



DESIGNED FOR JOY

7 Ways to
Take Back
Your Joy

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Introduction

A life filled with joy is God's original desire for us.

As believers, we're supposed to have the joy of the Lord in us, but it doesn't always look that way on the outside! Sometimes, if we've grown up around legalistic religion, we even view God as overly serious and Christians who are *too happy* as fake.

But if that view were correct, **why did God bother to give us a sense of humour or a desire to enjoy life?** If life was not meant to be enjoyed, why didn't God put Adam and Eve in the desert of Eden? He put them in a *garden* filled with laughter, joy and good things!

A life filled with joy is God's original desire for us. We need to make sure our belief system is based on what God's Word actually says!

"Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!"
Nehemiah 8:10 (NLT)

The truth is, **we do have the joy of the Lord in us, but to experience that deep, unstoppable joy, we need to learn how to cultivate it.** We need to renew our minds so we can laugh, enjoy and believe, in the midst of whatever we're facing in life.

God is not some robotic, spiritual blob in the sky. He has emotions, and you are made in His image and likeness, so He's designed you with emotions too. It's His plan for you to have joy and happiness!

As believers, we are in God's family. Jesus dwells inside of us and we're bound for Heaven, but He also wants us to enjoy our time here on Earth. After all, happiness and joy were designed by God for you to experience deeply in your daily walk with Him!

Let's explore seven ways to take back the joy that belongs to you.

Love Others

Loving somebody else brings you more joy than just being loved.

Most people endlessly pursue happiness, but don't actually know how to find it... or how to hold onto it if they do find it.

There are several qualities that can cultivate joy in your life, and one of them is *love*. You know, most people think the best thing in life is to be loved. Did you know that's not true? That's actually *second* best.

The number one thing is *giving* love.

Think about it: fifty people could love you without you knowing it. In fact, there are people whose spouses love them to pieces, yet they don't believe it. It's wonderful to be loved, but I've noticed that **the happiest folks on the planet are outward-focused lovers of others.**

Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 22:37-39 (NKJV)

Jesus even places love in order: love God, love your neighbour, love yourself. When we get that order mixed up, it messes us up too. When we focus on ourselves first, we tend to worry, "I wonder if anyone really loves me," or, "My wife used to make me breakfast to show she loves me, but now she doesn't pour milk on my cornflakes anymore."

Reaching out and loving somebody has a different impact on your life. The most joyful people are the ones who stop fretting about who loves them and just reach out and love people. **Loving somebody else brings you more joy than just being loved.**

Love God first, then get out there and find out who you can show love to! You'll find your joy increasing as you put this into practice.

Stay Optimistic

What we think and focus on will affect how we live out our lives.

God commands us to be optimists.

Another important quality that cultivates joy is optimism. Optimists and pessimists refer to those who see the glass as half full or half empty. Pessimists think they're realists and see optimists as wishful thinkers.

But is that accurate? In fact, both statements are true. However, **choosing which perspective you focus on will impact how you go through life.** What we think and focus on will affect how we live out our lives.

People who maintain an optimistic outlook look at situations and see good, even in the midst of crisis. When things aren't working out or there's an unexpected bump in the road, they focus on hope. Optimists enjoy life to a much greater degree than pessimists.

Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse.

Philippians 4:8 (MSG)

Philippians 4:8 tells us to focus on the positive instead of the negative. Why? Because God knows what it does to your heart and mind—and ultimately to your life and those around you. There will always be stuff going on around us and issues popping up in our lives. If you get focused on it, you'll be amazed at how quickly you'll become pessimistic. If you struggle with negativity, meditate on what Philippians 4:8 advises and train your thoughts obey its teaching.

When you follow God's direction and consciously choose to focus on the glass half full, **His joy in you becomes easy to access!**

Let Courage Fuel Your Joy

Feeling fear doesn't mean you can't do something; just do it afraid.

The search for happiness can seem elusive. But we can enjoy a continual spring of inner joy by knowing the qualities that generate it and working on the skills to develop those qualities.

For example, we know loving others and choosing optimism brings joy. **Another source of joy is choosing to live courageously.**

In Joshua chapter one, Joshua needed courage to face an overwhelming task ahead of him. God designated him to lead millions of people into the Promised Land. And guess what? Joshua was probably a bit scared—which might explain why being strong and of good courage is mentioned four times in that chapter alone! (See Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, 18, NKJV.) But Joshua's courage moved God's people to where they needed to go.

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Joshua 1:9 (NKJV)

See, courage is not the absence of fear. **Courage is choosing to push through fear and forge ahead anyway.**

Many people think, "When the fear is gone, I'll go for it." But that excuse keeps you immobile. Fear will always push at you; there is no outwaiting it. At that rate, you'll be ninety-nine and still saying, "Aww, I wish I was singing in that choir!" or "I believe this is what God's called me to do, but I'm too afraid." Imagine what would have happened to the Israelites if Joshua had held that mentality!

In order to experience freedom and joy, living courageously means going ahead despite the fear. After all, **feeling fear doesn't mean you can't do something; just do it afraid.** And don't worry—God is with you through it all!

Live Proactively

Decide to rise up and live with purpose... and watch joy begin to overflow.

Living proactively helps us lead a more joyful life.

Growing up, my friends and I used to play a game called pinball. When a plunger was pulled back and released, it would launch a steel ball bearing up to the top of the board. Then it would roll back down the board, running into posts and blockades, and bouncing all over the place. That ball bearing seemed alive the way it bounced around the board, but in reality, it simply reacted to everything it ran into.

Maybe you struggle to live fully because you feel like that ball bearing, believing you're unable to live the way you want due to the constant problems you run into. Problem—BOOM. Another problem—BOOM.

"I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]."

John 10:10 (AMP)

But life is not the enemy. **When you decide to actively pursue life purposefully rather than passively reacting to whatever life brings, it changes the way you live.**

In fact, by meditating on God's Word, Joshua 1:8 says you will make your way prosperous. So, does that mean we read the Bible and then sit by the door, waiting for the postman to deliver a cheque from Heaven? No, **living proactively means you engage in life—learning, growing and continually applying skills to all areas of your life!** Living proactively means not fearfully looking out the window and wondering, "What's going to happen next?"

Nobody can stop you from living out the phenomenal life that Jesus intended for you to have. That ability belongs to you. Decide to rise up and live with purpose... and watch joy begin to overflow as you do!

Stand in His Shadow

No matter what, God's got you covered.

Where do we find security?

When I was a young man, I remember being told, "If you want security, get a government job." Yet the average Canadian changes jobs twelve times in their lifetime! Placing your sense of security in careers, money or government poses the risk of failing you at some point.

So, security needs to be an internal thing between you and God, because there is nothing on this planet that you can truly trust like Him. That's why Psalm 91 is so comforting—it reminds believers to find our security, peace and protection in Jesus.

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the Lord: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.

Psalm 91:1-2 (NLT)

Think about this verse for a minute. I can see my shadow on the ground. If somebody was going to stand in my shadow, they'd have to be right beside me. In other words, rest, comfort and relief is found by sticking close to God.

That's why when the storms of life blow—whether in finances, marriage, home life or health—stay tucked in close to God by digging into His Word daily. Many people worry constantly about losing their job, health or relationships, but security in **God is different because He will never lose you.** And that brings incredible security to your heart and mind!

When you develop a certainty and confidence in Jesus, you'll rise up differently in the morning, unafraid of the future or what it holds. You'll enjoy life on a new level—because you'll know no matter what, **God's got you covered.**

Keep Things Healthy

Take care of yourself like you would someone you love!

Good health really affects happiness, yet it's one quality that we often take for granted when we're well.

We've all experienced sickness to varying degrees, and we know loved ones who struggle with their health or are even in Heaven today with Jesus. We can't always answer why, but we know from God's Word that **our bodies, our health and our well-being all matter to God**. God says your body is Holy Spirit's temple, so when you treat it like that—as something precious by loving and caring for it to the best of your ability—you honour Him.

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NLT)

I'm certainly not saying that you can't be happy if you're not in perfect health or physical fitness, but we all know that we feel better when we eat right, exercise, get proper rest and **take care of ourselves like we would someone we love!** After all, happiness is a bigger struggle if we're living in pain every day.

However, we do serve a God who is bigger than any struggle, and He gives us joy that transcends our circumstances! God is always for your health and healing (Jeremiah 30:17), and He also empowers us to do our part in helping to maintain these bodies He's given us. The old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," is actually a Biblical concept!

Let's do all we can to take care of our health and treat our bodies like the amazing temples of God they are.

Keep Your Perspective in Check

Your life serves a big purpose and an even bigger God.

Proper perspective in life brings joy.

Have you ever stood in line behind someone who was ticked off before ever getting to the checkout? First, they didn't get the parking spot they wanted. Then, they landed the shopping cart with the wobbly wheel, and now they're flipping out on the teenage cashier because she gave them the wrong change.

When we're unhappy, often it's because we've become problem-focused, and we're viewing things in black or white. But handling life from a small, often self-focused perspective feeds discontentment. When we choose a more outward, solution-based focus where we're willing to see shades of grey, we're happier. By choosing to keep perspective amidst problems, we **don't lose sight of the big picture in life.**

Truthfully, no one tiptoes through the tulips every day. Everyone deals with people butting in line, inconveniences and hurt. **But knowing we have Jesus and an incredible, Heavenly future should correct our perspective.** You could be upset, but then hear about someone who lost their spouse, causing you to rethink what's truly important. Maybe while racing into work late, you come upon a bad accident, and you regain perspective and slow down to get there safely.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Romans 8:18 (NKJV)

Holding a **big picture mentality on life and reminding ourselves of our eternal value helps us lead fuller, joyful lives.** Take care of things, but don't sweat the small stuff unnecessarily. Your life serves a big purpose and an even bigger God. Take joy in that!

Conclusion

Whatever is going on in your life, God is always real and always there.

The joy of the Lord is not elusive. It isn't something we need to wrestle with or fight to hold captive. Actually, it is always with you! Sometimes, all we need to learn is how to get it bubbling out of us again.

A friend of mine told us how he was digging a well when he ended up hitting a natural spring, resulting in an artesian well. He didn't need a pump; the fresh water readily bubbled up out of the ground on its own, so they capped it and now enjoy a source of clean, clear water. As he gave me a tour of the operation, it reminded me of the joy we have in Jesus. It's like that artesian well. It can't wait to bubble out all over your life, even in the midst of unhappy circumstances.

No matter what is going on in your life, God is always real and always there. Even on your toughest days, His joy is still there for you.

For you are the fountain of life, and the light by which we see.

Psalms 36:9 (NLT)

It's not hiding, and you don't need to dig to find it; God's joy is waiting within you. As you study His Word and spend time with Him, His joy grows in you. Then, even when facing problems, you'll be empowered to **rise up and live life to the fullest... until it overflows!**