



A Message of Joy

December 12 - 18, 2021

MAIN POINT

The source of a Christian's joy is deeper than happiness, and not dependent on circumstances.

INTRODUCTION

How would you define authentic joy? What are some of the ways joy manifests itself in a person's life?

How is joy different than happiness?

Can you share about a time when you were joyful, even though your circumstances didn't warrant it?

Joy is the second fruit of the Spirit Paul listed in [Galatians 5:22-23](#), and a characteristic of the Christian life that he mentioned frequently in his New Testament letters. Paul repeatedly stressed the divine origin of joy, encouraging believers to rejoice "in the Lord" ([Philippians 3:1; 4:4](#)), "rejoice in God" ([Romans 5:11](#)), and to realize that the kingdom of God is not "a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" ([Romans 14:17](#)). Christian joy is marked by celebration and expectation of God's ultimate victory over the powers of sin and darkness, a victory already actualized in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The ability to have joy in the Lord despite circumstances is one of the unique traits of the Christian life. Joy is not a natural response to suffering, which is how we know it's something we are unable to have apart from the Holy Spirit.

To begin our discussion of the source of joy, we will look briefly at Jesus' teaching on the connection between His love for us and the joy we can have in Him ([John 15](#)). Then we will turn to the Book of Psalms for a portrait of David's ability to be joyful in the midst of challenging circumstances ([Psalm 86](#)).

UNDERSTANDING

READ JOHN 15:9-11.

John 15 is Jesus' teaching on abiding in Him and producing spiritual fruit, the outward demonstration of a person's relationship with God. Producing spiritual fruit is joyful, but it comes as the result of sacrifice—of pruning and abiding and seeking the heart of God. In this way, it should lead us to follow the example of Christ, who "because of the joy that lay before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame" ([Hebrews 12:2](#)), but now has been exalted to the right hand of the Father whence He will come in power and great glory.

Do you agree that love is the avenue for joy? Why or why not? How are the two related?

How has Christ made your joy "full"? What does that fullness look like?

READ [PSALM 86:1-7](#).

Can you relate to David's feelings? When have you felt this level of despair?

What are some specific character traits David used to describe God in verses 5-7?

If David wallowed in despair, we don't see evidence of it in this psalm. Instead, David humbly chose to lay his grief at God's feet. David confessed his feelings and prayed for protection (v. 2), grace (v. 3), joy (v. 4), forgiveness and love (v. 5), mercy (v. 6), and an answer (v. 7). David was confident God heard him, viewing God's answer to prayer as evidence of His grace. Even in crying out to God, David worshiped God for His goodness, mercy, and love.

Christian joy is marked by celebration and expectation of God's ultimate victory over the powers of sin and darkness. How are the specific attributes of God found in verses 5-7 reasons to celebrate? What is the expectation, or hope, connected to David's prayer?

How does focusing on and trusting the character of God stir up joy in your heart when you're experiencing trials?

READ [PSALM 86:8-13](#).

As David continued his prayer, he acknowledged God's uniqueness and majesty (vv. 8,10). Our God is different from anything or anyone in the universe—He is the One who formed the nations, and one day they will all come and bow before Him (v. 9). Seeing the nations bow before God can shape our desires. He is worthy of this honor.

What did David affirm about God? Why would these be reasons for joy?

Because of who God is (vv. 8-10), David had the confidence to engage in honest conversation with Him. David then pleaded to the Lord, "Teach me Your way" (v. 11). David desired to live by God's truths. The nature of the Christian life is that we'll always be growing and learning as we pursue lives that glorify God through the Holy Spirit.

What is an undivided heart? How do you know if you have one?

How might the divisions of your heart be ways you are robbed of joy? What can restore it?

David asked God to help him have a single-minded devotion to Him. Literally, David wanted an undivided heart in his relationship with God. In Hebrew thought, the heart was the inner person—the center of emotions, will, and comprehension. David prayed that God would help him have undivided loyalty to the Lord, a unity of purpose focused on worshiping and serving Him. With his life centered in God and His will, David could fear God's name. The word "fear" does not convey a sense of dread or terror in this passage. Rather, it means "reverence," "respect," or "awe."

READ [PSALM 86:14-17](#).

What potential impact do the five characteristics of God mentioned in verse 15 (compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, loving, and true) have on a situation like David's?

As a group, list the practical aspects of living in God's strength. Discuss how this list compares to examples of trying to make it on our own.

David concluded his prayer with a passionate plea for God to turn to him and be gracious. David had many enemies who wanted to see his downfall, but he didn't try to take them on himself. Instead, he asked God to intervene and be his vindicator. David referred to himself as God's servant and asked for some of God's strength, knowing that any amount of strength he could muster on his own wouldn't be enough to fight his battle.

APPLICATION

What are some things in your life that steal your joy? Which of these do you fight against most often?

What are some specific reasons God is a source of joy for you?

How have you seen the Holy Spirit produce joy in you despite your circumstances? What has surprised you the most?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, giving your group members the opportunity to voice prayers of thanksgiving and praise for the attributes of God listed in [Psalm 86](#).

COMMENTARY

PSALM 86:1-17

Psalm 86 is "a Davidic prayer." The psalm is a heartfelt prayer for the Lord to intervene on behalf of the psalmist. Apparently he prayed under duress and in desperation; his life was threatened by godless men ([86:14](#)). We don't know the specific historical setting of this psalm.

86:1-4. The opening verses of this psalm show a pattern of petition followed by a reason. In verse 1, David petitioned the Lord to listen and to answer. The reason he gave was that he was poor and needy. In verse 2, the petitions were for God to protect his life and to save His servant. The reasons were because he was faithful and because he trusted in the Lord. In verse 3, he petitioned the Lord to be gracious to him because he called on Him all day long. Finally, in verse 4, the petition for God to bring joy to His servant's life was based on the fact that he turned to the Lord in hope.

86:5. David didn't pray out of self-righteousness but self-awareness. He knew he was poor and needy, so he chose to be faithful, trusting in the Lord, calling on the Lord all day long, and turning to the Lord to grow the relationship God had established with him. In verse 5, he revealed his heart's gratitude toward God, acknowledging that the Lord is kind (most frequently translated "good"). This simple adjective refers to that which is pleasant, agreeable, beautiful, and beneficial. To the psalmist the Lord demonstrated all those characteristics. Because of His goodness, God stood ready to forgive. This phrase renders the Hebrew adjective *sallach*, which derives from a verb used only with God as its subject. Only God can forgive in the way the psalmist spoke. People can restore broken relationships. But only God can forgive us in a way that expunges our misconduct from the divine record, creates in us a clean heart, and empowers us to restore relationships with others.

Additionally, the Lord was rich in faithful love or *chesed*, one of the most important words in the Hebrew Scriptures. To whom is this faithful love available? To all who call on the Lord. The

psalmist made petitions to God based on God's character and readiness to act, not upon his own self-righteousness.

86:6. David's repeated petition for the Lord to hear his prayer was due to his crisis. He intensified his petition by asking God to listen (literally "pay attention to") to his plea for mercy. The term mercy derives from the word for "grace" or "favor," another reminder that David's prayer was empowered by God's character, not David's merit.

86:7. David uttered an important truth regarding prayer in verse 7. He called on the Lord because he knew the Lord would answer. The Hebrew text emphasizes the phrase in the day of my distress to show that even when things are at their absolute worst, we can have confidence God will hear our prayers. Though David's situation is not revealed until verse 14, the general truth of verse 7 is applicable to His people for all time. David told the Lord, "You will answer me." To answer communicates "to respond to" in the sense that God's reply will be directly related to David's petition. As David prayed to the Lord in distress, he was convinced God would not only hear his prayer, but would answer in a meaningful, beneficial way.

[Psalm 86:8-13](#) reveals two striking things about David. First, he knew many wonderful aspects of the Lord and listed them in these verses. Second, David realized he still had much to learn about God and His ways. Rather than content himself with what he already knew, he prayed for the Lord to teach him.

86:8. David acknowledged the uniqueness of the Lord. Exposed to the false gods of nearby nations, David was unimpressed by the number of gods and the claims of their adherents. Instead he knew and confidently prayed, "There is no one like You among the gods." The pluralistic religious culture didn't deter him from praising the true God for His uniqueness. David then extended his praise to the uniqueness of God's works, a reference to His creative and redemptive activities.

86:9. The claim in [Psalm 86:9](#)—"All the nations You have made will come and bow down before You"—would be offensive to some people, viewed as an arrogant statement by David. But he knew the Lord was the Creator of all nations and peoples. He was convinced of God's uniqueness as the one true God; he was also convinced of God's sovereignty. David knew God was "kind and ready to forgive" and that He was "rich in faithful love to all who call on" Him (v. 5). Therefore, all nations of the earth are the object of God's love. He loves all peoples and desires them to turn to Him. David's desire was that all the nations would honor God's name. Interestingly, the word honor comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to be heavy." In David's context, this verse served as a defiant confidence in the face of worldly threats. David's confidence in the Lord outshone any fear he had of those who sought to take his life.

86:10. David continued to focus his prayer on God's uniqueness. His statement "for You are great" was both a sincere expression of his faith in God and a reminder that the Lord was greater than any problem he faced, including hostile people who sought his life (v. 14). David's observation of God's wonders acknowledged the Lord's ongoing activity, signified by the use of an active participle in Hebrew. The word wonders derives from a term meaning "to be extraordinary." Thus David attributed to God the ongoing activity of doing extraordinary things. Our God is the God of the extraordinary. In light of God's greatness and repeated wonders, David confessed to the Lord, "You alone are God." This bold statement ruled out the possibility for David to find refuge in his day of trouble in any other place. His earnest prayer in a time of distress had developed into a time of heartfelt worship.

86:11. David's worship led to a petition to God superseding all previous petitions. Confident God was listening to his prayer (v. 1) and would protect him (v. 2), David looked to the future. David's future started at the moment he asked God, "Teach me Your way." For God to teach David, He would first have to deliver him from those who sought his life. David made a commitment to God. As the Lord taught David His way, David promised to live by His truth. The pledge to live by referred to his deliberate decision to conform his lifestyle to God's way. David made a further request of God: to give him an undivided heart. The idea was to have a heart concentrated on pleasing God alone. To fear Your name refers to maintaining an appropriate reverence and sense of awe for God. Whenever David heard or uttered the name Yahweh, he wanted to do so in a context of worshipful veneration.

86:12. As David's prayer focused more pointedly on God's love and goodness, he proclaimed, "I will praise You with all my heart." The phrase my heart refers to one's innermost being. David's prayer had entered the realm of heartfelt worship, resulting in his promise to honor God's name forever.

86:13. He realized God's faithful love for him was great. How great? Great enough to more than adequately answer his prayer; great enough to deliver his life from the depths of Sheol. In the Old Testament, Sheol referred to the abode of the dead, similar to our idea of the grave. David's mentioning Sheol revealed his apprehension about the danger threatening his life. Yet, he no longer feared those who wanted to kill him because God would deliver his life from the depths of Sheol. The term deliver means to snatch out of harm's way.

86:14-15. David completed his prayer by acknowledging God's character (v. 15) and by petitioning Him for help in his present crisis (vv. 14,16). David expounded on God's character, recognizing He was compassionate and gracious. These specific qualities of the Lord's nature were previously revealed to Moses after the Israelites worshipped the golden calf ([Exodus 34:6](#)) and also occur later in [Psalm 103:8](#). The term translated compassionate is used only for God in the Hebrew Bible and refers to His nurturing, protective side. Gracious also is only used for God and refers to His favor or goodwill toward us.

When David said the Lord was slow to anger, or long-suffering, he used an illustrative phrase in Hebrew. Literally he said the Lord is "long of nostrils." The Hebrews believed God's wrath against sin was kindled in His mind and then took the form of a fiery blast from his nostrils. Thankfully God had long nostrils, meaning the wrath took time to develop into the fiery blast. How much time? Time enough for the sinner to repent! David also praised God because He was rich in faithful love and truth. We have encountered God's faithful love already in this prayer psalm. In verse 5 God's faithful love was the basis for forgiveness; in verse 13 it provided the basis for God's deliverance. David mentioned God's faithful love for the third time as a reminder that he could count on God. The word truth derives from the Hebrew word for firmness or faithfulness. In this context, truth refers to God's dependability. Though David couldn't trust those around him, he always could trust God.

86:16-17. Having acknowledged God's character, David resumed the petition for His help. He wanted God to turn to him and to be gracious. He requested God's strength. David expressed full humility and dependence on God by referring to himself as "Your servant" and as "the son of Your female servant." In terms of social standing, the status of a servant was low and the status of the son of a servant was lower. God's greatness (v. 15) stood in sharp contrast to David's inferiority (v. 16). Only God's strength or might could overcome the onslaught of David's enemies (v. 17). They would see and be put to shame. Their attack on David would cease; hopefully, they would turn to the Lord also.