

## Shout for Joy • Psalm 100:1

Researchers designed a survey to understand human happiness. The project included such multiple variables as different ages, social classes and cultures. They concluded that there is very little correlation between circumstances and happiness. Some people have comparatively good circumstances in life and are miserable people, and others have terrible circumstances and are surprisingly happy.

One area examined in the survey was money. The researchers wondered if more money made people happier. The answer was somewhat complex. If more money provided the basics of life like food, shelter and clothing, that money did make people happier. However, beyond the basics in life, money was not a significant factor in determining personal happiness.

What about the person who won the lottery, received a huge raise or was the beneficiary of a large inheritance? The research showed that the benefits of the new money did make a person somewhat happier for up to three months. But after three months most people return to their previous level of happiness or misery.

About three thousand years ago an unknown songwriter, full of happiness and joy, wrote some of the most famous musical lines of history. It is Psalm 100 in the Old Testament. Jewish worshippers sang it originally as they marched through their streets in festivals of celebration and worship of God. But the words are so good that they have transcended time and culture and are as relevant today as they were three millennia ago. They say:

Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth.  
 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.  
 Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.  
 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his

courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Joy is one of the most frequent words in the Bible appearing 218 times. Joy was repeatedly the mark of Old Testament believers and New Testament Christians. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the “Good News” of Jesus Christ. When he was born the angels announced that his coming was to bring “great joy” to the world.

Joy is a great distinctive of Christianity. Most world religions are based on fear. Christianity is based on grace and joy.

There is a difference between joy and happiness. Although joy often makes Christians happy, joy is really a deep inner sense that everything is good because of God. It is like the ocean; even though there are hurricanes raging on the surface, there is calm and stability underneath. The intent of God is that the joy on the inside determines

how we respond to the circumstances on the outside rather than that the circumstances swirling around us become the determining factor for who or what we are on the inside.

Christian joy comes from knowing that what is most important of all is God and his relationship

to us rather than circumstances. Christians live by faith that God exists, God is wonderfully good, God forgives sin, God gives eternal life, God is powerfully in charge of everything that happens, God is intimately involved in our lives and God will make everything turn out right and good in the end. So we believe that no matter what happens to us in life that God knows, God cares and God makes everything eventually okay.

Anyone who really believes and knows this is transformed. Life’s meaning and feeling is not

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based on physical appearance, job, possessions, other relationships or anything else. All these things are temporary and comparatively unimportant.

Several years ago I wrote a book that began with these words: “Joan Hollister is the happiest person I know.” Joan, a part of the Wooddale Church family for many years, had been diagnosed with cancer. It was the beginning of what would be a long and sometimes painful journey, a journey that not only included cancer for her but for her husband, Jack, as well. Their cancer would eventually take both their lives, Jack first and then Joan. I watched them move from health to sickness to death. They were joyful throughout! Their lives were fixed on Jesus Christ, and they were amazing.

Joy is meant to be expressed, and there are thousands of different ways to express Christian joy. It can be expressed in prayers of gratitude and trust in God. It can be in an anthem that a choir sings. It can be through acts of kindness to others. Sometimes it is simply through a smile. Or it might be as powerful as calmness in crisis.

One of the best ways to express joy is with noise. You can be noisy alone, but it’s more fun to be noisy with others. If you’re a football fan you know that there is a big difference between cheering a touchdown alone in the living room and being in a stadium with 60,000 fans.

For thousands of years believers have gathered together to celebrate. In ancient Israel they marched through the streets singing the words of Psalm 100 as they went. For two thousand years Christians have gathered to sing the same words.

Now, I’m not a shouter by nature and I’m certainly not much of a singer. I don’t usually scream at baseball or football games. I don’t do somersaults when I get good news. But I love to praise God with other Christians. It is this wonderful experience of saying and singing joy to the Lord that has a way of getting me out of myself. It lifts my heart.

Many times I have gone into gatherings with other Christians in a whole variety of moods. Then I watch and listen and share in praises to God and I feel my spirit soar. It brings the joy to the surface.

Sometimes I like to look around at others who are expressing their joy. I love to see people’s faces and connect to their celebration when they sing and when they praise God. It is this marvelous thing to see that lifts my heart together with others.

There are many reasons to enthusiastically share in worship together. I encourage every Christian to attend church every Sunday possible and be sure to arrive on time. The Bible commands it. It is an appointment with God. But those are sort of “heavy duty” reasons. The best reason of all is to worship God and to express Christian joy and commitment with other believers. The purpose of the gathered church is to worship God and to shout and sing and express our Christian joy together.

There is only one true source of Christian joy and that is the Lord. No other person or thing can give true inner joy and contentment except God himself.

The people who learn this best are often those who lose everything else. Have you known Christians who were minimally joyful for years when they had good health, stable families and dependable income? Then they lose their jobs, their families fall apart or severe health problems arise. Just when you would expect that person to be miserable and bitter, she is full of joy and talks often about God. He suddenly has a peace and happiness that was never there before.

We are tempted to give psychological names to this appearance of joy. We say it is denial or bargaining with God. Except those who have lost so much and are so joyful say, “No, this is for real. I don’t think I’ve ever experienced anything like it before. I just sense God’s control over my life. I trust him for everything. I really am filled with joy.”

I’ve seen this many times. I have gone to visit patients in the hospital, dreading the visit. I’ve wondered what to say. I realize that my words can seem so hollow and empty. But I walk into the room and immediately sense the joy. And often I have driven away thinking how much I have been benefited and blessed because I have witnessed powerful, deep Christian joy.

But we don’t have to wait until everything

else is stripped away to experience this joy that comes from the Lord for it is available to anyone who truly bases life on God. It is available to anyone who loves God and lives for God and trusts God. It is a personal choice. It cannot be made by anyone else. There is no sermon that will do it for you. There is no church program or counselor who can make it happen.

Do you want to try it? How about praying a prayer to God that goes something like this:

Lord, I want this kind of joy so I choose for you to be Number 1 in my life starting today. You will be more important to me than anything else. I really mean this. If you want to, you can take away everything else in my life as long as I have you. You can have my job, my money, my health, my family—everything. As long as I have you, I have all that I need.

Would you be willing to pray that prayer to God? Would you be willing to write it down with today's date, sign it and save the paper? And would you be willing to tell other people what you have prayed?

If we are honest, many of us are thinking, "I can never pray a prayer like that! What if God took me up on it and I lost all my savings? What if it cost me my house? I could lose my job or marriage or children. I'd be too scared to ever pray a prayer like that."

We know what we're saying, don't we? We're saying that our joy in life is really not in God but in someone or something else.

I'll tell you what I want. I want the joy of the Lord. More than anything else! Not that I want to lose the other things in my life that are extremely important and that I value. But I don't want them to come before God. I want the basis of my life to be nothing but God himself. Because I believe that God alone is more than enough to have the greatest joy possible, I want to trust him enough to make that decision for me.

When you are excited about something good, you usually want to share it. You want other

people to celebrate and shout along with you. Think about the last time you had some really good news. It could have been a new job or a new baby, a raise in salary or a benign biopsy report. What was the first thing you did when you heard the news? You probably called home, went to tell a friend or co-worker or found a complete stranger on the street to tell what happened. Exciting good news always has to be shared!

Anyone who has the joy of the Lord wants to shout about it, but not alone. We want our friends and family to join in with us. We want the whole earth to join the celebration. I'm excited about that day that's promised in the Bible when an uncountable crowd of people from every tribe and language and people and nation will join the shout of celebration and joy for the Lord. But until then, here is the best advice you can get for today:

***I want the basis of my life to be nothing but God himself.***

\* Find your joy in the Lord!

\* "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth."

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