

The Serious Business of Heaven  
Philippians 4:4  
10-19-2025

C.S. Lewis called it the “serious business of heaven.”

Theologian Karl Barth referred to it as a “defiant nevertheless.”

Author G.K. Chesterton stated that it is like “peace dancing.”

Longtime Fuller seminary professor, Lewis Smedes, said, “it is the reason for our existence. If we miss out on it, we miss out on the whole reason we exist.”

And to Robert Rainey it is, “the flag which is flown from the castle of the heart when the King is in residence there.”

Can you guess what It is?

**JOY!**

Joy, not happiness for that is something entirely different

Thomas Jefferson was heavily influenced by the writings of John Locke and Adam Smith when he wrote those words in the Declaration of Independence that we have the inalienable right to the pursuit of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

But he changed their words from life liberty and the pursuit property and possessions.  
we’ve been equating the two ever since, pursuing happiness through things like experiences, possessions, and relationships.  
We too easily fall prey to the false promise that happiness is just around the corner with the next click of our mouse or swipe of our credit card

Thinking if only we get that iPhone 17 or take that luxury cruise or the promotion at work we’ll be happy  
And if we are fortunate enough to get them, we may seem to be happy for a time but it never lasts  
Happiness wears off, then what?  
We move on to the next item on our list.

**Like John D Rockefeller, one of the richest people in the world during his day so famously put it when asked how much money is enough and he said, just a little bit more.**

That is the nature of materialism and a consumer mentality, it creates discontent by always wanting something more, newer, better, thinking that will give our lives meaning but it is a form of idolatry, the belief that anything apart from God can bring fulfillment.

Happiness comes from the root word meaning luck, fortune  
By its nature it is temporary, coming and going with time and circumstance

God promises us something far greater and permanent, he promises us himself

I. And in Promising us himself, he is promising us His joy

***“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.” (Psalm 96:11–13)***

It is part of his nature and character which is why in Paul’s list of the fruit of the spirit in Galatians it is listed 2<sup>nd</sup> only to love.

When he gives us himself in Jesus, he not only gives us his love, he gives us his joy

**Rejoice in the Lord always, Paul told the Philippians, I will say it again, rejoice.**

We don’t hear this enough but the Christian life is meant to be a joyful life, a joy filled life.

As a fruit of the Spirit, it is part of Christian character

And just as fruit comes naturally to a healthy tree, joy is a sign of a healthy faith

If it is absent, it is a sign that something is wrong

**Jesus made this point in John 15 he said the only way to bear fruit is to be connected or abide in him. Any branch that does not bear fruit is like a branch that is broken off and thrown away.**

We often talk about things like Gods love, his mercy and forgiveness, even his judgement, but we need to acknowledge his joy as well

He is a God who takes delight in his creation, which we are a part of

***“For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory. Let his faithful people rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds.” (Psalm 149:4–5)***

Does your view of God allow for that?

Can you imagine him with a smile on his face, taking joy in the creation he declared as very good

And despite our failures and sin, he can take joy in you?

Or do you only see him with a scowl, solemn and angry?

If so, your God is too small!

Need to be careful here because Psalm 135:8 points out that we become like what we worship

If we are lacking joy maybe we are worshipping a false image of God

**In Luke 10:21 Jesus was said to be full of joy and the Holy Spirit**

**In quoting David, Peter said in Acts 2:28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.**

**Romans 14:17 says the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of righteousness, peace, AND JOY in the Holy Spirit.**

Our God is a God of Joy!  
So rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice!

In *The Life You've Always Wanted*, John Ortberg wrote,

**Imagine for a moment how the opening sentences of the Bible might read if God were not a supremely joyful being. Imagine Genesis if God approached his work as we so often do.**

**In the beginning, it was nine 'o'clock, so God had to go to work. He filled out a requisition to separate light from darkness. He considered making stars to beautify the night and planets to fill the skies, but thought it sounded like too much work, and besides, thought God, That's not my job. So he decided to knock off early and call it a day. And he looked at what he had done and he said, It'll have to do.**

**On the second day, God separated the waters from the dry land. And he made all the dry land flat, plain, and functional, so that-behold- the whole earth looked like Idaho. He thought about making mountains and valleys and glaciers and jungles and forests, but he decided it wouldn't be worth the effort. And God looked at what he had done that day and said, It'll have to do.**

**And God made a pigeon to fly in the air, and a carp to swim in the waters, and a cat to creep on dry ground. And God thought about making millions of other species of all shapes and colors, but he couldn't drum up any enthusiasm for any other animals—if fact, he wasn't too crazy about the cat. Besides, it was almost time for the Late Show. So God looked at all he had done, and God said, it'll have to do.**

**And at the end of the week, God was seriously burned out. So he breathed a big sigh of relief and said, Thank me, it's Friday.**

Of course that is nothing like the account of creation in Genesis. Instead he took pleasure in in all, it throbs with the Joy of the Lord which is why God looked and said it was all good, very good.

Because joy describes Him and what he is like, its presence in our lives shows he is alive and well in us  
Because His spirit lives in us and we are told to be filled with his spirit, it is a sign of health and testimony that we are his children  
So in a very real sense, joy is a matter of faith  
The stronger our faith, the greater our joy  
If want more joy in your life get to know God better

This doesn't mean there will never be those down times, period of sadness and struggle

**Just as when the people of Israel were struggling and grieving over what was happening around and in them.**

**Life was hard just getting by and must have seemed hopeless at times, yet Nehemiah reminded them that it wasn't their circumstances but, the joy of the Lord who is your strength**

The word Nehemiah uses for strength is literally fortress, a place of safety, protection, refuge

In other words joy in the Lord gives us strength in the midst of life  
Strength to go on even in the worst of times  
Refuge and protection when we are in danger of being overwhelmed

**For beneath it all there will be the foundation of life in Christ which says along with the Psalmist, weeping may last for the night but joy will come in the morning.**

**So as one wise old saint once prayed, from silly devotions and sour faced saints, spare us Oh Lord.**

**Habakkuk put it well when he wrote, “*Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights*” (Habakkuk 3:17–19)**

**So rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, Rejoice!**

Jesus’ life and teachings were not just filled with love, they were filled with Joy  
He likened the kingdom of God to a great banquet, a wedding celebration, a father receiving his lost son home with a celebration of feasting and dancing and singing, a servant invited by his master to come in and share in his joy, and all heaven rejoices when one person is saved.

**Passages like these led theologian Robert Hotchkins to say: Christians ought to be celebrating constantly. We ought to be preoccupied with parties, banquets, feasts, and merriment...we ought to attract people to the church quite literally by the fun there is in being a Christian.**

As God fills us with himself and His Spirit, he gives us His joy  
The fruit of the Spirit, Paul said is joy  
So rejoice in the Lord always

Where happiness comes from the root meaning luck or fortune and is temporary by its very nature  
Joy shares the same root as gratitude and grace

Grace means gift, favor, something undeserved and unearned  
Joy is given to us and never taken away, it is permanent  
Life may be in crisis yet there remains a firm foundation which cannot be shaken because that foundation is God

Joy comes from God and is a byproduct of a heart filled with gratitude

II. Joy comes from gratitude

Have you ever noticed that people who take life for granted and have a sense of entitlement have very little gratitude but just assume they are owed it  
They may have all kinds of stuff and possessions, but they aren’t grateful for it

As a result, they have very little joy in their lives, there is not room for it without attitude of gratitude, we will have little to be joyful for

there are too many joyless people living unhappy lives because they never find anything to be grateful for  
instead, they focus on their problems, perceived wrongs done to them, pain or poor health or unfulfilled desires  
or they take salvation for granted and forget about the goodness and grace of God

joy is what we feel when we are grateful for what we have been given  
and we who know Christ have been given so much to be grateful for  
we have been given Jesus Christ who laid down his own life for our sins  
we have been given forgiveness  
we have been given new life and a future hope  
we have been given mercy  
We have been given love and eternal life  
We have been given His spirit

These are all expressions of His super abundant grace  
Sources of joy and gifts he has given we need to be grateful for  
None of them earned or deserved, claimed by right or privilege

How grateful are we for all we have been given?  
That is where joy comes from, don't take them for granted

***In Jude 24 it says, "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—" (Jude 24)***

***And 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 tells us, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."***

**So rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice!**

- III. Joy comes from God, it is the natural outflow from a heart of gratitude, and it is grounded in a hope and confident assurance of the future

***as Paul told the Romans, "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)***

That is why James could say,

***"Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing." (James 1:2-4)***

Finding joy in suffering can seem like hard words

Yet they are possible because joy is not dependent on our circumstances or how we feel or what we have, all of which can change at any time.

Joy is based on God's eternal love in Christ Jesus

So Jesus said, in this world you will have trouble but take heart for he has overcome the world

**Joni Erickson Tada wrote: Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and the Spirit is eternal. So when we experience His joy, it has a sense or a smell of eternity about it. It becomes timeless. I think those joy filled moments down here on earth are sneak previews that whet our appetite for the heavenly glories above.**

In writing about finding joy in even the most trying of circumstances, John Ortberg recounts his favorite wedding story taken from Robert Fulghum's book, *It Was on Fire When I Lay down on It*.

**He writes about a wedding that was produced on an epic scale by an unhinged character known only as the Mother of the Bride. The logistics—from an eighteen-piece brass and wind ensemble to gift registries spreading across most of the continental United States to 24 bridesmaids, groomsmen, flower pedal throwers, and ring bearers—a scale usually seen only during a military invasion of a sizable country. But the plans were all working—until the climactic moment of the processional**

**Ah, the bride. She had been dressed for hours if not days. No adrenaline was left in her body. Left alone with her father in the reception hall of the church while the march of the maidens went on and on, she had walked among the tables laden with gourmet goodies and absentmindedly sampled first the little pink and yellow and green mints. Then she picked through the silver bowls of mixed nuts and ate the pecans. Followed by a cheese ball or two, some black olives, a handful of glazed almonds, a little sausage with a frilly toothpick stuck in it, a couple of shrimps blanketed in bacon, and a cracker piled with liver pate. To wash this down—a glass of pink champagne. Her father gave it to her. To calm her nerves.**

**What you noticed as the bride stood in the doorway was not her dress, but her face. White. For what was coming down the aisle was a living grenade with the pin pulled out. The bride threw up. Just as she walked by her mother.**

**And by threw up, I don't mean a polite little lady like urp into her handkerchief. She puked. There's just no nice word for it. I mean she hosed the front of the chancel—hitting two bridesmaids, the groom, a ringbearer, and me...**

**Only two people were seen smiling. One was the mother of the groom. And the other was the father of the bride.**

**They ended up pulling themselves together for a much simpler and quieter ceremony in the reception hall. Everyone cried, as people are supposed to do at weddings, mostly because the groom held the bride in his arms through the whole ceremony. And no groom ever kissed a bride more tenderly than he did.**

**The best part of the story is that 10 years later, everybody was invited back for another party to celebrate this disaster. They watched the whole thing on three TV sets—the mother of the**

**bride had had three video cameras going at once during the ceremony and each caught every moment. And the party, it was thrown by the mother of the bride herself.**

**It was a celebration of great joy and laughter even though the wedding had been an unmitigated disaster.**

**He asks, how could all these people rejoice when everything had gone wrong? Because in spite of the mess, the bride still got the groom. At the end of the day that was all that mattered. The bride got the groom.**

**Weeping may last for the night but joy comes in the morning!**

How do we become and remain joy filled people in such a broken and pain filled world?

Look at the promise which comes right near the very end of God's word.

***"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." (Revelation 19:7)***

the bride, which is his church, gets heaven's bridegroom, Jesus and at the end of the day that is what really matters

May the joy of the Lord be your strength, for it is the serious business of heaven

So rejoice in the Lord always and I will say it again, rejoice.