

Where's the Joy?

Five Steps to Restore Our Joy

By
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If our children were asked...

is it a joy or a burden for your daddy and mommy to follow Jesus, how would they answer? We hope and pray they would announce that daddy and mommy are joyful as they walk with Jesus, right?

As I read (and encourage you to read) Matthew 22:34-23:15, I find it interesting that Jesus responds to the Pharisees' questions with the scriptural answer they are looking for, and which they knew well. Then Christ turns his attention from the pharisees (whom we assume are still well within earshot) to his disciples (and future believers as it's been recorded in the Bible) and says...

Matthew 23:1-4

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. "

So, though they knew the Word well, Jesus proceeds to use their hypocrisy as a teaching moment for his disciples. The point being, we can know the Word well, yet if pride is involved as was the case with the pharisees, the Word can be wrongly presented. It then becomes unbearable burdens for the listeners, when in fact it is the path to true and joy-filled life. Of course the biggest problem with the scribes and Pharisees is that they were still unrepentant sinners. They did not have the Holy Spirit to guide them into joyful obedience to the law. The pharisees were quite good at dictating obedience to those under their authority, even as these self-focused pharisees were themselves very disobedient.

It's difficult not to feel some sympathy for the Jews throughout biblical times. God required obedience to the Law knowing they would fail. The Law was the unattainable bench mark to show them their need for a Savior who would meet God's standard and bridge the great divide between humanity and deity. Through that Savior they could receive salvation and be relationally restored with their Creator, hence becoming the light to others rather than a taskmaster to those around them. By the work of Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit in us, we

are enabled to joyfully, gratefully obey the greatest commandment and the one like it found in:

 **Matthew 22:37-40**

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

So, let's *ask ourselves...* "Is obedience to God's Word feeling burdensome and hard to bear? If we are enabled to genuinely love God and our neighbor by the Holy Spirit, wouldn't we be filled with joy? Instead... are we straining under God's Word and habitually casting off what feels to be a hefty weight and defaulting into self-sufficiency? Are we looking any different than the pharisees as we try to train our children in the Law that we ourselves are finding difficult to bear? Are we truly able to show our kids what loving God and loving our neighbor looks like?"

Consider this: Could our lackluster daily life be a symptom of our lack of right biblical *perception* regarding God's Truths? We read in the Word, and our preaching pastors communicate the perfect holiness of our living God. This is followed by the fact that we continue to be sinners. Hopefully sinning less... but still sinning, right? Here is a tough question: Is our pride keeping us from correctly perceiving and responding to these messages? Here lies the root of the problem. We can hear the truth, *but when we place* *ourselves at the center of that message*, focusing on the fact that we are never going to be sinless, we might become weighed down, discouraged and begin mentally trudging through our days without much hope, disappointed in ourself. We are frustrated by our failures and tempted with discouragement, leaving us joyless. This is precisely how our walk with the Lord translates into a lackluster life, in turn leading us into the awful role of taskmaster; cracking a proverbial whip over our children to be obedient to lessons from the Bible that we ourselves aren't handling rightly. Do we ask them to have a happy heart and fail to display one ourselves?

Ugh! Now we have become the Pharisee.

Instead, we can purpose to *humbly* perceive, making the decision to hear and understand that King of Kings is at the center of the Gospel message. Christ alone is sinless and therefore able to provide the solution to our continuing sin. We must get our eyes off ourselves, our failures, and trust Him to be the source to amazing and miraculous joy in the midst of this sinful, decaying world. The point is, even in our sin, we have been saved by the mercy and grace of our Savior. Again... it's about him! This is the testimony of God's faithfulness that though this world will pass away, we are firmly established in the palm of his hand, and are commissioned to share that miraculous joy, especially with our little disciples that God has placed in our homes. We must battle the temptation to become discouraged by the chaos of this world, not to mention our own spiritual battles with sin and pride, which taints our perception of this incredibly joyous Gospel message.

Matthew 23:15 says

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

Wow! That's rough! But let's consider this just for a moment. Is this me? Am I dumping my unbiblical, pride-infected, self-failure-focused burdens on the shoulders of my children? We know our little ones are watching our every move and reading our expressions all day long. As we are teaching them about Jesus, do they see the a lack of joy weighing down on us as an example of what life will be if they follow Jesus? That can't look very enticing! Or do they see the miraculous joy of being Christ's possession, with the hope and excitement of heaven before us? Do they understand that the Gospel message is not only about our sinfulness (again, we are not at the center of the Gospel), but primarily, most importantly about our Savior's sufficiency, and the sheer amazement of this truth. Ponder this! The Gospel is about Christ's forgiveness for the sins we have committed and those we are yet to commit. So we have very *Good News*! But only when we *truly believe* this all powerful, sovereign God has indeed forgiven us and discarded our sin as far as the east is from the west.

Where are you on the *Joy Barometer*? How light is your heart? How often do you laugh throughout your day? If you are struggling with a heavy heart that is affecting your

presentation of Christ as the unmitigated solution for your's and your child's sinfulness, then seek biblical solutions because they are the only solutions that will internally effect our attitude.

God has given us His Holy Spirit, along with a system for losing the negative attitudes and enlisting the godly perspective in this life. As I'm sure you know, it's called the put-off-put-on principle and it's found in:

Ephesians 4:22-24

to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Let's make this practical:

Here are five steps to renew our mind, allowing us to hear the truth of the Gospel message as it's meant to be heard... a joyful, hopeful presentation that is to affect how we think and live:

1. *Put off unrealistic expectations and put on humble and reasonable goals*



How often are you disappointed by your child's behavior? How can he disobey when you just told him not to do that? Why is she stomping off, angry when you simply asked her to clear her plate? These everyday occurrences can stir up anger or offense in us as we struggle to understand how they can act like this towards their mom who loves them so! Yet when we stop and think it through, we are doing the same thing to God every time we grow impatient; every time we take offense; every time we act out in anger or frustration. We are just as sinful as our children. The grace of the Gospel and a Savior that already died for our sins didn't do it only for us parents. He did it for our children as well. Here lies the pitfall of unrealistic expectation which leave us beaten, and in broken relationships with our kids. Instead of expecting your child to become obedient by the end of the day (or even year! lol), we need to understand that the purpose of our training them every day, every week, every year until they leave our home will never be to produce perfectly obedient kids. Our God ordained duty is to train in them an understanding of God's economy for their lifetime. That is action equals consequence, combined with

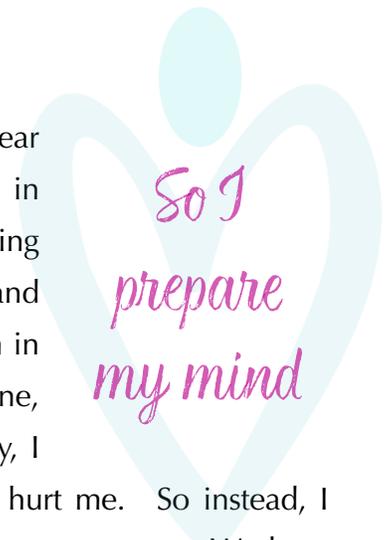
biblical knowledge of God's moral laws. When we do what is biblically right, there is a positive consequence. When we do something sinfully wrong, there is a negative consequence. When we promote reasonable and biblical goals as their pattern for life in our homes, with faithful biblical consequences, our children will enter into adulthood with a Godward orientation. They will be morally mature making wise choices for their family, career, and prayerfully their spiritual life. We need to forgive ourselves and forgive our children for sinfulness, just as completely as Christ has forgiven us. We need to trust Christ with our sanctification, along with the moral growth of our children, as we all focus on loving God with all our heart, soul and mind, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Philippians 2:3-5 becomes a great benchmark in how to love God and love others.

Philippians 2:3-5

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

2. Put off negative thoughts and put on godly, hopeful thoughts

I'm sure you are aware that we form habits of thinking. After the year we've had, it is not a surprise if you are habitually dwelling in negativity. We have been spoon fed distressing and depressing thoughts for months. But, we are in control of our own thoughts, and we are able to break those patterns of thought. First identify: when in your day do negative thoughts occur? I found that when I'm left alone, maybe my time in the morning when I'm getting ready for my day, I may begin to submerge myself in the topics that worry, anger, or hurt me. So instead, I prepare my mind, and make a list filled with topics of thought that encourage me. Work on this and fill your list with memory verses to practice, or add to your list moments in your life that reflect the goodness of God. These are memorials and are encouraged by God (Josh. 4:1-7). Add to your list the things you love about your husband, your children and others in your life. Add this... "We have hope in the work of Christ." We are never without it. The fact that Christ took our sins and has washed us clean... the reality that we will dwell perfected in the glory of God in his amazing kingdom for eternity. We are not of this ugly



world, but quickly passing through to our destiny spent with our King in paradise. Rejoice in these truths!

 **1 Corinthians 10:5** says

Take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.

3. Put off negative prayer and put on godly hopeful prayer

Too often our prayer journals are filled with the things we want (which may even be godly requests like salvation for the unsaved, or spiritual growth for ones we love, etc.) but we fail to fill our prayer time with the testimonies, thanksgivings and gratitudes for the miraculous joys we see in the Word and in our world as a result of God's hand. Again, it's a choice to prioritize and put on the glorious, blessed truths that testify of the goodness of our God. It's these that encourage us to bear up in faith regarding our desires and worries and concerns.

 **Psalm 57:9-10**

"I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations. For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds".

4. Put off the worlds input, and put on Biblical input.

You know where I'm going with this, right? We are bombarded with voices and images all day long that drag us down in the mire and muck of the world's mess. Social media, news reports, videos highlighting all the devastating events or injustices around us. Keep in mind, the world has been steeped in all these sins from the beginning, but never has a generation been able to see so far beyond their own community until this last century. And now it is an unending stream of chaos and sorrow. As a result, we find it hard *not* to see the travesties. We must make the choice to turn off the negative input and instead thoughtfully choose encouraging books or media that highlight a high view of God and his power and might over this world. Simply refuse to be subjected to the constant vanity of the world.

Psalm 16:8 says

“I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.”

5. *Put off criticism and put on encouragement.*

When we are fire-hosed with everyone’s opinions and criticisms, as we have been especially in this last season, it radically effects how we think. Our words have become peppered with negativity. Trade out negative speech and criticism for Christ-honoring encouragement. This takes discipline. Remember, out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45), so this is directly related to our second point. When we begin to practice godly, encouraging speech, it may feel uncomfortable, maybe even insincere at first, but soon, with practice it will become your natural habit of conversation.

Proverbs 25:11 says

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.”

Let’s get back to having genuine enjoyment and fun with those around us. Change negative conversations with others, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Heb. 10:24-25)



With the help of the Holy Spirit, and some time and obedient effort, unlike the Pharisees who were self-focused and condemned by Jesus, you will begin to have days that are characterized by joy as you truly trust in the forgiveness of Christ. You will take comfort accepting the truth that sanctification is a life-long process and won’t be completed by 5:00 tonight. Imagine what your husband and children will see in you as a result. Acceptance of your humanity, and the joy that comes from Christ’s forgiveness. The thrill of following your Savior and the glorious effect He has in your life! You may smile and laugh more often. Your children will love the new you. They will respond and reflect the new you. They will feel the burden lift as you no longer place your heavy burdens on

them. Joy will return and the security of being in a home that is filled with the Spirit and cared for by the God of the universe will bring peace!

Let's finish by reading the following passage and choose to reflect the joy of the psalmist!

*¹ Oh sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvelous things!*

*His right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.*

*² The Lord has made known his salvation;
he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.*

*³ He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.*

*All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.*

*⁴ Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises!*

*⁵ Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody!*

*⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord!*

*⁷ Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who dwell in it!*

*⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands;
let the hills sing for joy together*

*⁹ before the Lord, for he comes
to judge the earth.*

*He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.*

*"Oh!
The
Joy!!"*

