

# Consider it All Joy

## James 1:2-4

Recently a dear friend of mine asked me if I thought we would ever get to the point in our relationship with God where our feelings would take a back-seat to our faith. She hoped there was some level of spiritual maturity that we could reach where our feelings - our human emotions -- would not bother us anymore.

My first reaction was that the walk of faith is a walk we take in spite of our feelings rather than in stead of them. I thought of the prophet Elijah. Who knew God better than Elijah? Who had ever been used in a mightier way by God than Elijah? Yet he struggled with his feelings of fear and isolation. The scriptures honestly portray his struggle with depression.

Armed with Elijah's example and my friend's question, I went to God's word. I wanted to see what the whole counsel of scripture was on this subject of faith versus feelings.

### ***What is joy?***

James, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says:

*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4 (NASB)*

When I read this scripture in isolation, I come to the same conclusion that my friend did. Yet when I looked up the meaning of the Greek word that we translate "rejoice" I discovered something interesting.

The Greek word "rejoice" comes from a root word that means to leap up or spring up like a gush of water. I picture in my mind a gush of water leaping up - like Old Faithful. Some kind of pressure is exerted from the outside to hold the water under ground. However a greater pressure is exerted from within to cause the water to overcome the pressure from without and spring forth. With this picture in mind, I read 1 Peter 1:6:

*Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: (or trials) 1 Peter 1:6 (KJV)*

The Greek word translated "heaviness" means to grieve or to be sorrowful.

So we as Christians will sometimes experience trials that cause a heaviness of grief or sorrow, a pressure from without that will attempt to hold in our joy. These are our feelings - our common human emotions. Yet something - joy - should leap up or spring up from within us like a gush of water. So joy cannot be a feeling.

### **A Fruit of the Spirit**

The scriptures simply define joy as a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 2:22). "It is a quality, and not simply an emotion, grounded upon God Himself and indeed derived from Him." As a gift of the Spirit, it is "something dynamic and not static." <sup>1</sup> It is something powerful, forceful, energetic, influential and not stagnant, inert and rigid.

## **Derived from God the Father and God the Son.**

Jesus said:

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

"To be made full" can also be translated "to fill up to the brim." Jesus promised that if we would abide in His love and keep His commandments we would be so full of His joy that we would be full up to the brim with it. Have you ever tried to walk with a glass that is full up to the brim with liquid? It sloshes out everywhere. The truth of scripture is that we can be so full of Jesus' joy that it just sloshes out of us everywhere we go.

The scriptures also say that The God of Hope fills us with joy and peace (Romans 15:13) using the same word for fill that is used in John 15:11.

Notice, the conditions for joy: abiding in Jesus' love and keeping His commandments. If we focus on the problems and the feelings instead of on Jesus' love and commandments, we will not be able to rejoice.

## **Produced in spite of feelings**

The Christian's joy is a paradox. It appears often in scriptures in spite of feelings and trials, not in place of them. "Experiences of sorrow prepare for, and enlarge, the capacity for "joy," e.g., John 16:20; Rom. 5:3, 4; 2Cor. 7:4; 2Cor. 8:2; Heb. 10:34; Jas. 1:2."<sup>2</sup>

I found it very comforting that Jesus, who serves as our example, despised the shame of His trial and crucifixion, but for the joy set before Him endured it (Heb. 12:2-3). We do not have to enjoy our trials and heartaches. We will experience human emotions in them. Yet we can have joy in spite of them. We can have joy and rejoice because we have an eternal perspective - we know that these trials are temporary. What waits for us is better and without trials.

## ***Why should we rejoice?***

The scriptures tell us that we should rejoice:

- that our names are recorded in heaven (Luke 10:20), in other words, for our salvation
- when persecuted [leap for joy] because our reward is great in heaven (Luke 6:23)
- that Christ is proclaimed (Phil. 1:18-20)
- in the Lord (Phil. 4:4)

Note the emphasis again on the eternal perspective. If we felt that this life was all there was, there would be no reason to rejoice. We can rejoice because of our eternal perspective. We can rejoice because the Lord Himself is the foundation and motivation of our joy.

## ***Does God care about my feelings?***

I refer to the Biblical illustration with which I began: Elijah. He was so afraid and so depressed that he asked to die. Yet God sent the Angel of the Lord to minister to him and strengthen him. Then the Lord spoke to him personally in a gentle whisper and encouraged him. This compassion of God, this understanding of our human emotions, is confirmed in the New Testament in 2 Cor. 7:6 where we are told that God comforts the depressed. It is also confirmed in Hebrews where we

are reminded that we have a High Priest, Jesus Christ, who understands what we are going through because He came in human form. Therefore, it is not a sin to be grieved, depressed, weepy, etc. However I do believe it is a sin to focus on our feelings so much that they become our prison. In those moments when we struggle with our human emotions we must, like Elijah, listen for God's gentle voice that will encourage and strengthen us and enable His joy that is within us to spring out like gushing water. Hear Jesus say to us as He did to His first disciples:

*"Therefore you too now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you. John 16:22 (NASB)*

## ***Is your joy lost?***

### **Relinquished by choice**

Did you notice that no one can take our joy away from us?

Our joy cannot be taken from us, but we can relinquish it. We can choose the prison of feelings and emotions over the joy of the Lord. Experiencing hurt, sadness, disappointment, anger and all the range of human emotions is inevitable, but to languish in them is our choice. When we are controlled by our feelings rather than God's Spirit, we are in serious trouble.

### **Interrupted by Sin**

Our joy can also be interrupted by sin. Remember that Jesus' joy is conditional upon our abiding in His love and obeying His commandments.

Do you know there are essentially only three commandments in the New Testament?

- love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength
- love your neighbor as yourself
- walk by the Spirit

"Every believer is called upon to share in the joy of Christ by a daily walk with Him and a daily practice of rejoicing in the knowledge of Him and His salvation (1 Thes. 5:16; Phil. 3:1; 1 Pet. 1:8)."

### **Conclusion**

After searching the Scriptures, this is the conclusion to which I have come: we will struggle with human emotions as long as we are on this earth. As we experience God's faithfulness in them, we will learn to trust Him more and therefore struggle with them less often, less intensely and for shorter periods of time. But we will experience them!

I'm not even sure I would ever want to meet anyone who didn't struggle with human emotions. I think I would feel they were too perfect to identify with my trials and heartaches. I prefer Jesus - my great High Priest who is able to sympathize with my weaknesses, who was tempted in every way just as I am, yet without sin. A High Priest through Whom I can approach the throne of grace with confidence and receive mercy and grace to help me in my time of need. (Heb. 4:14-15)

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13 (NASB)*

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1. J. D. Douglass, ed., *New Bible Dictionary, Second Edition*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 1962:625.
2. W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words*. ©1940 W. E. Vine.