

JOY to the World



[Jesus said to His disciples,] “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy

may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:9-12)

This month I am thinking about four words: **FUN**, **PLEASURE**, **HAPPINESS**, and **JOY**.

Most people like to have fun. Everyone likes what gives them pleasure. Almost everyone wants to be happy (except for a few mixed-up souls who cling to unhappiness as a way of life). I believe those three concepts are fairly well understood, but I’d hazard a guess that most people do not really understand joy—the joy that Jesus spoke about.

Let’s take these four words in order.

FUN involves doing something. You can’t have much fun just sitting in an easy chair with your feet up and your eyes closed. You have to get fun in order to have it.

Fun can be good, bad, or indifferent. Good fun was had this past week by a group of teenagers who went out with rakes and raked several lawns that needed it—so while good fun often involves play, it can also involve work. Bad fun involves doing harm—like spraying graffiti on a wall, or playing a practical joke on someone who doesn’t appreciate it.

Indifferent fun is fun that is neither helpful nor harmful. Playing with a toy is an example.

An important point about fun is that it doesn’t last. You can’t grab hold of the fun you’re having and take it with you. Sometimes it can produce lasting pleasure—like that rightly felt by the teens who raked lawns—but the fun stops when you stop doing what was fun to do.

A lot of fun involves experiencing a thrill, overcoming a challenge, or taking a risk, large or small. For example, fishing would not be fun if there was no hope of ever

catching a fish. A roller coaster would not be fun without its breathtaking speed and turns, ups and downs.

One more thing about fun—when the activity is a job or becomes too goal-oriented, it is no longer fun. For example, skating is fun, but probably not for a figure skater preparing for the Olympic Games.

There’s nothing wrong with having indifferent fun or good fun, except when it interferes with what we ought to be doing. **But Jesus did not come to earth so people could have fun.**

PLEASURE involves feeling—It is an emotional or physical reaction to something that feels good.

“If it feels good, do it” has been a popular slogan in some quarters since the 1960s. What is missing is a firm reminder that we really ought to act responsibly, rather than irresponsibly.



God has designed our bodies and our minds so that we can experience pleasure, but He intends that we understand and observe the difference between lawful (good) and unlawful (bad) pleasures. For example, the pleasure of husband and wife having sex with each other is God-blessed, lawful, and good; other sexual unions may be pleasurable but they are not, in God’s view, lawful or good.

Here’s another example. Joe finds a wallet on the street with \$200 in it. Now Joe can return the wallet and the money, and take pleasure in having done a good deed; or he can throw the wallet away and experience the pleasure of keeping the money. Which action will give him more pleasure? What does God think of the two options?

For most of us there is lasting pleasure in having done something that helps or blesses someone else. Some people also get pleasure from having done harm to someone—in getting revenge, for instance. My guess is that the pleasant feeling of a good pleasure lasts a lot longer than that of a bad pleasure. But, good or bad, **Jesus did not come to earth so we could experience pleasure.**

HAPPINESS is a little more complex. It depends on at least three things: circumstances, expectations, and attitude. Advertisers know this very well, of course. Their job is to raise people's expectations, making them dissatisfied (a.k.a. unhappy) until they buy whatever is being advertised. It often works.

People who are living in poverty can be quite happy if they are able to meet their basic needs, because they have very low expectations. Others who are rich and famous are often unhappy because something they are expecting or hoping for (they may not even know what it is) does not happen in their lives.

Attitude is also very important. Abraham Lincoln has been quoted as saying, "Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be."

The Apostle Paul wrote this to the Philippian Christians: *"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."* (Phil. 4:11b-13)

Paul also wrote, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils."* (1 Timothy 6:6-10a)

So it's easy to be happy when things are going well for you. It's harder to be happy when circumstances are difficult or painful, though with determination one can still maintain at least a degree of contentment or happiness. But, believe it or not, **Jesus did not come into the world, suffer, and die so that we could be happy.**

JOY is like happiness, but also different. Dictionary definitions are no help—they are about worldly joy—they generally say that joy is intense happiness. In the Bible, though, joy is a very different thing. It has a spiritual dimension that removes it completely from the realm of expectations, circumstances, and attitude.

Jesus said to His disciples, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."* (John 14:27) According to Paul, the peace of God is beyond our ability to understand it (Phil. 4:7); it's quite different from the world's idea of peace.

It's the same with joy. Here's my belief about the joy that Jesus gives: it is a settled knowing, a feeling of unshakeable rightness deep within the soul or spirit. It's a recognition and acceptance of the truths of God—that He is real; that He is wholly good and I can trust Him completely; that He truly loves me as I am; that He has taken care of everything that would keep me separated from Him (my sin); and that my eternal destiny, which is absolutely secure, is to be with Him and to delight in the beauty of His holiness.

Is this a good description of "the joy of the Lord"? Of course not—it's like trying to describe a sunset. I might list fourteen colors and mention the shapes of the clouds, but no description in words can take the place of seeing the sunset with your own eyes.

It should be obvious, though, to anyone who has been exposed to God's word, anyone who has listened to Jesus' teaching and is aware of the things He did while He was on the earth, that the joy that Jesus promised to give is very much to be desired. Everyone should desire to experience and to have that joy.

How does one get that joy? Well, it's like salvation (in fact, it is one element of salvation)—you can't earn it or deserve it. All you can do is receive it. How do you do that? I think, rather than giving you instructions, I'll just tell you how I have received small doses of that joy—just by being with God. Just by being present during a Spirit-filled worship service, or reading the Bible, or praying while walking outdoors, or praying in tongues. The way to get to know Jesus better is to spend time with Him. And please ask to be guided by the Holy Spirit, who has been sent by God since the Day of Pentecost specifically to guide and help Christians.

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. (James 4:8)
"[Lord,] 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)



Jesus did not come so we could have fun; He did not come to give us pleasure; nor did He come to make us happy. But He did come so that we might have the JOY of the Lord, forever.

Praise the LORD. Amen.

Brother Roland

Ask me ... Send your Bible questions to me and I'll try to answer them in the "Good News Guide."
Your question may help someone else. **Brother Roland, P O Box 14, Fayetteville PA 17222**

The joy of the Lord – What is it?

Adapted from the website of Compelling Truth (www.compellingtruth.org)

The joy of the Lord is a supernatural confidence that God is sovereign, loving, powerful, and for us. It is the inner understanding, granted by the Holy Spirit, that no matter our circumstances, our condition, or our surroundings, God is working things out for our good (**Romans 8:28: And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**)



The joy of the Lord is evident throughout the Bible, especially in regards to Jesus.

Before He was born, Mary sang of her joy (**Luke 1:47: ... my spirit rejoices in God my Savior**) and Jesus' cousin John, still in his mother's womb, leaped for joy (**Luke 1:44: For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy**). On the night of Jesus' birth, the angels brought "good news of great joy" to the shepherds, announcing the coming Savior (**Luke 2:10: And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.**)

Jesus Himself lived with joy. Once, He said He was like a bridegroom at his own wedding feast (**Mark 2:18-19: Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast."**)—that is unmatched joy! At one point, people accused Him of being too joyful (**Luke 7:34: The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'**). Jesus told His followers that He taught them for His own joy and for a full portion of joy for them (**John 15:11: "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."** and **John 16:24: "Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."**).

Jesus' stories often resulted in joy—for example, the shepherd, woman, and father in Luke 15. Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit (**Luke 10:21: "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I**

thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.").

When the church began, it was known for its joy (**Acts 2:46–47: And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. And Acts 13:52: And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.**). When Paul wrote about the fruit of the Spirit, he included joy (**Galatians 5:22: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ...**). And, there is more. See **Romans 14:17: For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.; Philipians 3:1: Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord; Philipians 4:4: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.; 1 Thessalonians 5:16: Rejoice always; and 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,**

This joy of the Lord permeates the Bible. It extends deeper and further than mere happiness, which is temporary. It is constant (**John 10:28–29: I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.**)

Joy is a cornerstone of our relationship with God and that's why He spends so much time telling us about it in the Bible. The joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

Our entire relationship with God, made through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus, is set on a foundation of joy. (**Hebrews 12:2 - "Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God"**).

A Christmas Puzzle

Based on the beloved account of the birth of Jesus in Luke Chapters 1 and 2. Enjoy!
Have a blessed Christ-Mass this year.

Puzzle:

C I N S S A S D T C K O V Q F K Y O O P W I Z F V L X I U U E K E B
Z O N E U E R L G M Z N H O T Y O U S H A L L H A V E A S O N Z B X
O F I A M S C P R A J T X F Z H Y C T D P R G D V H S I B F R F J B
T G Z N S G N I K D E I Q B P T G U M X O E T X M V Z D C C X G X H
Z A L R R T N E O T N N I E H T N I M O O R O N W V H K Y Z Z K V B
Q J H O P X A O C J X X A B C N R R N X V G Y K W X I U M Z Z G F S
D A O B R C E B M A E K B D W E P C H T H M K K E A E Z H E G T W H
P N K S K Y N D L A E R M Z G J H O U P A H E W I L L B E G R E A T
D E A I I C T L R E E K L N S E O E E U J S G D W L D P I T Z V Y O
A S E T T X A O T J B C A U R S X S R Y O T D S N D O K O U Y B K L
P U D H Z T M G G L W M A T O U T H E E M P E R O R D E C R E E D C
H S U G S Q Z N Q O A U T E X S E S V P I N S H E I Y W Q P J L Z N
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N H N Y T E D G Z N E H E L M O F E N D E D R K M D H I U S D E O P
L E I S L W G S N O I Q P U Y R O L G N I L E G N A N Z T M E T T A
Y M K S O E Y S V T Z P H D W N N M I E Z G N M R D R E W B H H S R
H A S B W N B E Z B E M E T Z Q Z U E C Z X H I A O J Y W L E H D W
O N A T E T L L P E X V R E H X G W R O I A A U Y N U Q H S L I I L
S S W W Z T T D C A L L D E K N H O J M I H E M A N N O N G X S V H
T Z D W S O S L T F K P S A P R O P H E T L I K E E L I J A H W A T
S I O F R B L I C R K S S S U X T Z T H D I M U O O O U G U C I D L
A H R H L E D H W A G Z A T N A N G E R P Y R E V Y R A M R S F N G
N K E P C T W C J I H S W E K V Z P D E C I O J E R D N A S I E I D
G U H P X H M I H D L O T L E I R B A G G K W K S E X S E B I V R A
S J W I L L B E A R A S O N A I F N D Q M S D S C V A M P Y J O A G
H S K N H E N V J N I A G A E M A C L E I R B A G V E N G Q L G I D
C V O Q K H U E D J C L E S L E O T S R V D J Y I H X O I E Q E T A
C M T Y Y E R J W L W E T W Y T U T U F H L C O T Z E Z H O C J S H
Q S R V L M S O N O F T H E M O S T H I G H R C G J M T E W B C E O

Words:

HEROD WAS KING OF JUDEA
ZECHARIAH THE PRIEST
ELIZABETH HIS WIFE
CHILDLESS, GETTING OLD
GABRIEL TOLD HIM
YOU SHALL HAVE A SON
NAME HIM JOHN
HE WILL BE GREAT
A PROPHET LIKE ELIJAH
*
GABRIEL CAME AGAIN
A VIRGIN NAMED MARY
WILL BEAR A SON
NAME HIM JESUS
SON OF THE MOST HIGH

REIGN FOREVER
SO LET IT BE
MY SOUL REJOICES
*
THE EMPEROR DECREED
TAKE A CENSUS
JOSEPH AND MARY
WENT TO BETHLEHEM
MARY VERY PREGNANT
NO ROOM IN THE INN
IN A STABLE
JESUS WAS BORN
WRAPPED IN CLOTHS
SLEPT IN A MANGER
*

SHEPHERDS AT NIGHT
KEEPING THE SHEEP
ANGEL IN GLORY
DO NOT BE AFRAID
HERE IS GOOD NEWS
TONIGHT IS BORN
IN DAVID'S TOWN
A SAVIOR
THE MESSIAH
THE LORD
HEAVENLY HOST SANG
GLORY TO GOD
PEACE AMONG MEN
THE SHEPHERDS SAW
AND REJOICED