

# Joy

By Peggy Lively

**Core Verse:** “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” **John 15:11**

**Creed:** I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

## Part 1: Joy Defined

So many times we confuse joy with happiness. In fact, these words are often used interchangeably as synonyms. Yet, there is a very definite distinction between the two. Happiness is based on our circumstances and emotions; it can easily come and go as our environment changes. Joy is an inner contentment, a sense of peace and hope regardless of our circumstances or situation. I have discovered that true joy has its foundation in trust, trusting that God loves me and that He is in control of my life, no matter what happens.

In our core verse, Jesus speaks of making our joy complete. He says, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11). I have told you what? What did Jesus say? Look at the first part of this chapter to find out.

Read **John 15:1-11**.

1. How many times does Jesus say “remain in me” in this passage? Some Bible translations say “abide in me.”
2. In verse 9, He says “remain in my love.” According to verse 10, how do we do this?

Jesus’ repetitive message in these first ten verses is “remain in me,” “abide with me.” *This* is how our joy is made complete. Our joy is found in abiding in him and his love, not in our circumstances. Jesus also says that if we remain in him, we will bear much fruit, the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Joy is one of these fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). So how does abiding in Jesus make my joy complete? It begins with a belief in him as my personal Savior: “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” **I Peter 1:8-9**

3. Explain how believing in Jesus for my salvation can fill me with inexpressible and glorious joy?

Once we have received Jesus as our Savior, we “remain in his love” and experience joy by obeying his commands (John 15:9-11). We will find joy in a life of obedience to him.

“The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing.”

**Proverbs 10:28**

**Bring it home:**

\*Have I believed in Jesus as my personal Savior from my sins?

\*If yes, do I truly rejoice in my salvation? Explain.

“You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

**Psalm 16:11**

When life gets hard, it’s easy to forget eternal purposes, the “goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls.” I pray that the Spirit would remind us often of the joy found in abiding in Christ and the hope of eternal life with him. Yet in times when life is painful, how can we rejoice?

**Part 2: Joy in Trials**

As I worked on this study, I came to a very difficult test of my own joy. Halfway into writing this, our dog of almost twelve years suddenly got very sick with cancer and died. Over these years, he had become so much a part of our family, like one of our own children. We were extremely sad to lose this wonderful companion.

As I would sit down and try to write about joy, the tears would stream down my face. I knew I would eventually work through this and be alright, in time. Yet for the moment, I was grieving. So the question became very personal to me: “How can I have joy when life hurts?” When in the midst of painful circumstances, to “consider it all joy” seems impossible and ridiculous. It seems merely like putting on an act to rejoice when we are really grieving on the inside.

As I struggled with these thoughts, I read about Jesus. The Bible says, “for the joy set before him [he] endured the cross, scorning its shame ...” (Hebrews 12:2). How in the world could Jesus experience joy in his journey to the cross? He knew he was walking towards his own painful death. Do you think it was all joy? Did he grieve or stress in the midst of his circumstances? Look at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Read **Matthew 26:36-45**.

4. Describe the emotions of Jesus at this time.

5. How many times did Jesus ask the Father to take this “cup” from him if possible?

Read the account in **Luke 22:39-46**.

6. Describe what Jesus experienced in these verses.

The book of Mark records that “he began to be deeply distressed and troubled,” saying “my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Mark 14:33-34). Does this sound like joy to you? The truth is that Jesus had very real human *emotions*, and they were very intense at this moment. This doesn’t mean Jesus sinned in his distress and sorrow; it means emotions are very real and it is alright to express them. I found great freedom in this! As Christians, I think too often we try to jump straight to joy, ignoring or stifling our emotions, because we are *supposed* to “rejoice in all circumstances.” But we have to recognize that even Jesus expressed extreme sorrow, to the point of death. Also, when Lazarus died, the Bible doesn’t say that Jesus rejoiced; it says “He wept ... See how he loved him!” (John 11:35-36) There is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance” (Ecclesiastes 3:4). We must not deny the reality of our emotions. But we also must not stay here, becoming consumed and immobilized by our emotions. With God’s help, we work through them on the path to joy. The Psalms remind us, “weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning ...” David says, “You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy” (Psalm 30:5, 11). Unfortunately, many times we have to go through the weeping and wailing before we get to the rejoicing and dancing. Don’t deny the reality of these emotions, but trust in God and rely on his strength to get you to a place of rejoicing. Let’s see how Jesus got there.

7. Looking back at the Garden of Gethsemane, what did Jesus pray in **Mark 14:35-36**?

8. What was the joy “set before” Jesus as he endured the cross?

We examined how living a life of obedience leads to joy. I believe that Jesus found joy in his path to the cross because he knew that this was his Father’s plan for Him. He chose to obey even when he hoped and prayed that there might be another way.

“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!” **Philippians 2:8**

It was in his obedience, that Jesus found joy, knowing that he had completed the task and fulfilled the purpose that his Father had set before him. It was in his obedience, that he was a part of his Father’s plan of love and mercy to rescue his children from sin and death.

**Bring it home:**

\*Do I trust my Heavenly Father enough to pray “not my will, but your will be done,” even when my soul is overwhelmed and filled with sorrow? Why or why not?

“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” **Psalm 43:5**

**Part 3: Trust Leads to Joy**

The joy comes in complete trust in the Father. Jesus placed himself in his Father’s hands, and trusted him with his life. He knew that somehow out of his unjust, humiliating, excruciating death, God would bring about good: the salvation of our souls. In our own lives as well, sometimes it may seem impossible that God can bring good out of our circumstances, but we must trust him and remember his Son. Jesus reminds us, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me” (John 14:1).

Read **Psalm 31:6-15**.

9. List all the words of hardship or grief found in these verses. (For example: affliction, anguish ...)

10. Even in these circumstances, what does David choose to do in verses 14 and 15?

Trust plays a very crucial part in our joy. We must choose to trust in Christ as our firm foundation when the storms come, knowing that he is in control and that he loves us.

“But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hands.”  
**Psalm 31:14-15**

**Part Four: Joy is a Choice**

When circumstances are difficult, we can either choose to focus on the problems, dwelling on everything that is wrong, or we can look for the blessings, thanking God for what he has given us.

Read **Habakkuk 3:17-19**.

11. Describe Habakkuk’s circumstances in verse 17.

12. How did he choose to respond to his circumstances?

*“[Habakkuk] resolves to delight and triumph in God notwithstanding; when all is gone his God is not gone (v. 18): “Yet will I rejoice in the Lord.” Those who, when they were full, enjoyed God in all, when they are emptied can enjoy all in God, and can sit down upon a melancholy heap of ruins and even then sing to the praise and glory of God. This is the principal ground of our joy in God, that he is the God of our eternal salvation, the salvation of the soul; and, if he be so, we may rejoice in him in our greatest distresses, since by them our salvation cannot be hindered, but may be furthered. Joy in God is never out of season, nay, it is in a special manner seasonable when we meet with losses and crosses in the world, that it may then appear that our hearts are not set upon these things, nor our happiness bound up in them. He that is the God of salvation in another world will be our strength in this world, to carry us on in our journey thither, and help us over the difficulties and oppositions we meet with in our way.”*

-Matthew Henry's Commentary, page 1166

13. What does Matthew Henry say that we can always rejoice in, that can never be hindered by our circumstances?

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.” **John 10:28-29**

**Bring it home:**

\*Are there any circumstances in my life that are making it difficult for me to trust God and rejoice? Explain.

\*Write a prayer thanking God for the salvation he offers through the death of his Son Jesus. Praise him that nothing can take away our salvation found in Him.

As I put my trust in Jesus, understanding that he is in control of my life, and that he loves me beyond understanding, I will find that surrendering to his will for my life gives me the greatest joy, whatever the circumstances! No matter what, nothing can separate me from his love for me. In this, I can rejoice!

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

**Romans 8:38-39**

*Dear Heavenly Father, there is such comfort and joy in knowing that my times are in your hands. Thank you that you love me with an everlasting love, and that you have plans to prosper me and not to harm me, to give me a hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). Remind me of this by your Spirit when life is hard. Help me to remember Jesus, and the eternal victory that was won through his death on the cross. What a beautiful example of how you can bring good out of a horrible experience. I rejoice in my salvation that is secure in Jesus. Help me to choose **JOY** throughout each day. In Jesus' name, amen*