

Lesson 4

WHAT IS JOY?

But the fruit of the Spirit is ... joy
(Galatians 5:22a).

The first experience or consciousness of *agape* love is joy. Heartfelt joy in the Lord—regardless of your circumstances—is strong evidence to others that God has truly transformed your life.

Have you ever watched a couple that's in love? They can be walking hand in hand on a dreary, smoggy day and yet assert it's the most beautiful day ever! Why? Because of love. When we're so in love with the Lord, we view life positively.

Joy that is the fruit of the Spirit goes beyond happiness. Happiness is the state of being happy because of your circumstances. Joy that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit is constant and peaceable—despite difficulties.

All believers experience a feeling of joy at the point of their spiritual rebirth. When some hear the Word of God they receive it gladly and with joy; however, as trials and testings come along, many lose their joy and their desire to serve the Lord.

1. Write Mark 4:14.

2. Mark 4:17.

This passage explains why some people lose their joy. If God's Word does not take root in their heart, Satan comes immediately and takes away the Word that was sown in their hearts. The Word of God never took root in their hearts, and so they can only endure for a time. Afterward, when tribulation, persecution or temptation arises, they stumble and fall away.

3. Keeping God's commandments and loving one another produces joyfulness. Write John 15:10-11.

Jesus talked a lot about the fullness of joy. Not just joy, but rather the *fullness* of joy. God wants us to experience this joy daily, and has revealed in His Word how we can do so.

4. Praying in the name of Jesus promises joy. Write John 16:24.

5. Fellowship with other believers is another way we can experience the fullness of joy. Write 1 John 1:3-4.

6. Being a faithful steward of what God has entrusted to us ensures joy. Write Matthew 25:21.

Life is filled with problems, burdens, heartaches, and misunderstandings. Sometimes we can feel we can't cope any longer, and we're forced to reach out. It's what you reach for that's so critical because it can determine your destiny. Many reach for alcohol or drugs, which only compounds the problem.

When we get exhausted, and we're pressured to reach out, if we will just reach out at that moment for the Lord, we'll find that He has been reaching out to us. When we do, the joy of God begins to fill us, and He becomes our strength. We will be able to cope with the situation because the Lord strengthens us and gives us the ability to deal with problems.

7. Write the last sentence of Nehemiah 8:10.

8. Write Psalm 28:7.

The joy of the Lord gives us a surge when we think that we just can't make it any further. Suddenly, God begins to minister to us of His love, and through that love, we begin to experience His joy and realize the marvelous inheritance that we have as children of God.

Burdens don't seem so heavy anymore. Suddenly we just have that energy and strength as God ministers to us. And our strength amid adversity becomes one of the most powerful witnesses for the Christian gospel.

The joy of the Lord is attractive! It draws people, and it's contagious. But so is depression. Our attitudes affect other people. When we express the joy of the Lord, it lightens up the whole room. It lightens up people. They're blessed because of our relationship with God, and it demonstrates an unconditional love (*agape*) toward others. Our homes and places of work should be happier because we have the joy of the Lord.

9. Write Proverbs 17:22.

Our lives exude good or evil to those around us. No man lives to himself, but if you have the joy of the Lord, your life will be a positive influence on others. Besides, the joy of the Lord strengthens you, no matter how tough the battle.

The joy of the Lord is your strength. He will see you through. You'll come out victorious. The joy of the Holy Spirit in our lives is not based upon temporal pleasures. The joy that the Holy Spirit pours into our lives overcomes trials, tests, and persecutions. It is a joy that is a direct result of our understanding and abiding in the *agape* love of God.

Joy is the sense of well-being that God is in control of all circumstances. True joy is a matter of perspective. Jesus. Others. You. Jesus first, others second, you last. If you don't like being last, you'll never know real joy!