

Joy in Ministry

By Pastor Alan Utting



'It is not the work we do for God that brings joy, but the deep fellowship we have with Him while doing it.' Hudson Taylor

Over time, many Christian workers find their joy in ministry fading. The constant burdens and pressures they carry can gradually wear them down, draining their energy and passion. This doesn't just impact their own wellbeing, it often spills over into their relationships, making them difficult to live or work with. My days go better when I remind myself of the words on the scroll hanging on our kitchen wall:

'Today I choose Joy'

Although Jesus did, at times, bear the weight of the world on His shoulders, He was, by nature, filled with joy. Here are some New Testament verses that highlight Jesus and His perspective on joy:

1. Jesus speaks of the joy that comes from those abiding in Him. John 15:11. 'I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.'
2. Jesus teaches that heaven celebrates when even one person turns to God. Luke 15:10. 'There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'
3. Jesus is full of joy in delighting in his father's presence. 'At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth...' Luke 10:21.
4. There is joy for those suffering for Christ. Matthew 5:11-12 'Blessed are you when people insult you... Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...'

Psalms demonstrate that David's joy was not rooted in his situation but in God Himself. His honest expressions of sorrow often ended in worship, trust, and joy offering an example for believers today.

1. Psalm 27:6 'Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy.'
Context: Confidence and joy in the face of enemies.
2. Psalm 30:5 'Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.'
Context: Possibly after recovering from illness or trouble.
3. Psalm 32:11 'Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!'
Context: Written after confessing sin and receiving forgiveness (possibly linked to Bathsheba).
4. Psalm 34:8 'Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.'

Context: After escaping danger by pretending to be insane before Abimelek (1 Samuel 21).

Helpful Observations

1. Satan is a killjoy! He tries to steal our joy in various ways such as broken relationships, being drawn into unhealthy connections, excessive worry over finances, concern for your children, or what others say about your ministry. Choose instead to focus on thoughts of praise and gratitude. Don't allow your mind to become overcrowded. Be solution-focused rather than problem-focused.
2. Joy flows from genuine repentance of sin. There are no shortcuts. Words like 'sorry' or 'please forgive me,' spoken to God and to others when we've done wrong, should be sincere. We must resist the urge to shift blame onto others for our shortcomings however difficult that is.
3. I was raised in an environment where discipleship was primarily focused on suffering and the cross. Yet, Jesus spoke often about joy even as He approached the cross and faced the darkest moments of His ministry. As Hebrews 12:2 reminds us: '...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross.' Joy and suffering can coexist. Being stretched in life and learning to rely on God's help brings a deeper and more lasting joy than any temporary pleasure.
4. A joyful attitude brings strength in ministry and serves as a wonderful encouragement to others. As Nehemiah 8:10 declares, 'The joy of the Lord is your strength.'
5. George Müller was a renowned Christian leader who cared for hundreds of orphans during some of Britain's darkest days in the 1800s. Remarkably, he did this without ever asking for money or food as he simply brought his needs before God in believing prayer. So, what was his secret? He once said, 'The first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day is to have my soul happy in the Lord.' In other words, each morning he made it a priority to enjoy Jesus through reading the Bible and prayer before facing the demands of the day. Develop that same discipline before your daily tasks take over.
6. Learn to meditate and cultivate an awareness of God's presence. As Psalm 16:11 says, '...you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.' When I'm not living in His presence, even small burdens feel heavy. But when I remain in His presence, even the heaviest burdens become light.
7. Choose your company wisely. We tend to become like those we spend time with. Joyful people are uplifting and attractive.
8. Joy is listed as the second fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. This is a clear sign of its importance in the Christian life. Look for ways to celebrate life!

A prayer: 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit' (Romans 15:13).

Resources

Richard Foster, *The celebration of Discipline*

Tim Chester, *Enjoying God*

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*