

"Job was happier on the dunghill than Adam was in paradise." John Flavel

7. You may be sinfully preferring joylessness. If you are not thinking biblically, it might seem safer or easier *not* to rejoice in God. After all, if you never allow yourself to go too high emotionally and spiritually, you never risk being brought low. There is also a certain fleshly appeal in consistent dullness, especially when the opposite requires hard work and the death of self-focus. Furthermore, attention from people who sense your "lowness" might appeal to your sinful desire for pity.

The Remedy: Obey God by rejoicing in God. Joy is not optional. It is commanded. "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord" (Phil. 3:1). "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4). "Rejoice always" (1 Thess. 5:16). Given these clear commands, consider what James says about obligation: "One who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). When you are not rejoicing, you are sinning!

Your sour, non-exulting demeanor (that is, when joylessness shows through your skin) has a deadening effect on Christian fellowship and can drag others down with you. Persistent joylessness indicates a lack of love for other Christians. It even serves to turn unbelievers *away* from the gospel. Obey, then, for sake of obedience itself, and for the sake of those who know you. Get up out of the special-needs chair and light a fire of holy joy under others who might want to continue sitting in it!

"The Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot." Augustine

"Keep company with the more cheerful sort of the godly; there is no mirth like the mirth of believers." Richard Baxter

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word" (2 Thess. 1:16-17).

Seven Causes, and Remedies, for Joylessness

By Daryl Wingerd

Why are you not more joyful? Oh, I know. You are warm and friendly, even bubbly at times. You are always enthusiastic when singing with your church. You smile a lot. You even handle troubles and trials with a positive attitude. But why are you not more joyful? Why do you not exult in God more than you do?



Genuine joy and exulting in God is not the same as positive thinking, religious friendliness, enthusiasm during corporate worship, or other outward expressions that earn you the reputation of being a joyful person. These can be artificially pasted on any life, no matter how the heart feels. True joy is *soul*-happiness. It comes from knowing and loving the one true God, and from the awareness that He knows and loves you. It is experienced in affectionate thoughts toward His Son Jesus, and it is fueled by the presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells in all true believers. It is also expressed in heartfelt submission to His will.

True joy should be visible to others, but it can be experienced on the inside even when the trials of life make the outward appearance dark.

Seven Possible Causes for Joylessness.

1. You might be unregenerate. In other words, you might *not* be "born again" (John 3:3). You may have had a religious experience, but not a 2 Corinthians 4:6 experience, never having seen "the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." Because your spiritual eyes have never been opened to truly see Him, you have no reason to rejoice in Him.

The Remedy: Seek God with all your heart: God cannot be discovered apart from His own willingness to reveal Himself, but He has also promised that "He is the rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). He once said to the Israelites, "You will seek Me and find me when your search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). Two things, then, must be understood if your search for God will be successful: 1) You are utterly dependent upon Him for gaining a true knowledge of Him, and 2) He imparts the knowledge of Himself to those who earnestly seek to know Him. These truths are complimentary, not contradictory.

"God is never found accidentally" A. W. Tozer

2. You may be a true Christian who is doctrinally immature. You may have reached a plateau of *basic* biblical knowledge, but are going nowhere in terms of gaining an *increasing* knowledge of God. The joy of infancy in the Christian life is precious, when we first come to know the God who has saved us, but prolonged immaturity can squelch joy.

The Remedy: Develop and maintain a pleasant dissatisfaction with your current level of biblical knowledge, particularly in terms of knowing who God is. Do not be satisfied with knowing a few Bible verses and winning a few Bible trivia contests. Knowing the names of Moses' parents, Abrahams wives, Jesus' 12 disciples, and the guy who dozed off and fell from the window while Paul was preaching, may impress your friends, but it will not give you joy. If you want to experience increasing joy, heed Peter's instruction to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

"The recognition of who God is is a life-long process." Elizabeth Elliot

"The Christian is a God-explorer." Tom Wells

3. You may possess a great deal of knowledge about God, while neglecting to enjoy what you know. You may be familiar with many biblical truths about God and His ways. You might have a shelf in your mind (so to speak) on which you have placed the meanings of all the Hebrew names for God. But you never take these treasures down off the shelf for the pure pleasure of handling them and examining them closely. What joy will a man get from his classic car if he never polishes it or takes it out for a spin?

The Remedy: Meditate on God as a daily habit. Don't merely know that God is omnipotent. *Enjoy* His omnipotence. Think about what it means for you and the world around you. Don't be satisfied to merely understand that He is faithful. Consider all of the ways in which His faithfulness enriches your life.

"Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God" J. I. Packer

"The hearer of God's Word ought to be like those animals that chew the cud; he ought not only to feed upon it, but to ruminate upon it." Augustine

4. You may be walking in disobedience. It impossible to find sustained joy in God while you are consistently disobeying Him in some particular aspect of your life. Sin has a deadening effect on motivation, on prayer, on fellowship,

and on the personal disciplines that are such an essential part of pursuing joy in God.

The Remedy: Repent and obey God from this moment on. If you truly desire God, if you are truly seeking joy in Him, then you must desire to do His will. You cannot claim to delight in God's person while caring little about His attributes of holiness and righteousness.

"Obedience won't stop the decomposition of our physical lives, but it will halt the decay of our spiritual lives." Ian Barclay

"Joy is the natural outcome of the Christian's obedience to the revealed will of God." John Blanchard

5. You may have a misguided understanding of self-denial. The Christian life is a life of seeking ultimate pleasure, not in the things of this world, but in God Himself. When Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself," He was not teaching us to deny ourselves pleasure of every kind. There is great pleasure, after all, in knowing God. As the Psalmist said, "In your presence is fullness of joy. At Your right hand are pleasures forever." (Ps. 16:11).

The Remedy: Be like the man in Jesus' parable in Matthew 13:44. "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all he has and buys that field." Learn to see the Christian life for what it really is—the pursuit of ultimate satisfaction.

"God is a God of joy, and the human desire for happiness is a legitimate desire." John Benton

"We are meant to enjoy our salvation, not endure it." John Blanchard

6. You may be failing to recognize your difficulties as gifts from God. "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (James 1:2-3). If it is right to exult in our tribulations, as Paul says in Romans 5:3, then it is right to exult in the God who sends them.

The Remedy: Train yourself to think like Job. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 2:21). Job rejoiced in God even though God took away everything from Him, proving that true happiness does not depend on earthly circumstances or possessions.