Choosing Joy in Trouble World.

I had the privilege of living at a popular beach for almost a year. The scenery was breathtaking, with excellent opportunities for surfing and fishing. During my stay, I came to know a community counsellor who told me about retirees moving there from a large city. At first, life seemed wonderful. But as the novelty faded, boredom, having few friendships and a lack of activities began to strain their marriages. Their anticipated joy turned into disillusionment. My friend's role as a community counsellor was to help them cope with these challenges.

As a young man I can relate to this expectation of joy. I so looked forward to buying my first Hillman car and my Alcorn computer, but it was only a matter of time before the novelty wore off. What is it about this illusive thing called joy? We chase it and it often disappears and then at other times it turns up unexpectedly.

In discussing joy, we must also acknowledge there is a time for grieving. The Bible's shortest verse, 'Jesus wept', describes his sorrow at the death of his friend Lazarus.
Here are some suggestions that have helped me increase my joy in a troubled world:

1. Joy is not dependent upon our circumstances. It took a long time for me to learn this. Some of the most amazing people I come across carry heavy burdens and yet you would never know it as they walk with joy.

King David had his ups and downs and certainly was not perfect. In Psalm 13:1-6 he went from despair to rejoicing. David begins by feeling forgotten by God and overwhelmed by sorrow as he was pursued by his enemies. 'How long, LORD? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me? But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.' He found the answer in the Lord.
Paul in prison in Rome in his troubled world, chained to a solider night and day wrote letters to the various churches and in one of them he says 'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again rejoice' Phil 4:4.
Nehemiah 8:10 says, 'The joy of the Lord is your strength'. After seventy years in Babylon, the people returned to rebuild Jerusalem's ruined walls. Despite demanding work and threats to their lives, Nehemiah urged them to draw strength from joy in the Lord. Through faith, they persevered until the work was complete.
True joy comes from living for Christ, not pursuing pleasure. In Psalm 16:11 it says, 'He sets the prisoners free and gives them joy'. Even outside a difficult situation we can still feel captive to thoughts that weigh us down. These thoughts can give way to joy:

2. Psalm 100:4 says, 'Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise'. Coming before God with gratitude, even when we don't feel thankful, takes a deliberate choice. A small banner in our kitchen reminds me: 'Today I will choose joy'. We don't need to look far to count our many blessings.

3. Singing or listening to songs, on our own or with others, and reflecting on Scripture can cultivate joy. I note down verses on cards or in a notebook to remember them. Enjoying creation, practising Christian meditation and prayer, and sharing encouragement with those we meet also nourish joy. Serving others in practical ways renews that joy within us.

In 1643, 150 pastors and theologians gathered in London to discuss key matters of faith. Their discussions led to the statement that our chief purpose is 'to glorify God and enjoy him forever'. God desires this for you too. Enjoy him.

'You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand' Psalm 16:11. So, please choose joy in this troubled world! That decision is yours.