

# Hope

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Matthew 5:4*

**Mourning.** A time of sorrow and reflection. Sometimes mourning comes upon us swiftly — when a loved one dies, or we experience a tragic loss. Sometimes mourning is self-imposed as we reflect upon the disappointments and discouragements of life in general, or our own in particular.

A particular feature of mourning is the way life around us fades into the background as we become consumed by our sadness. Our focus becomes inward rather than outward as we become intensely concerned with our own emotions. Throughout these times, no amount of encouraging words or even comforting presences really assuage our pain. It is ours alone to bear, even if we share the sorrow with others around us.

Sometimes we argue with ourselves or the universe over our sorrow, wishing things could go back to the way they used to be. Sometimes we become angry at whoever we feel has imposed this loss upon us. But at all times, our pain is so personal, so deeply felt, that we alone must come to grips with it. Within a regular cycle of mourning, we eventually become resigned to the situation and begin to heal. Slowly life returns to normal and one day, we realize that we haven't even thought of the catalyst of our mourning for a while.

We do not think of times of sorrow as joyful. We think of them as pits in our lives. Times that we must struggle through before we can return to normal. Yet, Jesus described those who mourn as happy. What happiness is there to find, we wonder, in mourning?

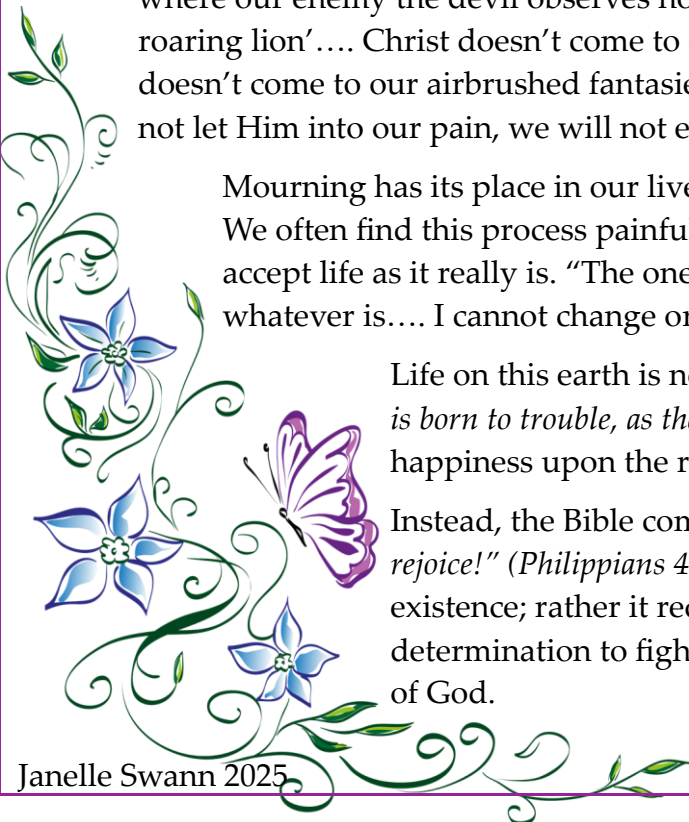
In the book *Champagne for the Soul*, Mike Mason makes the observation that a life of joy requires us to acknowledge the pain we experience in life.

“For Christians the shadow of the cross falls over every day. We live in a spiritual war zone where our enemy the devil observes no holidays but continually ‘prowls around like a roaring lion’ .... Christ doesn’t come to our righteousness but to our unrighteousness. He doesn’t come to our airbrushed fantasies but into the heart of our real pain. Indeed if we do not let Him into our pain, we will not experience His coming, or His joy, at all.” (p. 124)

Mourning has its place in our lives. It forces us to slow down, to reflect, to remember. We often find this process painful, yet ultimately, it plays an important role. It helps us accept life as it really is. “The one prerequisite for happiness is the acceptance of whatever is.... I cannot change or heal what I do not acknowledge” (Mason, p. 130).

Life on this earth is never going to be problem free. Job 5:7 tells us, “*Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.*” Still, we tend to stake our happiness upon the resolution of our problems. But that’s not reality.

Instead, the Bible commands us, “*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*” (Philippians 4:4). Happiness doesn’t require a problem free existence; rather it requires a mindset of acceptance of problems and a determination to fight to overcome our problems through the power of God.



# The Joy of Sorrow

*Finding hope in difficult circumstances.*

## The Sorrow of a Sinful Heart

Why does Jesus say in **Matthew 7:13-14**, so few enter the kingdom? *Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

What makes it difficult to find according to **Matthew 7:21-23**? What are those who are not entering the kingdom of heaven relying on? *Their good deeds*

What does **Ephesians 2:8-9** say is different about the way believers enter the kingdom of heaven? *It is through God's grace, not our deeds.*

What contrast do we see between the godly and wicked in **Psalms 5:5-8**?

The Wicked	The Godly
<i>The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity. 6 You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.</i>	<i>7 But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; In fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple. 8 Lead me, O Lord, in Your righteousness because of my enemies; Make Your way straight before my face.</i>

What is the necessary attitude we must have to receive forgiveness from sin according to **Psalms 51:17**? *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart — These, O God, You will not despise.*

What does salvation provide according to **Psalms 51:12**? *Joy*

## The Sorrow of the Flesh

**James 1:2-5** notes the joy of what? Why? *Facing trials, because it leads to maturity in the faith.*

While this hardly seems like a reason for joy, Paul explains the need for joy in **Philippians 3:1-3**. What role does joy play in our spiritual growth? *It is a safeguard for you. (NIV)*

What specifically is Paul warning believers to avoid here? *Legalism (circumcision)*

This was the doctrine of the Judiazers. It was legalism—keeping the law rather than accepting God's grace. In **Galatians 2:20-21**, Paul struck a blow against this doctrine. As believers upon what is our hope fixed? *Christ living in us. We don't have to keep the law*

He goes on in **Galatians 3:2-3**, to say that our growth as Christians comes through what? *Through the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.*



Legalism saps from us the strength we need to fight sin by convincing us we need to fight in our own strength. In **Galatians 5:16-23**, Paul shows us the battle this sets up in our lives. Who helps us overcome the power of our flesh? (v. 16) *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

Paul contrasts the difference between a life controlled by the flesh and one controlled by the Spirit. What do you notice about the joyfulness between the two?

Controlled by the flesh	Controlled by the Spirit

Joy is a safeguard because it serves as a measurement of the temperature of our heart. Are the activities we are involved in bringing us joy or are they destroying our joy? This extends to religious practices as we see with legalism. Trying to be righteous in our own strength leads to a joyless existence because in our arrogance we are rejecting the Holy Spirit who is our source of joy.

## The Sorrows of Personal Difficulty

Life as a Christian does not remove the difficulties of life, however it should insulate us against the damage of them. We should be able to live in way that is not defined by our problems, but that is defined by our walk with Christ. As we see in the story of Job, some physical suffering is directly related to Satanic intervention in our lives. Peter directly addresses this in **1 Peter 5:8-10**. He gives us two thoughts to provide comfort as we face difficulties in our lives.

1. We are not *the only ones*. (v. 9)
2. It is part of *God's purpose* in our lives to help us *grow as Christians*. (v.10)

Paul speaks to God's use of suffering as a tool in **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**. Why does Paul say God gave him the "thorn in the flesh?" *to keep me from becoming conceited*

What was Paul's original response to this suffering? *He prayed 3 times for it to be removed.*

What was God's response? *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

What was Paul's response to this?



In **Psalm 30:6-12**, the psalmist speaks of the way we often react when difficulties arise in our lives. How was his reaction different between when things were good and things were bad?

Good Times	Bad Times

Does he say that his problem has gone away? Yet what is his state by the end of the psalm? (v. 11-12)

Paul has another lesson to teach us about how to handle suffering in **Philippians 4:10-13**. What was his secret to living joyfully? *He learned to be content with what God gave him in life.*

## Finding Comfort

In **Ecclesiastes 7:1-6**, Solomon describes the importance of negative things in life. What point is he making? *Good times rarely make us stop and think. We enjoy them, but don't reflect on them like we do about problem areas in life.*

God gives us moments in life that bring us to a stopping point. In order to learn the lessons of these moments well we need to:

Proverbs 15:13, Proverbs 17:22    Acknowledge *the pain*.

Psalm 34:17-19    *Pray for help.*

Psalm 42:11; 13:5-6    Hope in God's *love and goodness*

2 Samuel 10:9-12    Don't *isolate* yourself.

Romans 12:9-13    Live *transparently*.

2 Corinthians 5:1-2    Realize that earthly life is sorrowful, but *heaven awaits*.

We must remember that God is on our side and is cheering us on. He wants us to come through victoriously on the other side. And in the midst of sorrow, He wants us to rejoice in Him. In Psalm 30:5, we are reminded:

*Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.  
For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life;  
Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.*

