



# FEED MY SHEEP

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## Obstacles to joy *The fruit of joy, part 2*

As Christians, part of our way of life is to be followers and imitators of Christ. “What would Jesus do” may be a well-worn and trite phrase after years of popularity, but it is still a good guide for everyday life. The pursuit of godliness is not an option for Christians. All the fruits of the spirit are summed up by that word “godliness” and in this current series of monographs we are focusing on the fruit of joy. There are over 500 places in the Bible where the word “joy” or its cognates are found, and thus we are perusing only a sampling of them to assist us in understanding the Bible’s teachings on joy. This next proverb is a difficult one for some of us to practice:

**Proverbs 24:17 Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth:**

It is difficult because it goes contrary to our carnal nature. When our enemy falls or stumbles, that need not be referring to literal falling. It could be when our enemy falls from his position of trust and responsibility, or from whatever office he may hold. He may stumble in his moral behavior. Our carnal nature wants to take delight in seeing him fall, but that is not the higher way.

Moreover, is this not the same principle that Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount? Therefore, we see that Jesus was not really bringing anything new in His admonition to “love thine enemy,” was He? Because here it is in the Old Testament. It is also found way back in the book of Exodus.

**Exodus 23: 4 If thou meet thine enemy’s ox or**

**his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.**

**5 If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.**

So there it is. The “love thine enemy” precept is part of Old Testament law. Next, ...

**Proverbs 27:9 Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel.**

The word *ointment* there and throughout the Bible is not referring to something like Ben-Gay. The Hebrew word is *shemen* which means oil, so this is a reference to botanical essential oils, the healing oils of the Bible.

Our Father-God, Yahweh, is the one ultimate Source of all joy. As His servants, we are blest because He wants us to en-JOY also, even as we serve Him. Back in the wilderness, as Yahweh gave the law through Moses, you will be amazed at the number of times God actually commands “ye shall rejoice” or “thou shalt rejoice” in such and such an activity, whether it is the feasts observances, or in work, or in offering sacrifice. God says rejoice in it.

Chapter 28 of the book of Deuteronomy lists the blessings and the curses which would come upon the children of Israel depending upon their obedience to God’s commands. We are going to focus on verse 47, but for many verse leading up to that, God tells all the curses that are going to upon them and why?...

**Deuteronomy 28:47 Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things;**

As Christians, indeed, as Christians of whom most of us happen to be literal Israelites as well, we too are a servant people, and we are under no less an obligation to serve the Lord with joy and gladness. When we fail to serve Him with joy, in other words, when we are like the caricature character of Wilbur (from last issue), what will happen? I can tell you, curses will come upon the Wilbur's of this world. It is not that God sits up there in heaven ready to throw down lightning bolts upon Wilbur.

In many cases, the miserable life of Wilbur comes about because he drives people away from him. His negative attitude, his lack of true joy, cause him to be obnoxious to everyone except someone equally or more negative than he is. So the curse causeless does not come. (Proverbs 26:2)

Jesus, God made manifest in human form in the New Testament, had much to say about joy and gladness. Just as God wanted His people in the Old Testament to have much joy, so did Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus declared in ...

**John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it [and joy] more abundantly.**

Although the word *it* is supplied by the translators, and correctly so; we would all understand that the pronoun *it* refers back to the word *life*. Jesus said he came so that we would have life and have life more abundantly (which is obviously referring to eternal life, since we already have mortal life). But I would submit to you that the abundant life also would include having joy in this life. Because we read in...

**John 15:11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.**

Recall that the setting here in the gospel of John is the night of the Last Supper, just before the betrayal of Jesus and the night before He was crucified. Did Jesus know what would happen in the next few hours and on the next day? Of course He did.

And yet we notice that He says to his disciples that he wants **His** joy to remain in them so that *they* could be full of joy. Is that a contradiction? How could Jesus have joy when He was fully aware of the excruciating pain that He was about to undergo? It is not a contradiction, but it points out the truth that having joy is not dependent upon our circumstances. Therefore, we are not to wait around until good things happen so that we can be joyful. Just as Jesus did, we too are called to have joy within us *at all times*. One place this is commanded is in ...

**1 Thessalonians 5:14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.**

**15 See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. 16 Rejoice evermore.**

Evermore means "at all times." This injunction to Christians is found in numerous other places as well, particularly in the epistle to the Philippians. Nevertheless, we must admit that for most of us life does not usually provide an overwhelming majority of causes for celebration and rejoicing.

Life is filled with stress, tensions, anxieties, conflicts and problems galore. ? So how can we have joy in the midst of all that, as we are commanded to do? To answer that, let us discuss four obstacles or impediments to joy.

The first is unconfessed sin in our lives. You see, when we are experiencing true joy, it is because we are connecting with our Creator. He is the source of true joy. But what happens when we have unconfessed sin in our conscience? It breaks that connection or communion with our Father, doesn't it? If there is a distance between you and God, guess who moved? God tells us in Isaiah 59.

**Isaiah 59:1 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear:**

**2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear.**

Look at Psalm 32. This is a David's dramatic account of the physical and psychological effects upon

himself as he agonized over his sins. He is clearly a man without joy. First, he tells the effects when he was stubbornly refusing to confess.

**Psalm 32:3** When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.

**4** For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

**5** I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

**10** Many sorrows *shall be* to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about.

**11** Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.

Psalm 51 is the psalm David wrote upon his confession of his sin with Bathsheba.

**Psalm 51:1** <To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.> Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

**2** Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

**3** For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

If you have ever felt like David did here, where your sin is ever before you, then that alone is a cause for joy because it means that God has not seared your conscience to the point where you can no longer hear anything from God, nor feel the pricks of the Holy Spirit working upon your conscience. David pleads with God:

**7** Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

And now notice the *result* of this conscience-cleansing by God, the forgiveness of sins.

**8** Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

**9** Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

**10** Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

**11** Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

**12** Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me *with thy* free spirit.

So when we are no longer finding the joy of salvation present in our daily life, then it is time to search our soul and see if the problem is because of unconfessed sin. Perhaps it is not an overt sin, but a darkened heart due to anger, bitterness, resentment, jealousy, a critical attitude, an uncaring spirit. We cannot show forth the fruit of joy when it is being blocked by any of those attitudes of the heart.

A second obstacle to experiencing joy on a continual basis is when we are unduly proud. I am not saying that we should not take pride in our work, for example. If you build cabinetry or sell insurance, one can take pride in the fact that we do a good job.

But what we are speaking about here is when it becomes a carnal thing. That happens when we neglect to acknowledge God as the source and reason for our success. He gave us the talents and wherewithal in the first place, so that we *could* do a good job.

This puffy pride of self is the arm of the flesh at work. Seven times in the OT and twice in the New, we find the phrase “rejoice in the Lord.” In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul makes it clear that we will either do one or the other: we will either place confidence in the flesh, in the works of our own hands, or we will rejoice in what the Lord has done through us.

**Philippians 3:1** Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you *it is* safe.

**2** Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

**3** For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

So we see there how that when we place confidence in the works of our own hands, that is when we fail to rejoice in the Lord. This of course is a sin in itself, but it can be the main cause of why we are not experiencing continuous joy in our life.

It seemed that Jesus was also applying this principle to ministry because you remember when He sent out the seventy disciples to get some practical experience in casting out demons and so forth. Pay attention to the joy words now:

**Luke 10:17 And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.**

**18 And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.**

**19 Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.**

**20 Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.**

So it appears that Jesus was not discouraging joy per se, but He was warning them about what the basis of their joy was. They were not to rejoice in the *success* of their ministry, as in, “See that? We can handle those evil spirits.” — Puffing themselves up. Success in a ministry can come and go, but our names are written in heaven for all eternity. And if we think we had anything to do with that, then we again are failing to give the credit where it is due.

Our names are written in heaven because God first chose us. Whenever we “got saved,” it is because we were fulfilling the script that God had written for us before we were even born. All the credit goes to God. Now, just as a sidebar of interest, let’s continue into the next verse.

This principle is applicable even if you are not in full-time ministry work. Because if you are a Christian, you are in fact in full-time ministry work. Whether you work at an office, a factory, a farm or family-rearing, your manner of life is always on display to someone. Non-believers will form much of their opinion of Christianity based upon how you and I walk the walk.

**Luke 10:21 In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes:**

Question: who was Jesus calling babes here? Not

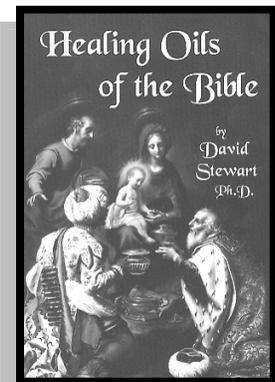
to their faces, of course, but in His private discussion with the Father. The seventy disciples! Imagine that! These are the people who have been closest to the Savior throughout His ministry and *they* are mere babes. Thinking about that should keep any of us from getting puffed up with spiritual pride.

Now, there are two more obstacles or impediments to experiencing continuous joy in our life, and these two are very closely related because both of them have to do with our response when bad things happen to us.

These two obstacles to joy are chastenings and trials. Both involve our suffering, but here is the chief difference between the two. Chastening is when God brings suffering in order to discipline us for sin in our lives, to correct our behavior, or to change our attitudes of the heart. Trials, on the other hand, are designed by God in order to grow our faith, not to deal with sin in our lives. Both trials and discipline are painful and both are for our ultimate good. For that reason we have cause to rejoice *through* our trials and chastenings. (*To be continued.*)

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