

Choose  
Joy!

# The Faith Messenger

"Christ Our Faith. Christ Our Hope. Christ Our Life"

2330 Hickory Valley Road, Chattanooga, Tennessee 37421  
Sunday School 10:00am • Sunday Morning Worship 11:00am

Volume #2  
Issue #1

January/February 2024

Issue Focus:  
Fruit of the Spirit: JOY

## Event Calendar

We eagerly look forward to the return of Pastor M.C. from his sabbatical, so until he returns, we have temporarily paused both the Free Meal and Jam Session Saturdays. We miss you, Pastor, so very much!

## Birthdays

Pastor M.C. Tolbert	January 11
Greg Holland	January 29
Ralph Brumley	February 10
Yvonne France	February 24

## The Faith Messenger New Format

New Year, fresh outlook, and focused content. Our newsletter is evolving to better match our congregation's needs and our church's mission to make disciples and disciple-makers through equipping the saints by teaching the Word of God and encouraging obedience and application of it to our lives.

To that end, we will be changing to a bi-monthly publishing schedule to allow more time and freedom to develop deeper content that is topically driven. We intentionally focus on Discipleship as Jesus commands in Matthew 28:18-20: *"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"*

On the last page, you'll find a photo montage of some of the highlights of special events we celebrated in the year 2023.

Now more than ever, with the world in such chaos, we must be more attuned to God's heart and mission for our faith walk. The Faith Messenger will supply tools for your faith to educate, equip, and empower your journey to become more like Christ.

## What is The Joy of the Lord?



The Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, repeatedly emphasizes joy, rejoice, and rejoicing, with these words appearing over 300 times. This repetition is not mere coincidence; it is a divine directive highlighting the importance of joy in the believer's journey.

The Hebrew and Greek words for joy, convey a sense of gladness and delight that surpasses mere emotional response. This joy is not a fleeting emotional feeling but a profound state of being, rooted in one's relationship with God.

In today's context, this joy is still as relevant as ever. It is a beacon of hope in a world often clouded by despair and uncertainty. For the believer, "the joy of the Lord" (see Nehemiah 8:10) is a wellspring of strength, offering peace and perseverance amidst life's storms.

It is a joy that does not diminish in the face of suffering but becomes more intense, a visible sign of an invisible trust in a faithful God.

The mystery of this joy lies not in its absence during trials but in its presence and power to transform them. It is a joy that is both a command and a gift, a hallmark of a maturing faith, and a witness to the world of God's unchanging love and faithfulness.

As followers of Christ, embracing this joy is an act of obedience and a journey into deeper understanding and relationship with God. In this joy, we find the strength to face each day, the hope to persevere through trials, and the assurance of God's sovereign care.

The biblical invitation of Philippians 4:4-5: *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice,"* challenges and encourages us to discover a joy that is not dependent on the ebb and flow of life's circumstances but is anchored in the unshakeable character of God. In embracing this joy, we find strength for ourselves, and it empowers us to become lighthouses of hope, proving to a watching world the transformative power of a life rooted in Christ.

## Can Joy Boost Your Health?

Pursuing joy may seem like an elusive, purely emotional goal, but its impact extends far beyond mere feelings. Scientific research increasingly reveals that joy profoundly influences our mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. Here are a few:

**Stress reduction:** Chronic stress, a prevalent issue in modern society, can lead to significant health problems. However, When we experience joy, our body's stress response diminishes. Joy triggers the release of neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin, which foster a sense of well-being and relaxation. Proverbs 17:22 tells us, "A merry heart does good like medicine," a sentiment mirrored in scientific studies showing how positive emotions buffer against stress and improve our overall health.

**Heart health:** Joy and a positive outlook can significantly help heart health. Research shows that joyful individuals have a lower risk of heart disease. Joyful emotions contribute to healthier blood pressure and heart rate variability, reducing the risk of cardiovascular issues.

**Inflammation and immune system:** There is a well-documented connection between emotions and the immune system. Negative emotions, including the absence of joy, can worsen inflammation, which is linked to a myriad of health problems. In contrast, joy and positive emotions can boost the immune system, enhancing our body's ability to fight illnesses and reduce inflammation.

**Mental resilience:** Joy also plays a critical role in mental health. It fosters resilience, enabling individuals to recover more quickly from emotional setbacks and traumas. Joyful people tend to have a more positive outlook on life, which contributes to mental well-being and resilience.

**Social impact:** Being joyful helps the individual and affects their social environment. Joy is contagious; it can uplift those around us, creating a more positive community. Conversely, a lack of joy can lead to social isolation, as people are naturally drawn to positive emotions.



### What Does the Bible Say About Joy?

**Old Testament:** 1 Chronicles 16:10, Nehemiah 8:10, Psalm 5:11, Psalm 16:11, Psalm 32:11, Psalm 33:1, Psalm 68:3, Psalm 97:12, Proverbs 15:30, Proverbs 17:22, Isaiah 12:6, Isaiah 35:10, Isaiah 55:12, Isaiah 61:10, Habakkuk 3:18, Zephaniah 3:14

**New Testament:** Matthew 5:12, Luke 6:23, John 15:11, John 16:22, John 16:24, Acts 2:28, Romans 12:12, Romans 14:17, Galatians 5:22, Philippians 2:18, Philippians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, 1 Peter 1:6, 1 Peter 4:13, Jude 1:24, Revelation 19:7

### What is Joy?

- **Dietrich Bonhoeffer:** "Joy is the simplest form of gratitude."
- **A.W. Tozer:** "The Christian owes it to the world to be supernaturally joyful."
- **R.C. Sproul:** "The essence of the Christian life is to live in the joy of the Lord."
- **Jonathan Edwards:** "True saints are distinguished by the high degree to which they obtain this sweet and joyful communion with God."
- **John Piper:** "Christian joy is the sweet and good experience of the soul that comes from the Holy Spirit as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and the world."
- **Watchman Nee:** "Joy is the echo of God's life within us."
- **John Calvin:** "There is no greater joy than to realize that we are destined for communion with God."
- **Oswald Chambers:** "The joy of the Lord is the expression of His life in me."
- **Martin Luther:** "The heart overflows with gladness and leaps and dances for the joy it has found in God."
- **Thomas Merton:** "Joy is not a mere feeling but an echo of God's life in us."

### How Do We Cultivate Joy Through Daily Gratitude?

Here are 10 practical tips for cultivating joy, focusing on gratitude and thankfulness as foundational elements:



#### Start a Gratitude Journal:

- 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
- Psalm 9:1: "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds."

#### Express Thankfulness Regularly:

- Colossians 3:15: "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful."
- Psalm 100:4: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and bless his name."

#### Mindfulness and Meditation:

- Joshua 1:8: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."
- Psalm 19:14: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

#### Volunteer and Serve Others:

- Hebrews 13:16: "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."
- Galatians 5:13: "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love, serve one another."

#### Connect with Nature:

- Romans 1:20: "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse."
- Psalm 96:11-12: "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy."

#### Practice Positive Affirmations:

- Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."
- Psalm 19:14: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

#### Engage in Activities You Love:

- Ecclesiastes 3:12-13: "I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also, that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man."
- Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

#### Reflect on Past Joyful Moments:

- Psalm 143:5: "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands."
- Lamentations 3:21-23: "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

#### Prayer and Spiritual Practices:

- Philippians 4:6: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."
- James 5:16: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."

### Scripture Memory

**"Light shines on the righteous and joy on the upright in heart."**

**--- Psalm 97:11**

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### Joy Throughout the Ages: How Has the Bible Showcased It?

**NEHEMIAH:** In Nehemiah 8:10, we find the phrase *"the joy of the Lord is your strength."* This joy is a divine gift, serving not only as a source of happiness but as a reservoir of strength. It is a joy that sustains believers through trials and tribulations, reflecting an unwavering trust in God's promises and providence.

**JOB:** The story of Job is another powerful testament to experiencing joy in adversity. Job, a man who faced devastating loss and suffering, never lost his faith in God. In Job 1:21, he says, *"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."* Even in the face of unimaginable grief, Job's words reflect a deep-seated joy and peace in understanding the sovereignty and goodness of God. His story is a striking example of unwavering faith and the joy that comes from complete trust in God's wisdom, despite the darkest circumstances.

**KING DAVID:** One profound example of experiencing joy amidst hardship is seen in the life of King David, particularly through his Psalms. Despite facing immense trials, including persecution from King Saul and personal failings, David consistently finds solace and joy in God. In Psalm 28:7, David declares, *"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise Him."* These words illustrate David's ability to rejoice in the Lord's presence and aid, regardless of his life's tumultuous events. His Psalms are a testament to finding joy in divine communion, trusting God's plan, and celebrating His faithfulness.

**APOSTLE PAUL:** The Apostle Paul echoes this sentiment in Philippians 4, where he declares, *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice"* (Philippians 4:4). Paul penned these words not from a place of comfort, but from the confines of a prison cell. His call to rejoice, therefore, is not dependent on circumstances but on a steadfast relationship with Christ. This rejoicing is interwoven with a contentment that transcends all situations, as Paul explains, *"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content"* (Philippians 4:11).

### What Are Examples of Hymns of Joy Born from Suffering?



The contrast of rejoicing and contentment in hardship underscores a profound truth:

Christian joy is deeply rooted in faith, not in external conditions. Each of these hymns shows the intense ability of faith to transform suffering into expressions of joy and gratitude, offering timeless inspiration and comfort to believers around the world.

#### "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" by Thomas Chisholm

Thomas Chisholm wrote *"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"* in 1923, reflecting on God's constant presence throughout his life, despite his poor health and the instability it brought. The hymn, with lines like *"Morning by morning new mercies I see; all I have needed Thy hand hath provided,"* speaks to Chisholm's recognition of God's unwavering support and provision.

Even in the face of personal struggles and uncertain health, he found a reservoir of joy and gratitude in God's faithfulness. This hymn is still a beloved reminder of the joy and reassurance found in God's consistent care and provision.

#### "Blessed Assurance" by Fanny Crosby

Fanny Crosby, blinded shortly after birth, became one of the most prolific hymn writers in history. Her hymn *"Blessed Assurance,"* written in 1873, exemplifies how she transformed her personal adversity into a source of spiritual strength and joy. The hymn's lines, *"Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine; Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine,"* speak of her unwavering certainty in God's presence and promise.

Crosby's life, marked by a disability that would have disheartened many, became a testament to finding joy in one's relationship with God. Her hymns continue to inspire believers to view their challenges as opportunities to experience God's grace more deeply.

#### "Amazing Grace" by John Newton

John Newton, a former slave trader, underwent a great spiritual transformation that led him to renounce his past and embrace Christianity. His famous hymn *"Amazing Grace,"* written in 1772, was born from this personal journey of suffering and redemption.

The words, *"I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see,"* capture Newton's gratitude and joy in finding salvation and forgiveness despite his troubled past. This hymn, transcending time and tradition, has become a universal symbol of hope and transformation, reminding us of the joy and grace available to all, regardless of our past misdeeds.

#### "It Is Well with My Soul" by Horatio Spafford

In 1873, Horatio Spafford, a successful lawyer and devout Christian, faced overpowering tragedy when the ship carrying his wife and four daughters sank. While his wife survived, all his children perished. Amidst this unimaginable loss, Spafford penned the hymn *"It Is Well with My Soul."*

As he sailed near where his daughters had drowned, Spafford found solace in his unwavering faith. The hymn's stirring lyrics, *"When sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, 'It is well, it is well with my soul,'"* reflect a profound sense of peace and trust in God's plan, despite the depths of his sorrow.

This hymn has since offered comfort and hope to countless believers facing their own trials, embodying the extraordinary power of faith to find joy and gratitude even in the darkest moments.



*Christianity has never been about ignoring pain or glossing over hardships.  
Instead, it is about finding a deeper, more resilient gladness and unswerving joy in God's presence and promises.*

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### Do You Rejoice Always?

Throughout church history, many giants of faith echoed this sentiment. One moving example is the 16th-century reformer **Martin Luther**, who found solace and joy in his faith amidst persecution and challenges. His writings often reflect the joy of a believer who, despite external trials, finds peace in God's promises. He declared:

**"WE ARE SAVED BY FAITH ALONE, BUT THE FAITH THAT SAVES IS NEVER ALONE."**

This quote reflects Luther's profound understanding of faith as not just a belief but an experience that brings joy and companionship with God, even in solitude or hardship.

**"PRAY, AND LET GOD WORRY."**

Luther's simple yet powerful words encapsulate the joy and peace that come from trusting in God's sovereignty. He emphasizes the relief and happiness found in surrendering our worries to God.

**"I HAVE HELD MANY THINGS IN MY HANDS, AND I HAVE LOST THEM ALL; BUT WHATEVER I HAVE PLACED IN GOD'S HANDS, THAT I STILL POSSESS."**

Here, Luther expresses the joy and security of entrusting one's life to God. Despite losing earthly possessions or facing trials, the peace found in God's promises remains.

**"THE HEART OF RELIGION LIES IN ITS PERSONAL PRONOUNS."**

This quote highlights Luther's joy in the personal relationship with God that faith affords. It speaks to the comfort and peace found in a God who is not distant but intimately involved in our lives.

**"A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD, A BULWARK NEVER FAILING; OUR HELPER HE, AMID THE FLOOD OF MORTAL ILLS PREVAILING."**

From his famous hymn, these lines by Luther capture the essence of finding joy and refuge in God's strength and promises, especially during life's most challenging moments.

### "Happiness vs. Joy: Are You Chasing the Right One?"

#### Introduction:

"In a world that often equates success with happiness, it's crucial to pause and ponder the true essence of what we're pursuing. Are we chasing fleeting moments of happiness, or are we looking for the deeper, more enduring joy often mentioned in Scripture? While happiness and joy are perceived as identical, a closer look reveals subtle yet significant differences, especially through the lens of faith. Let's explore these distinctions, understanding why as believers, our quest should align more with joy than mere happiness."

#### Comparative Chart

Aspect	Happiness	Joy
Source	Often derived from external circumstances or material possessions.	Springs from an inner sense of peace and contentment in Christ, our Lord God, regardless of external situations.
Duration	Typically, it is temporary and fluctuates based on conditions.	Enduring, not easily swayed by life's ups and downs. Eternal life is eternal.
Dependence on Circumstances	Highly dependent on favorable conditions and achievements.	Independent of external factors, deeply rooted in spiritual well-being birthed from salvation through Jesus Christ.
Spiritual Aspect	Generally, not associated directly with spiritual life.	Considered a Fruit of the Spirit, closely tied to faith and spiritual growth.
Scriptural References	Associated with worldly success, selfish ambition, and pleasures. Ecclesiastes 2:1-11, Mark 8:36).	Abundantly mentioned in the context of spiritual life and relationship with God (Galatians 5:22, James 1:2-3).

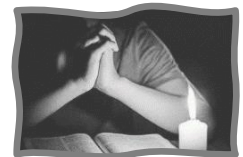
#### Conclusion:

As we reflect on these distinctions, it becomes evident that while happiness is not inherently bad, it is but a shadow compared to the vast depth of joy offered in a life centered around Christ. As described in the Bible, Joy is a steady beacon, unaffected by the storms of life, drawing its strength from a steadfast faith and a grateful heart. In Mark 8:36-38 and Matthew 16:26, we are reminded of the futility of gaining worldly happiness at the cost of spiritual fulfillment.

As followers of Christ, let us seek this eternal joy, which surpasses the world's fleeting pleasures, anchoring our hearts in the truth and love of God. May our pursuit of joy lead us closer to Him, transforming our lives and those around us.

### A Prayer for Joy

"Heavenly Father, I come before You with a heart brimming with gratitude, recognizing the many blessings You provide. The world chases fleeting happiness. Guide me to find true and lasting joy in my relationship with You. Anchor my happiness not in worldly pursuits, but in the steadfast promise of Your love and salvation. Instill a spirit of thankfulness in me, and let my life testify to the joy in You. In my trials, remind me of the enduring joy of my salvation in Christ. May I walk faithfully in Your ways, make my life marked by the Fruit of the Spirit, with joy as a cornerstone of my faith. Daily, renew my mind and heart to find joy in Your presence and fulfill Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen."





### Ready to Discover Joy?

#### Take the Quick Quiz Challenge

(Note: All answers are in this newsletter)

- What does 'the joy of the Lord is your strength' in Nehemiah 8:10 signify?**  
A) Physical strength. B) Emotional strength. C) Spiritual strength.
- In James 1:2, believers are told to 'Count it all joy' when facing what?**  
A) Success. B) Trials. C) Comfort.
- Who wrote the hymn 'It Is Well with My Soul' during personal tragedy?**  
A) Charles Wesley. B) Horatio Spafford. C) John Newton.
- Who wrote 'Rejoice in the Lord always' in Philippians 4:4?**  
A) Paul. B) Peter. C) James.
- What is the primary difference between joy and happiness, as discussed in the newsletter?**  
A) Source. B) Duration. C) Both A and B.
- Which hymn by Fanny Crosby speaks of joy in faith despite her blindness?**  
A) Amazing Grace. B) Blessed Assurance. C) How Great Thou Art.
- Martin Luther found joy and solace in his faith amidst what?**  
A) Wealth. B) Persecution. C) Success.
- In the newsletter, which Apostle is noted for learning contentment in all situations?**  
A) John. B) Paul. C) Peter.
- According to the newsletter, what hinders the Holy Spirit from cultivating joy in us?**  
A) Worldly focus. B) Spiritual disciplines. C) Community service.
- The newsletter discusses joy as a state of being, not just an emotion, rooted in what?**  
A) Personal achievement. B) Wealth. C) Faith in God.

### How Does the Holy Spirit Cultivate Joy in Your Life?

In the tapestry of Christian life, the Holy Spirit plays a pivotal role in cultivating an enduring joy that transcends earthly circumstances. This joy, deeply rooted in our spiritual relationship with God, offers peace and contentment that the world cannot give. Understanding the Holy Spirit's role in this process is essential for every believer seeking a joyous life.

The Holy Spirit, Who is God, often referred to as the Comforter or Helper, is a divine presence that guides, teaches, and empowers believers. One of the most profound roles of the Holy Spirit is to cultivate joy in our hearts. Galatians 5:22-23 says, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."* Here, joy is highlighted as a key attribute of the Spirit's work within us, a clear sign that true joy is a divine gift, nurtured and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

Another significant scripture, Romans 14:17, says, *"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."* This joy is not a fleeting emotion but a state of being that flourishes under the Holy Spirit's influence, irrespective of external conditions.

However, this joy is not automatic. It requires our willingness to surrender and be receptive to the Spirit's work. Hindrances to the Holy Spirit's cultivation of joy in our lives often include unconfessed sin, persistent disobedience, or an undue focus on worldly pleasures and achievements. Such barriers can stifle the Spirit's work, leaving us in a state of spiritual dryness, devoid of the true joy that God desires for us.



The call to action, therefore, is twofold.

First, it is an invitation to a deeper surrender to the Holy Spirit. It is an acknowledgment that our efforts to find joy in worldly gains are ultimately futile, as echoed in Matthew 16:26, *"What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"* This surrender involves letting go of our own agendas and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead our lives.



Second, it is a commitment to cultivate an environment where the Holy Spirit can work effectively. This involves regular prayer, immersion in God's Word, and a conscious effort to foster spiritual disciplines that keep us attuned to the Spirit's guidance.

As we do so, we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us, transforming our lives from the inside out and replacing worldly desires with divine goals and aims.

The Holy Spirit's joy is not just an emotion but an acute experience of God's presence and assurance. It's a joy that stands firm in the face of trials and tribulations, a beacon of hope in a world often shrouded in despair.

As believers, let us earnestly seek this Spirit-filled joy, embracing the Holy Spirit's transformative work in our lives. In doing so, we open ourselves to an everlasting joy that far surpasses any temporary happiness the world can offer.

Let us live in the fullness of this joy, demonstrating to the world the unchanging, unfailing love of God.



Veterans' Memorial



Veterans' Memorial Dedication



Veterans' Memorial Dedication



We Worship God & Honor the Flag



Spiritual Renewal Week



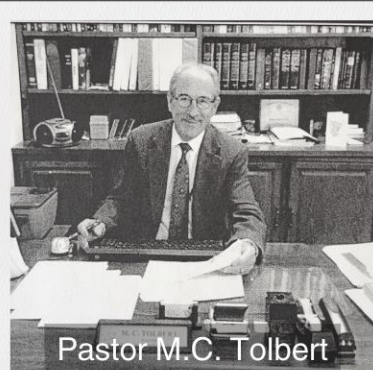
Jam Session



Family Fun Day



Praise Night



Pastor M.C. Tolbert



Our Christmas Altar



Our Christmas Tree & Advent Candles