

JOY - Our Foundational Purpose By Skip Elmore

Something inside each of us knows and feels this; that joy should be foundational to experiencing life. We were created to have a continuous perpetual-like ‘Joy’ as a key component of our relationship with our Lord prior to the fall (Genesis 3:6). We remain hungry for it even though we can’t quite define it or know how to fill that desperate hollow place within our soul. Our desire for joy is not secondary to our human experience; it is fundamental! Joy makes us complete!!! We don’t practice joy; it will possess us, but only to the degree that we progress toward righteousness.

This is not an article addressing how to feel better about circumstances, situations or self-worth. We’ve all had considerable counseling on such needs as these. It’s about moving from grasping to receiving. Joy is not about the absence of challenges. We all have these. This article is about our Creator’s intended experiential purpose for humanity before the fallen nature. The closest we can get to experiencing heaven while remaining here is when our personal identification becomes that of Joy, limited as it will be on this side of eternity.

How do we reconcile the fact that, if we are made for joy, this world includes so much suffering and, seemingly, so little joy? Jesus taught His followers plainly that pain is a part of our experience in this life and suffering is a part of the Christian journey. John 16:33 says *“In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.”*

It is so very easy to believe the enemy’s lie that God must be holding out on us with the ‘good’ He could be freely distributing. We then become selfish “graspers” of whatever offers an escape from the reality of needs and suffering through pursuing destructive manifestations of self gratification rather than being “receivers” of that foundational life purpose which leads to the hosting of, you guessed it, joy.

When trouble arrives we may subliminally interpret it as God failing us, even when we know better. Feelings of pain, abandonment, shame, fear and loneliness, on and on they ensue. To alleviate these, we become tempted to turn to whatever escape hatches we’ve been exposed to earlier, perhaps when habits were more controllable.

The grasping can be for nearly anything; food, alcohol, justice, position, money, ministry, esteem issues, power, love, sexual activities, gambling, even godliness. The act of grasping is what the enemy is after. It is not the object we are grasping that becomes his tool of destruction; it is the grasping in any form that demonstrates the self-will of taking rather than the faith to trust and rest on receiving from God.

Consider Adam and Eve in the Garden. The temptation was centered on the notion that what God was withholding from them was to *“be like God”* (Genesis 3:5). The irony is that among all of our Lord’s Creation, none were as much like God as man and woman. To humanity and humanity alone, God had given His image and His likeness (Genesis 1:26, 27). The enemy’s main approach in temptation was to get Eve and Adam to believe God was holding out “good” from them and that if they were going to get all the good they could, they would need to choose that self directed strategy; grasping.

We experience small emotional hints of joy when we help someone with a need, but when we become cognitive recipients of ‘Grace’ as a new unearned ‘Position of Blameless Worthiness’ and ‘Spiritual Authority’, it becomes more than a motivator of serving or a personality trait. Joy then possesses the receiver!!!

So, is godly joy readily available to us? The answer: Yes and no! No in the sense that godly joy does not usually come to us in the same overpowering emotional way sexual pleasures do. Joy will never reach out to hold us captive against our will.

And, yes, godly joy is always ours when we choose to purge perpetual dwelling on needs, desires and fear and become open recipients of spiritual enlightenment. That is when we experience possessing our Lord’s Holy Spirit. That’s when joy becomes more of who we are than a demonstration of our emotions and personality traits.

Practice gratitude. Stop comparing equities and inequities. We must accept who we are and prepare for the journey ahead. Get a proper perspective on how unimportant present circumstances and situations are in comparison to the promises of a Christ filled eternity. Dedicate the rest of life to placing bright colors on what you have. So many miss the blessings of their life while restlessly pursuing a life they think they want. Life is not fair; we need to get over it and live joyously.

We can endure devastating inequities when we become enlightened with the spiritual wisdom that allows us to contemplate the wondrous ‘Joys’ of eternity. The best way to cultivate faith in that dream is to let joy dominate our lives now.

This will only happen when we stop allowing our perception of self-worth to be based on imperfections and disappointments. We all have them; we were born after the garden scene ended. This causes the enemy to falsely convince us our Lord’s love is not really ‘unconditional’ and that we’re not lovable because we are flawed.

The first step in receiving joy is to choose to understand and accept our Lord’s unconditional love for what it is; unconditional!!! This allows us to practice receiving in a genuine way and then to be able to laugh at ourselves. Let’s be who we are, warts and all. This allows us to receive a full measure of the joy we were intended to possess before that first bad choice, the fallen nature of humanity in Genesis. We can then commence honoring our body, our soul and our spirit and see ourselves the way God sees us. God sees the perfect merger of the egg and the sperm creating us in His image as it would have been before the fallen nature of humanity initiated any depravities or inequities we are experiencing in this life.

Don’t forget, while joy is who we are more than just an emotional display, it seems to be contagious when our friends get around us and wonder about the source of the hope we display. Real joy can not be hidden.

There was no way Paul could have hidden his joy while chained to a smelly guard in a cold damp dungeon. You won’t be able to hide yours either. You will be a new creature regardless of the circumstances. Life without ‘faith driven hope’ that allows anticipation of eternal joy is like an unsharpened pencil – there is no point!!!