

## **“Joy” – Rev. Marty Blackwelder**

### **Key Points:**

- Paul finished his race with joy despite tremendous persecution, imprisonment, and hardship
- Joy and peace are not dictated by circumstances but by our perspective and response to life
- Believers must learn to live free from the weight of care by praying about everything and worrying about nothing
- Meditation is rehearsing and reflecting on God's Word; worry is meditation in a negative direction
- We must harness our thought life and focus on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report
- Internal conversation or self-talk significantly impacts our emotions, faith, and physical wellbeing
- Action is more powerful than emotion; we must choose to praise and rejoice regardless of feelings
- Living with an eternal perspective helps us view present challenges as light and momentary
- The joy of the Lord is our strength and releases healing properties in our lives
- Being filled with the Spirit produces supernatural joy that saturates and strengthens believers

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### **“Joy” Rev. Marty Blackwelder – 5 Day Devotional:**

**5-Day Devotional: Living with Joy and Peace**

**Day 1: Fighting the Good Fight with Joy**

**Reading: 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Hebrews 12:1-3**

**Devotional:** The Apostle Paul finished his race with joy, despite tremendous hardship. Like Paul, we have a course set before us, and God's intention is that we finish well—not crawling across the finish line but running with joy. Jesus endured the cross "for the joy set before Him," keeping His eyes on the eternal reward. Today, consider your own race. What weights or sins are holding you back? The key to finishing with joy is keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. Don't become weary or discouraged. Remember, your present struggles are temporary, but your eternal reward is forever. Choose today to run with joy, knowing that a crown of righteousness awaits all who love His appearing.

**Reflection:** What "weights" do I need to lay aside to run my race more freely?

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## **Day 2: Casting Your Cares**

**Reading: Philippians 4:4-7; 1 Peter 5:7**

**Devotional:** Paul wrote "Rejoice in the Lord always" while imprisoned in Rome, in a dungeon above the city's sewage system. His joy wasn't dependent on circumstances but on his relationship with God. The secret? He learned to be "careful for nothing." This doesn't mean being irresponsible, but rather refusing to carry the weight of worry. When you pray, believe, and receive God's wisdom, then do what you know to do—and release the outcome to Him. Worry is meditation in a negative direction, painting portraits of failure on your mind. Instead, make your requests known to God with thanksgiving, and His supernatural peace will guard your heart and mind. God's peace surpasses human understanding because it exists independent of circumstances.

**Reflection:** What situation am I worrying about instead of praying about?

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## **Day 3: The Power of Proper Thinking**

**Reading: Philippians 4:8; Romans 12:2**

**Devotional:** Your thought life directly impacts your joy, peace, and faith. Paul instructs us to think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. This is intentional mental discipline. An undisciplined mind is like an undisciplined child—headed for trouble. The enemy constantly vies for your attention because he knows your focus determines your emotional and spiritual state. You cannot feel your way into acting differently, but you can act

your way into feeling differently. Start your day by changing the "track" playing in your mind. Instead of rehearsing problems, rehearse promises: "I can do all things through Christ," "Greater is He that is in me," "The Lord always causes me to triumph." Meditation means to reflect and rehearse repeatedly until God's Word saturates your spirit and manifests its power.

**Reflection:** What negative thought patterns do I need to replace with Scripture?

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#### **Day 4: Living with Eternal Perspective**

**Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18**

**Devotional:** Paul endured beatings, shipwrecks, betrayals, and constant danger, yet declared, "None of these things move me." How? He maintained an eternal perspective. He understood that present sufferings are "light and momentary" compared to eternal glory. When you're going through difficulty, remember this is as bad as it gets for believers. Heaven awaits—a place of perfect righteousness, peace, and joy. Then comes the millennial reign, followed by a new heaven and new earth. Paul found comfort and strength by thinking about the hope of heaven and his eternal reward. Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me." Don't sorrow over loved ones who've passed in Christ—they wouldn't return if they could. Live today with your eyes on eternity, and present troubles will lose their power to steal your joy.

**Reflection:** How does an eternal perspective change how I view my current challenges?

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#### **Day 5: The Strength of Joy**

**Reading: Nehemiah 8:10; Psalm 126:1-3; Romans 15:13**

**Devotional:** "The joy of the Lord is your strength." This isn't merely a cliché—it's a spiritual reality. Joy releases supernatural strength into your life. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Laughter is a valid expression of joy that God created, and scientists confirm it releases healing endorphins in your body. Sometimes you must "prime your pump"—choose to laugh, choose to praise, choose joy even when you don't feel it. Action is more powerful than emotion. God wants to fill you completely with joy and peace through believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. Don't go through life running on empty. Be filled and continually refilled with the Spirit. Draw from the well of living water within you. Your joy is not dependent on circumstances but on His presence.

**Reflection:** How can I intentionally cultivate joy today, regardless of my circumstances?

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**Closing Prayer:** "Father, I thank You that Your joy is my strength. Help me to cast all my cares upon You, to think properly according to Your Word, and to maintain an eternal perspective. Fill me afresh with Your Spirit today. I choose joy, peace, and faith over worry and fear. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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### **“Joy” Rev. Marty Blackwelder - Scripture References from the Sermon**

#### **Explicitly Mentioned Scripture References:**

1. **2 Timothy 4:7-8** - Paul's testimony of fighting the good fight.
2. **Hebrews 12:1-3** - Running the race with endurance, looking to Jesus.
3. **Philippians 4:4** - Rejoice in the Lord always.
4. **Philippians 4:6-7** - Be anxious for nothing, pray with thanksgiving.
5. **Philippians 4:8** - Think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, and lovely.
6. **2 Timothy 1:7** - God has not given us a spirit of fear.
7. **2 Corinthians 11:23-28** - Paul's personal testimony of suffering.
8. **Acts 20:24** - None of these things move me.
9. **Romans 14:17** - The kingdom is righteousness, peace, and joy.
10. **Psalms 126:1-3** - Our mouth filled with laughter.
11. **Proverbs 17:22** - A merry heart does good like medicine.
12. **Romans 15:13** - God of hope fill you with all joy and peace.
13. **Ephesians 5:18** - Be filled with the Spirit.
14. **1 Thessalonians 4:16-18** - The Lord shall descend from heaven.
15. **Revelation 22:12** - Behold, I come quickly.

16. **Nehemiah 8:10** - The joy of the Lord is your strength.

17. **Ecclesiastes 3:4** - A time to weep and a time to laugh.

**Scripture Allusions (Referenced but not specifically cited):**

18. **Psalms 119:97** - "Oh how I love your word, it is my meditation all day."

19. **Romans 8:35-39** - Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

20. **Philippians 4:13** - I can do all things through Christ.

21. **2 Corinthians 2:14** - God always causes us to triumph.

22. **Romans 8:37** - More than conquerors.

23. **1 John 4:4** - Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

24. **Psalms 118:24** - This is the day the Lord has made.

25. **Isaiah 61:3** - Garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

26. **1 Peter 5:7** - Casting all your care upon Him.

27. **Matthew 28:20** - Jesus' resurrection and saints arising (alluded to).

**Additional Relevant Verses for Main Themes:**

- **John 15:11** - Christ's joy remaining in us.

- **Galatians 5:22** - Fruit of the Spirit (joy mentioned).

- **James 1:2** - Count it all joy when you face trials.

- **Psalms 16:11** - In Your presence is fullness of joy.

- **John 16:24** - Ask and receive, that your joy may be full.

- **Habakkuk 3:17-18** - Yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

- **Philippians 3:1** - Rejoice in the Lord.

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## “Joy” Rev. Marty Blackwelder – Personal and Small Group Study Guide

### Living with Joy and Peace

#### Opening Prayer & Icebreaker

**Icebreaker Question:** Share a time when you experienced genuine joy despite difficult circumstances. What made the difference in your perspective?

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#### Key Scripture References

- **2 Timothy 4:7-8** - Paul's testimony of finishing well.
  - **Hebrews 12:1-3** - Running our race with endurance.
  - **Philippians 4:4-8** - The command to rejoice and think properly.
  - **Nehemiah 8:10** - The joy of the Lord is our strength.
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#### Main Takeaways

##### 1. We All Have a Race to Run

Paul finished his race with joy despite immense persecution and hardship. Our goal should be to finish our life's course with joy, not just to barely make it across the finish line.

##### 2. Two Keys to Maintaining Joy

- **Cast Your Cares (Philippians 4:6-7)** - Don't worry about anything; pray about everything.
- **Think Properly (Philippians 4:8)** - Focus on what is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report.

##### 3. Our Perspective Shapes Our Reality

External circumstances don't possess the power to dictate our internal peace and joy—our perspective, response, attitude, and focus do.

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#### Discussion Questions

##### Section 1: Understanding the Race

1. What does it mean to you personally to "finish your race with joy"? What would that look like in your life?
2. Paul faced imprisonment, beatings, shipwrecks, and betrayal, yet maintained joy. What challenges are you facing that seem to steal your joy? How does Paul's testimony encourage you?
3. Read **Hebrews 12:2**. Jesus endured the cross "for the joy set before Him." How can having an eternal perspective help us endure current difficulties?

### **Section 2: Casting Your Cares**

4. The sermon emphasized being "free from care" not "free from responsibility." What's the difference? Why is this distinction important?
5. **Philippians 4:6** says to be "careful for nothing." What are you currently worrying about that you need to turn over to God in prayer?
6. The Living Bible paraphrase says, "Tell God your needs and don't forget to thank Him for the answers." Why is thanksgiving an important part of casting our cares? How does it affect our faith?

### **Section 3: Thinking Properly**

7. The sermon described worry as "meditating in a negative direction." How have you experienced the negative effects of worry in your life (physically, emotionally, spiritually)?
8. What is your typical "internal conversation" or "self-talk" like throughout the day? Is it generally positive or negative? How might this be affecting your joy?
9. The preacher said, "Action is more powerful than emotion." Have you found this to be true? Share an example of when you acted in faith despite not feeling like it.

### **Section 4: The Power of Joy**

10. Read **Nehemiah 8:10**. How have you experienced "the joy of the Lord" as your strength during difficult times?
11. The sermon mentioned that laughter releases healing properties in our bodies. How comfortable are you with expressing joy in worship? What might hold you back?

12. Paul wrote about joy while imprisoned in a dungeon. What does this teach us about the source of true joy?

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## **Practical Applications**

### **This Week's Challenge: Choose ONE to implement**

#### **Option 1: The Gratitude Practice**

- Each morning this week, before getting out of bed, speak three things you're thankful for out loud.
- When you catch yourself worrying, immediately stop and pray, thanking God for the answer.
- Keep a "gratitude journal" noting answered prayers.

#### **Option 2: The Thought Life Audit**

- Pay attention to your "internal conversation" for one full day.
- Write down recurring negative thoughts.
- Find a Scripture promise to counter each negative thought pattern.
- "Dip the teabag" by reading and speaking these scriptures multiple times daily.

#### **Option 3: The Joy Activation**

- When you feel discouraged, intentionally "change tracks."
- Sing a worship song (even if you don't feel like it).
- Speak declarations of who God is and who you are in Him.
- Practice laughing—even if you have to start with "ha, ha, ha" to prime the pump!

#### **Option 4: The Eternal Perspective**

- Each day this week, spend 5 minutes meditating on heaven and your eternal reward.
  - Read **1 Thessalonians 4:16-18** and let it bring you comfort.
  - Remember: "This is as bad as it gets" for believers—heaven awaits!
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### Reflection Questions for Personal Journaling

1. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your current level of joy? What factors are influencing this rating?
  2. What specific "care" do you need to cast on the Lord this week? Write a prayer releasing it to Him.
  3. What negative thought patterns have you allowed to run unchecked in your mind? What truths from God's Word will you use to replace them?
  4. How can you cultivate more joy in your daily life, regardless of circumstances?
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### Memory Verse for the Week

**Philippians 4:4** - "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"

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### Closing Activity

#### Group Prayer Exercise:

- Have each person share one area where they need to experience more joy and peace.
  - End by thanking God together for His faithfulness and the joy that is available in Him.
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### Homework for Next Week

1. Practice your chosen application daily
  2. Share with one other person how you're learning to maintain joy despite circumstances
  3. Come prepared to share one testimony of how God met you this week
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### Leader's Notes

- **Atmosphere:** Create a joyful, celebratory atmosphere. Consider playing upbeat worship music as people arrive.

- **Sensitivity:** Some group members may be going through very difficult circumstances. Balance encouragement with compassion.
- **Participation:** Encourage everyone to share, but don't force it. Some may need time to process.
- **Application:** Focus on practical, achievable steps. Joy is both a choice and a fruit of the Spirit—it requires our cooperation with God's grace.

**Remember:** The goal isn't to shame anyone for lacking joy, but to equip them with biblical tools to cultivate and maintain it regardless of circumstances.