

Joy; It's a Choice - Part 1

John Pollock

Recorded August 26, 2017

I'm going to start today by giving each of you an assignment. I want you to take a few seconds and in your mind or in your notes, define the word "joy." Again, for those of you in the local congregation, for those on the call-in line, for those of you who may hear this sermon in the weeks ahead, let's take about ten seconds and please define for yourselves the word "joy."

Okay, that's about ten seconds. So, you each have a definition in your mind or written down. Now let's read a couple of dictionary definitions of the word "joy." The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines Joy as, *the emotion evoked by wellbeing, success or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires*. From dictionary.com, we find the definition of Joy as, *the emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or something satisfying*. It goes on to state, *keen pleasure or relation*. The free dictionary.com gives the following definition of joy: *intense and especially ecstatic happiness or an instance of such feeling*. Those definitions are from those three resources.

I don't know if you caught a common thread among those definitions. The common thread is an emotional feeling, or just the word "emotion." True, joy is an emotion, but for the purpose of this message today, I want us to consider yet another definition. I want us to consider joy as defined as *a choice*. You see, joy is your choice and joy is my choice. Each of us can choose to be joyful or choose not to be.

Now it's an understatement to say that within the great Church of God today there is pain, suffering, and distress. Just look at the weekly updates or prayer. As humans, we cannot escape the reality of life. We cannot avoid all the pains of life. But, you know what? We can avoid joy. I'm not saying we should. I'm just saying it's our choice. God allows it. God allows you and me to be as miserable or as wretched as we want to be. These are choices. If you want to be miserable, you can be. No one will stop you. If you want to be wretched, it's simple, just be wretched. No one will stop you. It's our choice, but joy is also our choice, especially in times of trials. That's what I want to speak about for the next few moments. It's joy as we face trials.

In his book, [Profiles in Courage](#), John F. Kennedy writes the following.

Great crises produce great men and great deeds of courage.

It's true that a crisis or a trial can help to make a person. It's also true that a trial or a crisis can reveal the person. By that I mean it shows what the person is really made of. How we handle difficulties and how we handle trials, how we handle conflicts, health issues, suffering, distress and pain in our lives depends largely upon what kind of character we have as individuals.

Let's turn to a very basic scripture on how we are to respond to a trial or trials. James wrote to the scattered brethren. Today I am actually using a Bible. I have been accused of putting scriptures in my notes and then not giving you time to turn to those scriptures, so I'm trying to break myself of reading the scriptures too fast. I'm going to go ahead and turn to the scriptures along with you, even though the scriptures are in my notes. Here we will emphasize verses 2 through 4.

James 1:1. *James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. (NKJV)*

By extension, those are us today.

2) *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,*
3) *knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*
4) *But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (NKJV)*

If we are to have the kind of joy that James is encouraging here, we must first understand what joy truly is. You see, joy can be an emotion and it can be expressed emotionally. An example would be, "Oh, Honey, thank you so much for that five-carat diamond anniversary ring. I just love it!" Well, that's a dream that Shelly has had for a number of years. I think if I came home with a rock that size, she would actually divorce me. You see, joy is expressed in emotional ways, but joy is not only an emotion, it's a choice. Joy is not based upon some circumstance such as receiving an expensive gift. Real joy is based on an attitude and that attitude is based on our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Turn please to the listing of the fruit of the spirit.

Galatians 5:22. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23) gentleness, self-control... (NKJV)*

I've always wondered and found it interesting that Paul was inspired to use the singular word "fruit" when listing multiple fruits. It's just a conjecture on my part, but could it not be the fact that all fruits listed are encompassed within the first fruit listed, that of love? Anyway, that's not my point here. What I'm getting at is the first three fruits listed are love, joy and peace, with joy being listed in the middle. Why is that? Why would joy be listed in the middle? We're not a hundred percent sure. We know it's inspired by God, but is it possibly due to joy being the glue or the bonding agent that holds love and peace together? That's something to consider and think about.

It's interesting that the apostle who wrote so much concerning love, gives us Christ's own words here about trials and tribulation. The reason? Christ tells us how He overcame such, how to handle crises and trials in our lives.

John 16:33. *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*” (NKJV)

Can we see the encouragement in Christ’s statement here? Be joyful, be cheerful, for He (Christ) overcame the world. How? Well, John 17:1. Remember, there’s not a chapter break in the original text, so as soon as Christ finished His words in verse 33 in chapter 6, He goes on to state:

John 17:1. *Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,
2) as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.
3) And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
4) I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.
5) And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.* (NKJV)

Christ is telling us here, in verse 33 of John 16, to be joyful in the trials of this life, because He (Christ) overcame the world through the relationship He had with His Father, the closeness, the bond that He had with His Father. Look at the admonition in verse 3.

3) And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (NKJV)

We are to know the Father, the only true God, just as Jesus Christ knew His Father. We are to have that same relationship, and in doing so, we too can overcome the trials of this life. We too can choose to do so with an attitude of joy in our lives.

We find in scripture two aspects of joy, one being the kinds of joy, the other being the descriptions of joy.

This sermon is titled:

Joy; It’s a Choice - Part 1

We’re going to review the different kinds of joy and we will then review the diverse descriptions of joy, and then we will look at scriptures that will help us to have a greater understanding as to why joy is a choice. That aspect will come in part 2. First, what are the various kinds of joy found in God’s word?

1. Foolish joy.

That kind of sounds like an oxymoron in a sense, but foolish joy.

Proverbs 15:21. *Foolishness brings joy to those with no sense; a sensible person stays on the right path. (NLT)*

Coffman's Commentaries on the Bible has this to say about this verse, and once again I want to read the verse from the New Living Translation.

Proverbs 15:21. *Foolishness brings joy to those with no sense; a sensible person stays on the right path. (NLT)*

Coffman states the following:

This stresses the element of choice in the career of a fool. The playboy follows his fancy; the man of discernment is concerned to set the straight course of his life.

I really appreciate the following from Coffman:

To act the idiot is fun to the empty headed, but the man of intelligence forges straight ahead.

Note here that Coffman uses the word "choice" in his comments. This stresses the element of choice in the career of a fool. In other words, foolishness may bring joy to the empty headed, but there is intelligence in those who choose to follow what we find in the gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 7:13. *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. (NKJV)*

Wide is the gate and broad is the way to the foolishness found in Proverbs 15:21 which we just read.

2. Temporary joy.

Matthew 13:3. *Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow.*

4) And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.

5) Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth.

6) But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.

7) And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them.

8) *But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*

9) *He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (NKJV)*

Our key verses here are 5 and 6. Let's drop down to the beginning of verse 20 for an explanation as to this parable.

20) *But he who received the seed on stony places [direct reference to verse 5], this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;*

21) *yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. (NKJV)*

That's in direct reference to verse 6.

The point being made here is that one can receive understanding or receive the truth with joy, but if we're not grounded firmly in God's word, that joy will only be temporary, especially when trials spring up in our lives. We must be grounded firmly in the truth of God's word. If not, the joy of receiving understanding will only be temporary.

3. The joy of motherhood.

This is one that men cannot fully appreciate. By men I mean the masculine of creation.

John 16:21. *A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. (NKJV)*

Now men might experience the joy of birth, but we will never understand in the flesh the joy of motherhood and the joyful bond that is created between a mother and her child. With that being said, we still can come to understand that men as well as women who have never experienced childbirth, they will finally understand the joy of motherhood when they experience what we read here in verse 22.

22) *Therefore, you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. (NKJV)*

There will come a time when the joy that we have, no one will take from us. This leads us directly into the fourth kind of joy.

4. The joy of the future.

Matthew 25:14. *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.*

15) *And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.*

16) *Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.*

17) *And likewise, he who had received two gained two more also.*

...

19) *After a long time, the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.*

20) *“So, he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ (NKJV)*

You can see that this servant made a choice.

21) *His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’*

22) *He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’*

23) *His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ (NKJV)*

What I find interesting here is that the two who entered into the joy of the Lord did what? I just touched base on it a moment ago. They made a choice. They took the talents given and they increased the talents and their choice brought joy.

To this point, we have reviewed four types of joy; those being a foolish joy, a temporary joy, motherly joy, and then joy of the future, joy in the Lord.

At this point, we will look at how joy is described in scripture.

1. The first description of joy in scripture is that it is everlasting.

Isaiah 51:11. *So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (NKJV)*

You can also find reference to this verse in Isaiah 39:10. We find here that this joy, experienced by the ransomed of the Lord, is everlasting. This verse also indicates that at some point, the ransomed had made a choice, and through that choice, they obtained joy, everlasting joy.

At least for me, it's hard to wrap my head around this word “everlasting.” What does it really mean? For you see, in the flesh, nothing is everlasting. We can experience joy from time to time, but it's temporary as we found earlier. Everlasting; what does it really mean? We could turn to any dictionary for a definition, but I want us to consider what

we read in Revelation, chapter 21, regarding everlasting. We're looking at a definition, not the only definition of what everlasting can mean.

Revelation 21:1. *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea. (NKJV)*

At this point in time, the physical is a thing of the past.

2) *Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

3) *And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.*

4) *And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."* (NKJV)

I hope you can see the everlasting in those verses; no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain as every tear is wiped away. That is everlasting joy. However, we can't stop reading there.

6) *And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. (NKJV)*

Look at the everlasting joy found here.

7) *He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. (NKJV)*

We find here individuals who have made choices, the choice of overcoming and with that choice comes joy, an everlasting joy.

2. A second description of joy that we can find in scripture is that it is great.

We don't turn here very often. What I find interesting here is not only the description of joy as being great, but the reason as to why Paul chose to refer to this joy as great.

Philemon 1. *Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer,*

2) *to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church [ekklesia] in your house:*

3) *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

4) *I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,*

5) *hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints,*

6) *that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.*

7) *For we ... (NKJV)*

That's Paul and Timothy, but the "we" is also in reference to five others of Paul's fellow laborers.

7b) *... have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother. (NKJV)*

Great joy because the hearts of the saints had been refreshed by Philemon. You see, Philemon had made a choice, a choice to love the brethren, and it brought great joy to Paul and Timothy. One can assume it brought joy to the brethren in Philemon's house, and one can also assume that it brought great joy to Philemon himself. You see, joy is a choice.

You can also find great joy in the following. You can look these up later. You can also find great joy in the conversion of the Gentiles. You can find great joy in the healings that took place during the physical life of Christ. You can find great joy in the ascension of Christ. There was great joy in the announcement of Christ's birth. There was great joy shown at the dedication by Nehemiah of the wall in Jerusalem. There was great joy shown by those who kept the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread by Hezekiah. You can also find great joy taking place when David proclaimed Solomon as king.

If you have access to a topical Bible, look up the word "joy" and you'll be absolutely surprised as to the references found there, especially great joy.

3. A third description of joy found in God's word is that joy is full.

1 John 1:1. *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—*

2) the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

3) that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

4) And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (NKJV)

The word "full" is Strong's No. 4137. I'm not about to try to pronounce it. It's transliterated as "pepleeromenee" and it means *to make full, to fill up, to complete*. Now hold your thought that our joy is to be full, and turn to John 15. We will read Christ's own words regarding the fullness of joy.

John 15:11. *"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. (NKJV)*

We need to stop here and analyze this verse from two aspects.

The first aspect is: What things was Christ referring to when He states, "Things that I have spoken?" Well, logic dictates that it would be the things mentioned prior to His statement, because He uses the word "spoken" in the past tense. So, it would be the things spoken from verse 1 of chapter 15 to this point in verse 11. You see, as chapter 14 ends, Christ completely changes the subject matter from that of the new commandment given, found in chapter 14, to the subject matter of chapter 15, that of Christ being the true vine.

The second aspect of verse 11 is its placement. What we find prior to verse 11, beginning in verse 1, we find this. I will read it from the New International Version.

John 15:1. *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.*

2) He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

3) You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

4) Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5) "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

6) If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

7) If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

8) This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

9) "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

10) If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

11) I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (NIV)

So as Christ is summarizing His true vine analogy, He summarizes it with the subject of the Father's love towards Him and His love towards us. Then we find verse 11, which once again reads, *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.* Then Christ continues in verse 12 with the subject of love, that we are to love one another. We'll read verses 12 through 17 from the NIV.

12) My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

13) Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

14) You are my friends if you do what I command.

15) I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

16) *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.*

17) *This is my command: Love each other. (NIV)*

Let's complete this point on the fullness of love by keeping fresh in our minds what we just read in John 15, and now turn to John 17. I'm still going to read from the NIV.

John 17:1. *After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:*

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

2) *For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.*

3) *Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

4) *I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.*

5) *And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*

6) *“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.*

7) *Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you.*

8) *For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.*

9) *I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.*

...

13) *“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. (NIV)*

Two things here; I believe that John was inspired to place verse 11 of John 15 exactly where God wanted it. It was the bridge needed to show the fullness of joy in the love that the Father and the Son share, and the fullness of joy that we should have with their love towards us and our love towards one another.

I hope you don't think that I'm trying to be syrupy Protestant here. I'm just reading what scripture says.

4. The fourth aspect of joy is that it is exceeding.

1 Peter 4:12. *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;*

13) *but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. (NKJV)*

We are all familiar with these two scriptures. I will read verse 13 and to the end of the chapter from the NLT. It's a perfect bridge, if you will, to our next set of scriptures

13) *Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.*

14) *If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you.*

15) *If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs.*

16) *But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name!*

17) *For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God's household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God's Good News?*

18) *And also, "If the righteous are barely saved, what will happen to godless sinners?"*

19) *So, if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you. (NLT)*

Verses 13 and 19 are transition verses as we move into the epistle of Jude to verse 24.

Jude 24. *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, (NKJV)*

Jude is encouraging each of us to remember that God is all powerful and there will be exceeding joy when we are presented faultless at the resurrection if we obey Him now in the physical flesh.

So, where are we in today's message? We reviewed four kinds or types of joy, those being foolish joy, temporary joy, motherly joy and future joy. We've reviewed four descriptions of joy, those being everlasting, great, full and exceeding.

In part 2 of this two-part sermon, we will review what was presented today and we will visit scriptures that will help each of us to better understand why joy is not just an emotion, but that joy can be a choice for each and every one of us.