

Joy

in
ALL Circumstances

by Betty Marschner



Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to heed Your Word — words of exhortation and promises of joy eternal. Thank You for the blessing of Your Word, which gives strength and guidance for our daily lives in this sin-filled, often joy-less, dangerous world. In His name we pray. Amen.

James 1:2–3 (ESV): *Count it all joy my brothers [and sisters] when you meet trials of various kinds for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*

So often we think of joy and happiness going hand in hand. The world would say we can't have one without the other. Certainly, trials don't bring out a happy dance in us, but can we find joy in them? List three to five things that can bring happiness and three to five that bring joy. Share with the group. _____

Did you find similarities in both lists? Differences? How would you define each? _____

Does happiness seem more transient and temporary? Joy deeper and more eternal? Joy is often used in Scriptures as referring to eternity in the Lord, both here and hereafter.

James, apparent author of the epistle and perhaps half-brother to our Lord Jesus, was not always accepting of the fact that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (John 7:5). It seems that when our risen Lord appeared to James, his doubt melted away and he became very active in the early church (1 Corinthians 15:7, Acts 1:14).¹ Let's take a look at the situation at the time James was writing.

Read Acts 7:54–8:4. It was not exactly a joy-filled time for the new church, was it? Describe the climate of the circumstances surrounding the new church and early believers. What were some of the events? _____

Do you wonder if they, at some point, felt God was punishing them for past sins or some act of disobedience in their lives? Explain why. _____

Do you suppose they may have felt at all that they were a part of a larger plan God had for the spread of His Kingdom? How do you see this being played out in their lives? _____

Now reread **James 1:2–3**. When facing trials, what gives you comfort? _____

Read **Psalms 119:105**. If a path is dark and littered with obstacles, what helps to make the way safe? _____
How does God's Word light the path? _____

What benefit did the trials these early Christians endured produce? _____

Review the command Jesus gave as He ascended into glory that Ascension Day in **Acts 1:8**. Do you think, as those words still rang in their ears, they may have known then that this was the only way this Great Commission could be carried out? Why or why not? _____

We may not face severe persecution as these early believers did, yet our lives as Christians are rarely trouble-free. Can you think of a benefit to the spread of Christianity our present day persecutions might have? Explain. _____

So often when trials beset our lives, the first thing we think of is that God might be displaying His wrath against us for some unrepentant sin and that we will indeed perish. How does the age-old Gospel message of **John 3:16** eclipse that idea? _____

Look at **James 1:12** and **25**. What are some of the benefits of enduring trials and the testing of our faith? _____

Define steadfastness and perseverance. _____

What do you feel is the greatest joy-stealer in your everyday life? _____

Read **John 15:10–11**. What does Jesus ask of us that our joy might be complete? _____

Because we cannot keep the commandments perfectly, to what is He referring in verse 13 of the same chapter? _____

Who showed the greatest love, and how? _____

In light of the fact that God sees the whole mural of our lives and we see only a thumbnail-sized piece, why do you think it is important to live by faith? _____

Trials, which might even include persecution, attain an eternal good in the lives of the church on earth and in our daily lives. If you are led to do so, share with the group a trial you have experienced and how it became a faith builder.

It has been said that joy is an attitude of choice. Do you agree with that? Why or why not? _____

What do you think about this statement: "Joy is a confidence based on the assurance of eternal life in Jesus Christ."? _____

Is it possible to have everlasting joy outside of Christ? _____

Let's take a look at some passages that speak of the source of joy: **Nehemiah 8:10; Psalm 4:7; John 16:22;** and **Romans 15:13**. _____

What does Jesus tell us about finding joy in earthly possessions in **Matthew 6:19–21**? _____

In **Romans 12:9–21**, what are some of the things listed by Paul that will bring about lasting joy? _____

Martin Luther stated: "Do not rejoice over things of the present or things you have experienced and know for joy is twofold. The first kind has to do with things visible, things known in some way either inward or outward. This kind is vain because it is transitory. The other kind has to do with invisible things, that is things that are unknown but simply accepted in faith: and there is true joy, eternal, firm, and without this kind of hope there is no joy in the other. For who can rejoice in the first kind if he despairs or doubts he will receive a future joy?"²

In the middle of our fiercest storms we can have joy and a peace that the world little knows or understands. True joy is found nowhere but in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Sacraments reveal this fact to us: In the Means of Grace we receive forgiveness of sins and the blessed hope of eternal life with Him, both here and now and in the life to come.

What three things are affirmed by Jesus in **John 16:32–33**? _____

What is the comfort in this verse? _____

If Jesus knew, even then, that all of us would face tribulations, what great fact does His death and resurrection bring home to us every time we worship? _____

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, how often we choose to find happiness in temporal things, but possessions fall away and things that gave great pleasure soon disappear. Help us, when facing trials, to remain steadfast by looking beyond the temporal to things eternal. We thank You for the great hope of joy and the gift of eternal life found only in the life, death, and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ. It is in His name we also pray ... "Our Father," Amen.

If time allows, end with "In Thee is Gladness" (LSB #818; LW #442) or "Hallelujah! Let Praises Ring!" (TLH #23).

¹Concordia Self-Study Commentary: Copyright 1971, Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis. New Testament introduction, notes, and references ... by Martin H. Franzmann. "James": pages 249–250.

²Martin Luther Day by Day We Magnify Thee: Daily Readings: Copyright 1982, Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis. Luther's Lectures on Romans, Luther's Works 25:457.