

Joy vs. Happiness

A famous minister said, *"I wouldn't trade joy for all the happiness in the world."*

Joy and happiness are not the same, not at all. Despite the fact that we interchange them far too often, they actually have quite opposite meanings. Happiness is a reaction, it's an impulse that comes upon you when you're pleased or excited with your circumstances. For example, you could respond to a knock at the door and there stands a long-lost best friend that you haven't seen in years. Your reaction will be happiness and elation! You don't choose happiness, it just overtakes you as a natural reaction to something you like.

Joy, is not a reaction, joy is a response, a choice, an act of the will. The word joy means to be content, calm; to be content despite your circumstances, when circumstances are not satisfying. In the Bible, the book of James is written by James, who was a half-brother of Jesus. His audience is to believers that are enduring persecution for their faith. They're experiencing very difficult and unpleasant times, and James says in James 1:2-3, ***"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance."***

"Consider" means to decide, to make the choice. He says, decide to be joyful in your trials. What does he mean by that? He certainly isn't saying that one should be happy to face trials. Instead, he says, to chose joy; chose to be calm and not panic or be upset, chose to be content in Christ and focus on the heavenly perspective. The heavenly perspective is that trials test the faith of a believer, which can produce the character quality of endurance.

Paul and Silas

Consider the story of joy, describing the circumstances of Paul and Silas in Acts 16:22-30.

"The crowd rose up together against Paul and Silas, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

- Paul and Silas were persecuted for their faith; stripped/unclothed, beaten with rods, thrown into prison even into the inner-most dungeon, feet put in stocks.
- Despite these terrible circumstances, Paul and Silas chose joy. Their delight in the Lord exceeded what man can do to them.
- In the middle of the night, Paul and Silas couldn't help but focus heavenward, and prayed allowed and sang praises to the Lord.
- The impact their joy had on the other inmates was incredible; even when presented with an opportunity to escape after all the jail doors flew open, the inmates knew they were experiencing the work of the Lord in Paul and Silas and they would rather stay and bear witness than take the open door to escape. What a display of the value of seeing Christians genuinely chose joy in life – it can't help but impact those around them!
- Not only did this change the heart of the inmates, the jailer who knew he'd be killed if inmates escaped on his watch, he himself couldn't help but want the type of joy that Paul and Silas had, and begged, ***"What must I do to be saved?"***
- Paul and Silas wouldn't let their circumstances rob them of joy! They certainly wouldn't trade joy for all the happiness in the world.

What Robs a Christian of Joy?

- Selfishness
- Fear
- Unmet expectations
- Unresolved conflict
- Unconfessed sin
- Our past
- Our circumstances

I use the word “rob” loosely, because the reality is that joy is a choice, and nothing can snatch it from you.

- No circumstances can put you out of reach from choosing joy!
- No circumstances can put you out of reach from praying!
- No circumstances can put you out of reach from worshipping the Lord!
- Satan can’t steal your joy, but you can give it over to him. Don’t chose this! If Satan can keep Christians looking and feeling miserable, complaining about their life, then nobody wants any part of Jesus or the life He offers.
- People can’t steal your joy, but you can give it over to them. Don’t chose this either!

Yesterday and Today

Your past doesn’t define you or determine who you will be today. Paul declares this when he writes in Philippians 3:13-14, ***“Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*** Paul always determined that his painful circumstances were going to be used for God’s glory. Paul chose obedience to the Lord over defeat. Jesus says in John 15:10-11, ***“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”***

A Fruit of the Spirit

Beyond choosing joy, joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit, therefore it’s a gift from God. Galatians 5:22-23 says, ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”*** So, how do we acquire this gift? We choose to surrender the moment to God and focus on Him instead. When we let the Spirit govern our life, and get our own will out of the way, then the Spirit administers joy to us when we’re facing challenges.

Conclusion

Decide today that you’ll pursue the Lord. Seek Him as the greatest source of hope and life. Decide to not let your circumstances turn your attitude. Don’t let your emotions govern your life. Present yourself to the Lord and say, ***“God fill me with your Spirit! Give me the joy that can only come from You! Help me to delight in You most of all. Help me to see my circumstances as an opportunity to live for you with joy, praise, and thankfulness!”***