



JOY

Delighting in God's way because I choose to obey Him and trust in His promises

Ask most people what they ultimately want out of life and the answer would probably be happiness. Sure, some people would say “money and lots of it,” but give someone long enough to reflect on the question honestly and you will probably hear a wish for more happiness, contentment or joy.

Most people spend their entire lives searching for it and sadly never turn to the real Source that can provide it. Or they reject God and His instructions altogether and wonder why true, long-lasting joy always seems to elude them.

Joy involves a state of mind—a way of living, thinking and believing.

The truth is, God desperately wants us to find joy and hold onto it for all eternity! And He gives us instruction in His Bible on how to achieve it.

Just what is joy?

Joy can be a tricky concept to completely grasp, especially since the word is often used as a synonym for *happiness*. It might be helpful to explain to your children that happiness is often a fleeting emotion—they might feel happy that they aced that exam or that they kicked the winning field goal—but as with all emotions, the feeling passes and gives way to the next emotion. There's nothing wrong with feeling happy for the right reasons, of course. We're just not designed to feel happiness at all times.



Much like contentment, joy must be learned. And it requires focus on what truly matters.

Joy, on the other hand, involves a state of mind—a way of living, thinking and believing. During good times, joy might manifest as exuberance or lively positivity. In difficult or stressful times, joy doesn't mean fake smiles and insincerity, but rather a confidence and trust that God has everything under control and a purpose for the trials we're experiencing (1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 1:6). Joy takes conscious effort to attain and maintain. Much like contentment, it must be learned. And it requires focus on what truly matters.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote, “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (James 1:2). Being joyful during very difficult times of stress and pain is not a natural state. Explain to your children



that only through a strong relationship with God and with the help of His Holy Spirit can we achieve this level of joy. God wants to see us succeed and give us beautiful things ([Luke 12:32](#); [Romans 8:18, 28](#)). Focusing and meditating on His promises produces joy.

The analogy of fruit is used because it would have been an easy concept for people living during the time of Christ to grasp.



The fruit of the Spirit

Joy is closely related to concepts like righteousness, peace, hope, love, and gentleness. Where joy is discussed in the pages of the Bible, these other concepts are often interwoven in context. That's not surprising considering these are all components of the fruit of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)).

Explain to your children that God's Spirit, working with us prior to baptism and within us after baptism, makes us able to take on these characteristics. The Holy Spirit is what makes us able to transform our minds ([Romans 12:2](#)) and become more like our perfect example, Jesus Christ.

The analogy of fruit is used because it would have been an easy concept for people living during the time of Christ to grasp. Olive groves and vineyards were plentiful, and their fruit was a valuable commodity. Grains, dates, figs, pomegranates and apples were additional crops that would have been cultivated. All these fruits would have been visible not only in the fields but also at market stalls throughout the cities.

When God is working with us through His Spirit, joy and other parts of the fruit of His Spirit will show in our lives.

So when Jesus spoke of knowing false prophets "by their fruits," He was encouraging His disciples by this analogy to study people and discern whether their actions, words and behavior were good or bad ([Matthew 7:15-20](#)). When the apostle Paul wrote about the "fruit of the Spirit" to the Galatians, he was reinforcing Jesus' concept. When God is working with us through His Spirit, joy and other parts of the fruit of His Spirit will show in our lives.

Why is joy important?

Joy isn't necessarily a word we hear very often and because it tends to be confused with happiness, we might wonder just why it is so important.

As always, it's worthwhile to first consider God's perspective on the matter. The apostle Paul was inspired by God to write that "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and



peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” ([Romans 14:17](#)). That means that of three words that could be used to describe God’s Kingdom—His ultimate plan for all of humanity—joy is one!

Explain to your children that God wants us to have joy! He wants to give us good gifts, and He wants to bless us. Yes, He wants us to be happy, but more than that, He wants us to have long-lasting sustainable joy by being a part of His Kingdom.

Teach your children about the parable of the talents, one of several “the kingdom of heaven is like” parables. In the parable, the master leaves talents (money or something of value) with three of his servants and goes on a journey. On his return, he finds that two of the three servants have used what the master gave them and produced more. He congratulates them and tells them, “Enter into the joy of your lord” ([Matthew 25:21, 23](#)).

Help your children understand that when we experience true joy in this lifetime, it’s like experiencing just a glimpse of what God’s Kingdom offers us.



There are multiple lessons to learn from this parable. Just one lesson is that Jesus Christ, our Master, wants us to succeed with what we have been given and to enter into the joy of His Kingdom. God the Father also wants us to seek His Kingdom and wants to give it to us ([Luke 12:31-32](#)). Help your children understand that when we experience true joy in this lifetime, it’s like experiencing just a glimpse of what God’s Kingdom offers us.

So joy is important! It’s one way we can keep the focus of this future clear in our minds.

When we are oppressed with sadness and despair for a prolonged period of time, it’s time to assess our “joy-sappers.”

Identify your “joy-sappers”

If joy is overflowing happiness in following God, then the opposite is sorrow and despair from rejecting Him.

Explain to your children that we will all, at times, feel sadness. And that’s normal. But when we are oppressed with sadness and despair for a prolonged period of time, it’s time to assess our “joy-sappers”—things in our lives that might be distracting us from the joy that God wants us to have.

Is there a TV show that repeatedly makes us feel down and discouraged after we watch it? Is there a person in our lives who makes us feel bad about ourselves for no reason? Are we unable to focus on God’s blessings because we are so distracted by feelings of worry or gloom? These are joy-sappers, taking away our joy and our energy. Identify your joy-sappers and remove them (or if it’s a person, remove yourself from interacting with them).



King David wrote, “I will set nothing wicked before my eyes” (Psalm 101:3). Instruct your children that a TV show may not be “wicked,” but if they feel oppressively sad, lonely, confused, or discouraged after watching it regularly, it can’t be good. It’s not producing good fruits. Encourage them to follow David’s example and not to place it before their eyes (choose to not watch it).

The apostle Paul wrote, “‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’ Awake to righteousness, and do not sin” (1 Corinthians 15:33-34). Teach your children that if someone is frequently trying to convince them to do something they know is wrong or sinful, they need to stop spending time with that person, pray for them, and set a good example.

Listing blessings in a “joy journal” can be a very effective tool to combat overall feelings of dread, depression or anxiety.



Jesus instructed His disciples, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on” (Matthew 6:25). Instruct your children that if they are overly concerned with the physical things, they are missing out on spiritual blessings—perhaps both in receiving them and being aware of them. Listing their blessings in a “joy journal” can be a very effective tool to combat overall feelings of dread, depression or anxiety. Reassure them that God cares deeply for them (1 Peter 5:7). They probably have many more blessings than they realize!

Though these methods are effective in counteracting perpetual sadness, they are not intended to be a cure-all for a diagnosed medical condition of depression. They can, however, always be used in conjunction with treatment—and have no bad side effects!

Instruct your children that meditating on these uplifting things does not mean ignoring the bad things or pretending that evil does not exist.

Focus on the positive

In addition to identifying and removing our joy-sappers, we can confront feelings of sorrow and despair by focusing on more positive and worthwhile things: “whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

Instruct your children that meditating on these uplifting things does not mean ignoring the bad things or pretending that evil does not exist, but rather making a conscious effort to focus on the positive things. It does require concentration to choose to focus on the good.



When we ruminate obsessively on the bad, we allow those bad things to consume our thoughts, giving them control over us rather than practicing self-control (another part of the fruit of the Spirit). Teach your children, on a level they are able to understand, that we are engaged in a battle for our minds and that we win the war by applying God’s weaponry and armor to our lives ([2 Corinthians 10:3-5](#); [Ephesians 6:10-17](#)).

Just prior to writing about focusing on the positive, Paul wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” ([Philippians 4:4](#)). The promised result is this: “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” ([verse 7](#)). Paul’s instruction is in the form of an imperative—a command. Do this—rejoice—and you will reap the benefit of a settled heart and mind. That is a beautiful blessing we can claim if we rejoice in God’s promises!

Teach your children that they need to establish and maintain a relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ to have true joy.

Can we lose joy?

In the parable of the sower, Jesus cautioned His disciples about receiving the message of the Kingdom of God but not rooting it in a solid foundation. He said, “But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles” ([Matthew 13:20-21](#)).

It is possible to lose joy if we don’t consistently root it in God’s word. We can even hear the message of the good news of the Kingdom of God but without regular study and application of the Scriptures, we can lose our focus. To carry the analogy one step further: A dead plant produces no fruit whatsoever.

Teach your children that they need to establish and maintain a relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ to have true joy. Jesus Christ is our foundation ([1 Corinthians 3:11](#)). Encourage your children to root their lives in the study of His Word—let them be governed by the principles found in the pages of the Bible ([Proverbs 12:12](#)).

The seed rooted in a firmer foundation is much more likely to thrive. And if you care for it and tend it regularly, it will even produce food.

Growing a seed is a good visual aid to help reinforce this concept. Plant one fast-growing seed (like a bean or pea) in potting soil and another in sand. Water them both regularly. Which one does better? The seed rooted in a firmer foundation is much more likely to thrive. And if you care for it and tend it regularly, it will even produce food.





How can we fulfill our joy?

Before His arrest and eventual crucifixion, Jesus Christ spent the night praying to the Father. One of the things He compassionately prayed that God grant His disciples was “that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13). Earlier in the same evening, He had instructed His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (15:11).

What does this mean? How do we experience fulfilled joy?

We’ve already seen one way: govern your life by God’s Word. This is what Jesus Christ meant in John 15 when He instructed His disciples to “abide in Me” and “abide in My love.” Explain to your children that when we live our daily lives by applying God’s instruction from the pages of the Bible, we are “abiding” in the Word of God, and joy is a natural byproduct.

We can also experience fulfilled joy by bearing good fruit—the kind of fruit that can only be produced by walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25). When we live our lives guided by God’s Spirit, we will reap good outcomes.

“Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”



We can also experience fulfilled joy in unity. The apostle Paul instructed the church in Philippi to “fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Philippians 2:2). He also gave instruction on humility. In Ephesians, in addition to the concepts of unity and humility, Paul added gentleness, longsuffering, and the directive of bearing with each other (Ephesians 4:1-4). Teach your children that all of these mindsets contribute to unity and joy. Teach them to be “joy-fulfillers” by implementing these qualities.

Paul also encouraged the church in Corinth with the truth of God’s promise of eternal life and the Kingdom of God.

We can also experience fulfilled joy in focusing on our future and taking comfort in God’s ultimate plan for our lives. Paul reminded those in the church that if they would live by the Spirit, they will live as children of God, heirs of the promise of His Kingdom (Romans 8:13-17). He also encouraged the church in Corinth with the truth of God’s promise of eternal life and the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:20-26). And Jesus Christ Himself encouraged us to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” showing us where our priorities should be (Matthew 6:33).

If we do all of these things and focus on our future, allowing God’s Spirit to work through us, joy will be a natural result.



A summary of joy

In his first letter, the apostle John encouraged the early Church to have fullness of joy (1 John 1:4). To achieve this, in the previous three verses he reminded them of what they could find ultimate joy in: that the Word of life became Jesus Christ, led a sinless life, died for all of humanity as the perfect sacrifice, was resurrected to God's right hand, and now bears witness on our behalf (is our advocate) so that we can ultimately have a relationship with God the Father.

Encourage your children that God the Father and Jesus Christ are eagerly waiting to give us entrance into the Kingdom.

And all of this was written down throughout the pages of the Bible—the living word of God (Hebrews 4:12). The very Word of life—Jesus Christ—gave us the words to live our lives by so that we could have life more abundantly (John 10:10) and gave His life so that we could ultimately have fellowship with God the Father as well in His Kingdom (Revelation 21:3).

Encourage your children that God the Father and Jesus Christ are eagerly waiting to give us entrance into the Kingdom. This is cause for great joy!



TAKING THE FIRST STEP

Here are some suggestions to help you and your family generate more joy on a consistent basis in your lives:

Write out a clear, workable **definition of joy** and display it prominently.

Write out one or two **key scriptures** that will actively help you and your family focus on and produce more joy.

Identify your **joy-sappers** and remove them from your life (or limit or stop your interaction with a joy-sapping individual).

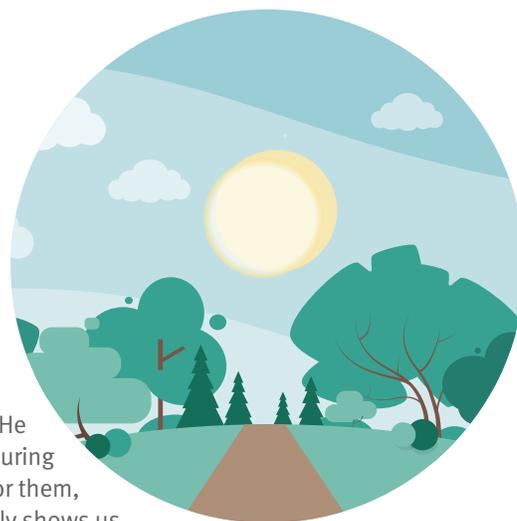
List your blessings in a **daily joy journal** and refer to it often.

Meditate on **God's promises** for you and for all of humanity.

7 GUARD AND GUIDE SCRIPTURES

You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. —Psalm 16:11

Kind David wrote this psalm as he was reflecting on the end of his life. He had hope in God's promises of a resurrection and the Kingdom. Even during the most difficult times, encourage your children that God has a plan for them, that He hasn't forgotten them, and that He cares for them. His Word truly shows us the "path of life," and when we walk in it, we will find joy.





But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.
—Luke 12:31-32

God wants His children to experience joy and gladness! Instruct your children that when we organize our priorities properly and put God first in our lives, we will reap blessings. Meditating on His blessings and on the promises of His Kingdom will give us joy. Knowing that He desperately wants to give us this blessing also gives us immense comfort.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. —Revelation 21:4

God promises a future when sorrow and pain won't even exist anymore! The ultimate fulfillment of joy will take place in God's Kingdom when Jesus Christ will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and all things will be made new. We can take great comfort in this promise and in this future hope for all of humanity.



FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

We also recommend these additional (but certainly not exhaustive) scriptural passages that are relevant to the topic of joy:

Moses and Miriam lead the Israelites in song ([Exodus 15:1-21](#))

Ezra and the Israelites return from Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem ([Ezra 3-8](#))

The origins of the Feast of Purim ([Esther 8-9](#))

King David rejoices as the ark is returned to Jerusalem ([1 Chronicles 15-16](#))

Proverbs of joy ([Proverbs 12:20; 14:10; 15:21, 23; 17:21; 21:15](#))

Zacharias, Elizabeth and Mary ([Luke 1](#))

Through suffering, joy and peace ([1 Peter 4:13; 5:10](#))