it, this verse is saying: change your point of view.

## *Day 3: Joy Conquers Anxiety*

Stop seeing things that happen in your life as obstacles that produce fear and anxiety, and start seeing them as requests that you can present to God as you ask him to be a part of your life. And because everything the Bible says about God points to the fact that he wants to be a part of your life, you can trust Him to come through with His side of the bargain.

You have the choice whether or not you are going to be anxious. If you didn't, the word of God wouldn't command it so simply: "do not be anxious about anything." Honestly, I am just as guilty as anyone else of thinking, "what do you mean? I can't help it if I worry." But that kind of thinking will never allow you to be truly joyful. Stress is more than a physical condition or a response mechanism. Stress is the result of dozens of anxious thoughts about things you can't control but are unwilling to lay at God's feet. It's the opposite of faith when we subconsciously assume God is going to fail or not show up. When I first began to study this verse, I memorized it. Anytime I received bad news, or experienced a setback I would repeat to myself, "DO NOT BE ANXIOUS!" In those moments, I instantly said a silent prayer about whatever was bothering me. "In every situation, by prayer and petition, present your requests to God..." This became a habit that I still continue today. I used to tense up, and remain so tense throughout the day that I'd get a headache and at one very stressful point in my life, chest pains. But a change in point of view taught me to pray instead of worry. This doesn't mean I never feel worried or afraid about anything in my life. That would make me superhuman. It simply means I make the choice not to allow it to grow into panic or anxiety. It's a decision. I decided that there is nothing in the world that I should give enough power over me to make me anxious. There is no point; if I've already presented my request to God, He will be the one to work it out. If anything bad is going to happen I trust that in the end, it'll work together for my good (see Romans 8:28). Because I have that confidence, I can present my requests to God with a thankful heart. There is so much joy in knowing that I don't have to be sure that everything is going to go according to plan. I just have to do the best I can on my end and trust that things always go according to God's plan. If you struggle with stress or anxiety, I encourage you to memorize this verse the way I did. I wrote it out on a post-it and carried it everywhere I went. I made it a habit to pray instead of worry. In a very short time I began to feel more joy in my everyday life. If only our culture knew that there is a God who loves us, who doesn't want us to be destroyed and tortured by stress. He is willing to help us in our every need!

# *Day 3:* *Joy Conquers Anxiety*

## **Thoughts for Meditation:**

**What's going on in your life right now that you can't control?**

**What are the thoughts that come up that trigger anxiety in your day to day?**

**List some things that you often try to do in your own strength, and forget to take to God and ask for help:**

**How could you present those things as petitions to God? What could you take off your worry-list, and trust Him to sort out?**

**Take some time to give thanks in advance for what you believe God could do in your life. Make a praise list for things he has already done!**

## **Prayer:**

**Lord, I make the decision today to stop being anxious. Instead, in everything, I will bring you my requests. I will trust that you know what is best for me, and that you will never let me down. Give me the strength to resist the temptation to stress when I don't know how things are going to work out.**

**Holy Spirit, when things get rough, remind me to pray, so that difficult situations bring me closer to you, instead of further away.**

## *Day 4:* *He Will Not Abandon Me*

**“Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.”Acts 2:26-28 (NIV)**

When I look back at the most difficult moments in my life, I only vaguely remember the details of those times. It’s hard to remember everywhere I went or everything I did. I can’t recall how my hair was styled, or what I ate for dinner. At the darkest of times, it seemed as though I were going through life in a blur. All I can really recall from those times is the extreme exhaustion. It felt as though I was wasting away in an endless sea of sleepless nights and days with no appetite. As the stress increased, my concern for myself and my health diminished, and my body weakened. Even when I closed my eyes to rest, there was no rest to be found.

Only replays of my fears on the big screen of my mind. It was during these times where I began to understand what it is like to feel as though you are living in the realm of the dead; as though you are trapped in a land where nothing can live or grow, and there is only loss. Maybe, dear friend, this is where you find yourself now. Maybe you are in a darkness so thick you can’t see through the haze. Maybe you are stuck in what can only be described as a living hell. I’ve been there and I know the pain, the fear, and the disappointment. However, I also know that God never abandons us there.

We can rest confidently in hope, because our God doesn’t forget about us in the land of the dead. “my body also will rest in hope, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead” If you look for the passage above in the bible, you will find it in two different places. The psalmist wrote them originally, but the words were prophetic and described how Jesus felt when he was crucified. King David spoke of the land of the dead as he described overcoming deep emotional despair. Jesus had to actually descend to the land of the dead (into hell) after he was crucified in order to conquer death for us. The situations were similar: both had to brave what looked like ultimate defeat, yet neither was abandoned by their Heavenly Father. Ultimately, they both conquered the place that threatened to defeat them, and were filled with the joy of the presence of God. Our takeaway is this: the realm of the dead is not our final destination. It is a passageway through to His presence, where there is fullness of joy.

## *Day 4:* *He Will Not Abandon Me*

“He will not leave you in your pain forever. His intention is to restore you and uplift you. “you will not let your holy one see decay” Whatsmore, He will not allow you to decay in the process. Have you ever questioned whether you will be left in one piece after a storm in your life? Sometimes it can seem as though the battle has deteriorated us, and worn us down. The word decay means to decline in excellence, health or prosperity. Decay occurs when we gradually become less of who God made us to be, and more of what the realm of the dead has gotten us used to. Little by little, many who have experienced heartache find that they don’t smile like they used to, or can’t trust anymore. Their bodies are exhausted, and their spirit has been crushed. They experience a sad truth that is described in Proverbs: A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones (Proverbs 17:22).

“You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.” God reassures us that he makes known to us the paths of life when we have lost our way. As we draw near to his presence, His kindness and mercy restore us, so that we are no longer decayed and deteriorated. Only His presence can restore what was once lost and make us whole again. And it is in this nearness to God, this return to his presence that he fills us with joy. A few years ago I was at a youth retreat with the young people of our church. During one of the breaks, a young girl of about 17 years of age approached me with a downcast face. We had been ministering that day about letting go, forgiving, and allowing God to heal our wounds.

She said to me, “Vanessa, I just don’t know if I can let go.” I asked her why she felt this way and she replied, “I feel as though if I let go of my pain, I will be empty. So much of me is tied into what happened to me as a child, without it, I don’t know who I am.” Just then, I felt the Holy Spirit nudge me to reassure her. We were sitting beneath the shade of a huge, healthy tree that spread out in all directions.

I said to her, “Do you see this tree? If it were to be uprooted, there would be a huge gaping hole, right?” “Right,” she replied.

## *Day 4:* *He Will Not Abandon Me*

So I continued: "But if the owners of this land love what belongs to them, they would never leave a big gaping hole in the center of it. Rather, if this tree were to ever be uprooted, I'm sure they would plant another, just as big and beautiful in its place. In the same way, when God uproots the hurt in our lives, He doesn't leave us empty, He fills us with His presence." That young girl was so afraid that she would deteriorate. She was worried that her decay had done so much damage, that letting go of her past would leave a hole in her heart. But fortunately for her, and for us, Jesus fills that hole with joy. In many cases, He restores us to such an extent that we have double what we had before: Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore, in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy. Isaiah 61:7

If today you find yourself feeling lost in a season of death and sorrow, know that God does not intend to leave you there. As I said in the first chapter of this book, your pain is not your final destination, but a bridge to a double portion of joy.

### **Thoughts for Meditation:**

**Where do I find myself at this moment in my life?**

**Do I feel as though I am in the realm of the dead? Do my soul and spirit need to rest in hope? Am I tired of the battle I have been fighting? What kind of decay have I seen in my heart?**

**How can I ask God to restore to me the joy of His presence?**

### **Prayer:**

**Dear Lord, I thank you because I know you will never abandon me to the realm of the dead. Instead, you protect me from decay and total deterioration. Restore me, Lord. Bring me life, again. Fill me with the joy of your presence. Make known to me the paths of life.**

## *Day 5:* *I Will Not Be Shaken*

**Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved. Psalm 55:22**

Who can be joyful if they are worried that they are going to lose it all? Sometimes, the hardest part of going through trials isn't even the trial we are going through. It's the fear that the situation you are facing is going to rob you of the good in your life. We think of everything we've earned and hold dear, and cringe as the enemy threatens to set us back to ground zero. We dread having to start over, having to recover what we haven't even lost yet. Sometimes, we believe the lie to such an extent, that we sabotage ourselves by giving up or not doing our best because we are so afraid to fail. But God's word, through Psalm 55:22 gives us two promises. If we can learn to believe and live by these promises, we will be much more likely to maintain an attitude of joy when things don't go our way. The first promise is that He will sustain us. The word "sustain" according to Webster's has two definitions: the first, is "to provide what is needed for someone to continue."

When the word of God tells us that He will sustain us, it means that he is going to take on the responsibility of making sure we have everything we need to go the distance. It means that when the road gets tough and it feels like we can't go on, He is going to provide whatever it is that we lack to make sure we don't give up. The second definition of the word 'sustain' is "to hold up the weight of something." If you notice, the verse we are studying starts out with a reference to something heavy: our burdens (all of our worries, fears, and inadequacies) and it tells us to cast them on the Lord because he will "sustain" (hold up the weight). The promise is this: we don't have to be nervous about failing, because if anything is ever too heavy, He will hold up the weight for us. If we stop to reflect on the significance of this, and let it sink into our hearts, there's truly nothing that should ever scare us or make us feel like we will not succeed. Neither stress nor fear are necessary because our burdens don't have to be sustained by our own strength but simply given over to God, who is more than able to sustain them.

The next promise in this verse is that the Lord will "never permit the righteous to be moved." That fear that we all have of being displaced isn't as realistic as the enemy would like us to think. God has given us His word that He will not allow anyone or anything to move us from where we are supposed to be. Through Jesus, we have been made righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21),



## *Day 5:* *I Will Not Be Shaken*

and through our relationship with God we are given confidence that this word is ours to keep and to believe. We will not be knocked around, shaken, or moved. The things that we work hard for, that God has allowed us to build, are ours to keep, if only we remember to cast our burdens on the Lord.

### **Thoughts for Meditation:**

**Are you weary or burdened?**

**Take some time to write why...**

**Reflect on how you feel after making a sincere effort to give God your burdens, what changes?**

**What are ways you can make casting your burdens on Him a more frequent habit?**

### **Prayer:**

**Lord, there are times when I feel so weary and weighed down. I need you to help me, and give me rest for my soul. I'm tired of trying to carry all of my burdens on my own. I'm willing to lay them on you and trust that you will take them from me.**

## *Day 6:* *The Worries of This Life*

**“...But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”Mark 4:19  
(NIV)**

By now, we have learned that joy is more than an emotion. It is a fruit produced from time in God's presence. And, we've begun to see a trend in verses that teach us how to seek joy in our lives: it's purposeful and intentional. Yet, here, the word points to something that can make our efforts to produce joy sterile and unfruitful: worry. To some degree, it's understandable; worry is a natural reaction to challenges. We worry when we have disagreements with the people we love or when we want to do well at something new. We worry when things don't go our way and when we are forced to grow and change. There is no way to ensure we will never encounter worrisome situations. However, the level to which we allow worry to interfere with our joy is within our control.

In Mark 4:19, the Bible describes worry as one of the things that can choke the word of God in your life\_ killing the joy, faith, and peace that it produces\_ making it unfruitful. The worries of this world cause our heart to be divided and confused. Think of the things mentioned in this verse and how they affect our hearts and minds:

For one, the deceitfulness of wealth. We lose so much joy when we worry about money and are driven by greed. The illusion is that money and material possessions will make us happy, when in reality only God can fill the void in our hearts. So often we worry about not having the things we want and how those things are going to make us look in front of the people around us. But wealth, as stated in this verse, is deceitful. The only thing we achieve by worrying about it, is to choke the word of God that actually has the power to prosper us. In this verse, Jesus also mentions desires for other things. Here, I believe He is referring to the constant desire we have for things other than the presence of God. The bible teaches us that in His presence there is fullness of joy. This means our joy is complete and lacking nothing as we draw nearer to our creator. Yet, the world tells us that we will be satisfied when we look better, have more friends, and make all of our problems go away.

## *Day 6:* *The Worries of This Life*

“So, we hope that a relationship, a career, a pill or a bottle can make us happy but do not realize these things do not produce fullness of joy. They can make us happy temporarily, but ultimately they will leave us wanting. Psalm 103:5 tells us that God “satisfies our desires with good things”, and that when he does so our youth is renewed. He has the power to satisfy us with things that are good rather than harmful. Things that we don’t have to go crazy chasing because we get them simply by coming to Him. In Him, we find freedom from the worries of this world. Our job is to learn to seek Him before we begin to worry about wealth and all the other things that rob us of our peace. When we do this, He fills us with joy and renews our “youth”\_ our strength, our vigor, and our energy.

### **Thoughts for Meditation:**

**Have you ever tried reading the word of God, but found it unfruitful?**

**Have you ever let worry keep the word from giving fruit in your life?**

**Even now, are you struggling to chase after wealth or the things of this world?**

### **Prayer:**

**Heavenly Father, help me when the worries of this world threaten to choke the joy my life. Keep my heart from being divided. Protect me from desires for things that will not satisfy me, and help me to desire you, above all things. For you alone can satisfy my soul, and give me joy.**

## *Day 7:* *Grief Turns to Joy*

**“Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”John 16:20-24 (NIV)**

It's hard to conceive what the disciples were feeling when Jesus said these words to them. Their friend, their leader, their protector was no longer going to be physically with them, but instead was going to be publicly crucified and then taken away from this earth. I can only imagine the fear they must have felt. As disciples of Jesus they would be persecuted, and would no longer have their savior physically with them for guidance or comfort. I imagine their confusion, as they questioned why, He, the bread of life would have to endure such a painful death, when all he had done was please the Father. And most vividly, I imagine their pure grief, as they prepared to mourn their friend.

I bet they asked themselves: Why is He leaving us? What are we going to do without Him? Jesus, of course, saw what his disciples were going through. Although I am sure that He himself was preoccupied with the fact that in a short time He was to be crucified, our loving, compassionate Savior made sure to comfort his friends. He essentially says to them: My friends, I know you are sad. In fact, you are now in a time of grief, BUT this grief will not last forever. Isn't it amazing that Jesus does not deny our pain? He acknowledges and understands when we grieve. He didn't turn to his disciples in anger that they were making things all about them, or lecture them about how they were questioning God. He didn't, like many religious people tend to do, chastise them for their lack of faith, as if grief were a sin, or a crime against God. He didn't diminish their pain by saying something like "You think you have it rough? Try having to die on a cross!" No. Instead, Jesus comforted them. In fact, the first message He gave to his disciples as he saw their hurt was this: It's okay to grieve. Jesus understood that they would have to go through a process of grief. They would need to process the loss of their savior.

## *Day 7: Grief Turns to Joy*

They would need to go through a time where the whole world would rejoice, while they were in sadness. How many times have we found ourselves in a painful situation and wondered if anyone cared what we were going through? How many times have we gone to friends in search of comfort only to be made feel as though our situation were insignificant? Jesus understood. He said to them, “now is your time of grief.” In other words, “I understand that this hurts.” Perhaps for someone reading this, now is a time of grief. Maybe all the people around you have failed to recognize the depth or the importance of what happened to you. Maybe they diminish it or make it seem like less. If that is the case, I hope you feel the sweet words of Jesus as He says to you that a joy is coming that no one will be able to take away. You see, Jesus’ acceptance of our grief is only the first step of how he heals and comforts us. He recognizes it, but He does not intend for us to grieve forever. The next part is even more powerful. It is when He assures us that our grieving makes way for beautiful, lasting joy.

Because what Jesus’ disciples didn’t know up until that point is that although He would have to die, and both He and they would have to endure the heartache of the cross, that heartache was precisely what would open up a door for them to be able to go directly to the Father. And even more amazing, once they had access to the father, nothing would be impossible for them! The doors would be open to anything they ask, and their joy would be complete. The more I learn about Jesus, the more I am convinced that His intention is for our joy to be complete. All He desires is for us to live a life that is abundant and whole. But that doesn’t mean that times of grief would not still be a part of life. He compares it to the process of a woman giving birth. I, personally, have not experienced this first hand yet, but I have never once heard of it being pleasant! It’s one of the most physically painful and exhausting experiences a human being can endure. Yet, every mother who I’ve ever spoken to says the same thing after it’s over: it was worth it. The pain is intense, and grueling, and in many cases even dangerous.

But after all, it is temporary, and the bundle of joy you take home afterwards is permanent, and no one can take it away from you. In the same way, we will grieve many times in our lives. We were never promised a perfect existence. However, the promise we were given is that there is always a blessing at the end of the time of grief; and that once we have received it, it is ours to keep, to love, and to enjoy.

# Day 7: Grief Turns to Joy

## Thoughts for Meditation:

Have I taken my grief to the Lord?

Have I allowed myself to be open and vulnerable with my sadness in His presence? Have I doubted that my sadness is important to Jesus?

Have I felt that I would be judged, quieted, or turned away?

Have I ever considered that my pain could be bringing forward great joy?

**Prayer:** Today, in your own words take some time to talk to Jesus about your time of grief. Lay every burden and worry at His feet, and allow Him to comfort you. Psalm 34:8 says the Lord is near to the broken hearted. As you go to Him now, ask for His presence to be near you as you receive healing for your heart.

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