

# HOW CAN I CULTIVATE JOY?

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In this brief document, we are going to consider what the Bible teaches us about joy and how to cultivate it. It may surprise you to learn that there are many commands related to joy in the Bible. So let's think about how our happy God commands and produces joy in us.

## WHAT IS JOY?

**i** Joy is an experience of gladness. We experience joy through our relationship with God and through the various good things in our lives.<sup>1</sup>

Consider four points that help us think biblically about the experience of happiness, delight and gladness.

- **Jesus was joyful.** “If our Lord was the Man of Sorrows, He was more profoundly still the Man of Joy.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus found pleasure in obeying His heavenly Father (Psalm 40:8), He delighted in communing with Him (Psalm 16:10-11), and Jesus rejoiced in seeing His Father’s purposes unfold in the world (Luke 10:21). It is also remarkable to reflect on the fact that joy motivated Jesus to endure the agony of the cross (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus, who came to earth “as a conqueror with the gladness of the imminent victory in his heart”<sup>3</sup> truly was the Man of Joy.
- **Jesus is the pattern for us.** Becoming a mature Christian involves joy! Like Jesus, we are to find deep joy in communing with God, in obeying God, in serving God, and in seeing God’s purposes come to fruition in the world.<sup>4</sup> Jesus Himself wants us to experience the profound joy He experienced (John 15:11, 17:13).
- **Our joys reveal our desires and beliefs.** What we desire to have, and what we believe to be most important, will inevitably shape our joy. This means that some of our rejoicings might be inappropriate – for example when the Chief Priests heard that Judas was going to betray Jesus, they rejoiced (Mark 14:11). Thus our joy points back towards our desires and beliefs.
- **Joy can coexist with pain and suffering.** Because biblical joy is not fundamentally tied to events we experience or circumstances we live under, we can still experience joy amid struggles: “Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.” (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

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<sup>1</sup> D. Mangum et al., eds. *Joy* Lexham Theological Wordbook .2014.

<sup>2</sup> B.B Warfield, *On the Emotional Life of our Lord*. Presbyterian and Reformed. 1953

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Borgman, *Feelings and Faith*. Crossway. 2009.

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**i** *Biblical words for rejoicing point to both an emotional state and a chosen behaviour<sup>5</sup>*

While it might sound strange to us, the command to rejoice denotes not only a feeling of happiness but also an action that one chooses to do. Let's consider some of the actions that we can take to deepen our joy. Each activity has a corresponding biblical reference that is worth looking up and reflecting on.

Action Step	Biblical References
<b>Cultivate joy through reading God's Word</b>	<p>"The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes." (Psalm 19)</p> <p>"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:11)</p> <p>"When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight." (Jeremiah 15:16).</p>
<b>Cultivate joy through prayer</b>	<p>"I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices." (Psalm 16:8-9)</p> <p>"Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (John 16:24)</p>
<b>Cultivate joy through gratitude and thanksgiving</b>	<p>"Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the Lord; exult before him!" (Psalm 68:4)</p>
<b>Cultivate joy through obedience</b>	<p>"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them." (John 14:21)</p>
<b>Cultivate joy through relationships</b>	<p>"I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete" (2 John 12).</p>
<b>Cultivate joy through serving others</b>	<p>"But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you." (Philippians 2:17)</p>
<b>Cultivate joy through rejoicing in the Lord</b>	<p>"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4)</p>

The experience of joy is not ultimately in our power to produce. It is, ultimately, the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes our happiness grows slowly, other times it seems to spring up overnight! But there are means of cultivating it, and as we practice the above actions, regularly and prayerfully, we can have a genuine expectation to grow in joy. May the eternally happy God give you deep and lasting joy in Himself.

<sup>5</sup> D. Mangum et al., eds. *Joy* Lexham Theological Wordbook .2014